THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE:
A CASE STUDY OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT GUILFORD TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A dissertation presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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October 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I arrive at the pinnacle of this long journey, there are so many to thank. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Ann Elizabeth Alexander, who has been my rock, every step of the way. Thank you for the weekend trips and phone calls, and for keeping a critical eye on my work. I am a better writer today because of you. To committee member, Dr. Donald W. Cameron, for allowing me carte-blanche access to your institution. Words cannot describe my appreciation for your time and support, and to Dr. Meagan Karvonen, who taught me lots and is the best researcher I know. Many thanks to the faculty and staff at Guilford Technical Community College who graciously opened their doors to me.

To my Stanly Community College mentors, colleagues, and friends who probably heard more about this dissertation than they cared to know, and offered unwavering encouragement nonetheless. To my classmates, Bonnie, Jana, and DeErica, not only in class, but outside too-- we had such a great time. Studying in Europe--it just doesn't get better than that!

To my parents, Bill and Ivy Holt, who, somewhere along the way, taught me the valuable lesson of fortitude. I owe much gratitude to my daughter, Whitney, who endured my absence when she often needed me. And last, but certainly not least, to my husband, Mike. How can I thank you for all you have done to keep the home fires burning? Running my errands, cleaning the house, delivering coffee to me at midnight to keep me going – the encouragement to finish the race--I made it! I'm coming home.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to

Dr. Michael R. Taylor

who saw potential in me and taught me to think big.

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ABSTRACT

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AT GUILFORD TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Characteristics of a knowledge economy have been extensively documented in the literature. Rapid change resulting from increased technologies and globalization has triggered an unprecedented urgency for all citizens to possess high-level workplace employability skills in order for the U.S. to maintain economic vitality and global competitiveness. Community colleges are primary providers of workplace skills, therefore, faculty are expected to teach high-level workplace skills to students. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's SACS Quality Enhancement Plan on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC. A thorough review of the literature confirmed the significance of the need to examine institutional implementation of employability skills and faculty commitment to economic development and delivering high-level workplace employability skills to students. The study was conducted at GTCC utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. The dynamics of naturalistic inquiry provided rich insight of the

implications for faculty commitment to economic and workforce development, and institutional change surrounding implementation. Data were amassed through interviews, documents, studies, surveys, and other relevant texts obtained from GTCC. Themes and patterns that emerged during the data collection to produce findings were used to address the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?
2. What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?
3. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?
4. What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?
5. How did Guilford Technical Community College overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

The research was rooted in Conner's theory of the Stages of Change Commitment, and existing literature related to the topic. The study revealed that teaching employability skills to students was institutionalized by GTCC faculty participants; and hence, was a significant part of the college's philosophy and culture. The findings of the study further addressed how GTCC administrators implemented the campus-wide strategic initiative, barriers to implementation of employability skills, and how GTCC overcame barriers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Not long ago in America, the factory provided stable employment and decent wages for a significant portion of the population, allowing families to own homes, provide for their children, and retire in modest comfort. Over the past decade, manufacturing jobs offering a generous wage have largely disappeared, leaving generations of factory workers with a very uncertain future. Grubb & Lazerson (2004) noted the high-tech revolution has changed the nature of work in the United States, shifting from occupations rooted in industrial production to occupations associated with knowledge and information. The shift to high-demand, highly-skilled occupations left many individuals with skills from traditional production jobs unqualified to compete for new employment opportunities.

The long-standing efforts of North Carolina's 58 community colleges to train highly-skilled workers will become more important to meet future labor and market demands. In May, 2008, Dr. Scott Ralls became the seventh President of the North Carolina Community College System (North Carolina Community College System, 2009). In January, 2008, Dr. Ralls' first presentation as president-elect to the North Carolina state board of community colleges, sought to rally efforts of all faculty, staff, and administration in moving North Carolina forward in terms of economic and workforce development. He referred to the 2007 North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development report by stating:

> The next ten years for us are going to be tough years in regards to workforce development. Over the last couple of months, we have seen the first baby boomers apply for social security. Over the next 20 years

> we are going to see 80 million people across the United States start to move out of the workforce. And if you look at the numbers the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development has provided, what that means for us as community colleges is we must produce, according to them, 19,000 more completers--graduates each year--starting this coming year. That's about 75% more than our statistics say we produce now. (Ralls, 2008a, para. 23)

Ralls (2008a) further stated he would ask his colleagues to be prepared and open for change in North Carolina's community colleges. Any meaningful effort to improve the supply of skilled workers, therefore, must address the opportunities and challenges facing community college administrators, faculty, and staff in making sure graduates are adequately prepared for the workplace.

Accelerated Change and the Knowledge Economy

Technology and globalization have altered the world at a breathtaking pace (McCabe, 2000). In a time when local and global knowledge economies are dependent upon advanced technologies and high-level skills, Gates (2008) declared that despite the enormity of technological advances, they will continue to expand at an increasingly rapid and complex rate in the future. The incredible technological progress emerging from the past decade laid the foundation for profound changes that dramatically impact the way individuals work and learn.

The driving force behind the Information Age has been the explosive growth of computers, robots, digital factories, and sophisticated management systems. Yet, advanced technologies require ever-increasing education levels on the job (Gordon,

2000). According to Nielsen & Baird (2003), those who succeed in the workforce are the ones who accept the fact the new economy is increasingly value-added and knowledge-based. Knowledge economy, information society, and higher-order skills, are all phrases describing the same concept; capital development and wealth will flow to nations that continuously develop and utilize the skills of their workers (Lederer, 2003).

Rising Global Competition in a Knowledge Economy

Twenty-five years ago, the U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983), noted our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation was being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. What was unimaginable in the previous generation had begun to occur; other nations were matching and surpassing the United States in educational attainments. Nearly 10 years later, the U.S. Department of Labor released the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)* report that reaffirmed the challenges of international competition and the weakness of conventional learning in a knowledge economy (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

A report by Ellwood (2006) issued a dramatic wake-up call to a rising crisis of the American workforce. The crisis, arising from the combination of a worker shortage gap, a skills gap, and a wage gap, if not properly addressed could threaten U.S. competiveness and indeed, our very way of life. Friedman (2005) spoke of the crisis as well, but he added that the crisis is one that is unfolding very slowly and quietly. Friedman further stated we cannot hope to fight job drain due to international competition without a well-trained and educated workforce.

Increasingly, American workers at all skills levels are in direct competition with workers in every corner of the world (Fahy, 2006; North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development, 2007). The knowledge economy is quickly creating an increasingly polarized workforce, segregating those who have skills and access to good-paying jobs, and those without skills who have access only to low-paying jobs (North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development, 2007). The rapid pace of technological and global change represents an unprecedented urgency for an educated U.S. citizenry to maintain competiveness and national economic vitality (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

The Rise of Worker Skills Gaps in America

In 2005, Gershwin powerfully stated the educational attainment of the American workforce was stagnant, revealing an emergence of a second-class workforce that may threaten U.S. productivity, economic vitality, quality of life, and international competiveness. These grim findings cannot be ignored. For the United States to successfully preserve vital economic development efforts, educational competencies must be aligned with the needs of business and industry in order to meet the growing demand for highly-skilled workers.

Employers complain college graduation requirements, based primarily on passing sets of courses, fail to ensure that graduates are prepared with the qualities and skills needed to succeed in the workplace. In addition to advanced levels of reading, writing, math, and technical expertise, high-level workplace employability skills include responsibility, persistence, integrity, effective written and oral communication, creative and critical thinking, and collaborative problem solving (Brown & Stemmer, 1990).

Among companies testing job applicants for basic skills, nearly one-quarter reported skill deficits in math, reading, or writing that disqualified applicants for the positions they sought (Greenberg, Canzoneri, & Smith, 1998).

According to Packer (1992) and Vaughn (2006) unless schools and employers work together to close skills gaps, millions of young people will be perpetually hindered economically because of inadequate education and skills which qualifies them only for low-paying jobs. Further, if measures are not taken America's economy will continue to weaken from loss of employment opportunities that result from global competition.

Job Losses and Worker Skills Gaps in North Carolina

North Carolina's economy has experienced great pressure with more than 100,000 manufacturing jobs lost and 2,500 plant closings since 1995 (The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, 2008a, p. 11). According to the 2007 report by the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development titled, *State of the North Carolina Workforce: An Assessment of the State's Labor Force Demand and Supply 2007-2017*, North Carolina lost 72,000 manufacturing jobs between 2002 and 2005, and this trend is expected to continue over the next decade. While extreme declines in manufacturing left many workers unemployed, better paying jobs in North Carolina do exist. The state's knowledge economy is creating a substantial number of new higher paying jobs, but the new jobs require highly-skilled workers. The North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development report (2007) projected the demand for workers with the kinds of technical skills developed through community college programs will exceed the available supply by 19,000 positions annually between 2007 and 2017. If North Carolina's economic

development efforts are to be successful, highly skilled workers must be trained and available to fill the labor demands of businesses and industries.

Community Colleges as Providers

North Carolina's community college system (NCCCS), founded in 1963 to aid the state in transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy, is one of the most prominent in the nation. According to Fahy (2006), the NCCCS is one of the most extensive educational systems in the country and is considered the backbone of North Carolina's workforce training system (p. 2). With 58 colleges, the NCCCS is one of the state's most important resources to assist in the economic transformation from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy (Lancaster, 2008). While most community colleges in the nation started with academics and moved in the direction of workforce development, North Carolina's system started with workforce development and continued to expand its academic focus (Fahy). These long standing efforts of North Carolina's 58 community colleges to train highly-skilled workers will become more important to meet future economic demands. Mebane Rash Whitman, attorney with the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, noted the importance of continuing to provide educational opportunities that effectively prepare workers: "North Carolina is short on workers, but the community colleges are not short on solutions … If given the support they need, community colleges will give North Carolina's employers the workers to meet the shortages" (North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, 2008b, p. 1). North Carolina's community college commitment to an "open door" admissions policy, coupled with scope and flexibility of program offerings, will continue to provide services vital to the growth of individuals and the state.

When it comes to preparing America's workforce, community colleges have historically made significant contributions. Workforce training programs have been an important part of the nation's community college curriculum since the 1920s, and these programs remain essential for the United States to compete in a global economy (Vaughn, 2006). Warford (2003) stated two realities are certain: (1) comprehensive workforce training is a critical element in the global economy, and (2) the community college is a worthy partner to help develop a viable workforce for the global economy (p. 9). Because of the effectiveness of educational programs which have prepared workers in the past, there is a high probability public trust in community colleges for preparing a future workforce will continue to gain momentum.

In a speech to the Economics Club of New York, former U.S. President George W. Bush (2008) stated, "A community college system is probably the most market-driven education system in the United States. Unlike some higher education institutions either unwilling or sometimes incapable of adjusting the curriculum, community college systems are capable of doing that" (para. 52). Businesses, industries, and individuals are likely to find specific technologies and skills becoming quickly obsolete in the 21st century. As the job market becomes increasingly competitive, unemployed and underemployed workers can gain relevant skills and a competitive edge through training offered by the community college.

The Need for Educational Reform

On September 19, 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, formed the 19-member Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Charged with examining vital issues central to quality higher education, the commission released its findings in the

2006 report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. The report determined while America's colleges and universities have much to be proud of, they are not well-prepared for the challenges of an increasingly diverse student population and a competitive global economy. The report also stated the system of higher education in the United States has become dangerously complacent at a time when education is more important to our collective prosperity than ever. Further, there were disturbing signs that many students who earned degrees had not mastered the reading, writing, and thinking skills expected of college graduates.

Business and industry representatives complain that growth of their firms is constrained by the lack of a highly-skilled workforce. Educational reform is essential in order for students to make a connection between experiences in the classroom and skills needed on the job. Educational systems in the United States must create an environment in which more students see a connection between what is learned in the classroom and how that will impact future employment opportunities (Gordon, 2000).

High-Level Employability Skills as an Institutional Priority

There is much work to be done to improve the connection between high schools, colleges, and careers. The Southern Regional Education Board report by Bottoms & Young (2008) determined high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions must work together to create a set of curricular experiences--including authentic projects, job shadowing and internships--that excite students about learning, introduce them to the skills and knowledge they will need for high-demand, highly-skilled, high-wage fields, and convince students they will reap the rewards for learning sophisticated skills.

Thomas (1989) stated college presidents and boards of trustees must take the initiative to commit to a greater role in economic development, and colleges must foster an understanding that faculty will generally depart from the typical academic faculty profile to develop partnerships with economic development organizations. The 2003 U.S. Department of Education report, *Documented Characteristics of Labor Market Responsive Community Colleges and a Review of Supporting Literature*, declared commitment to the idea of market-responsiveness by community college presidents as essential for success of such initiatives. In the same report, North Carolina's Central Piedmont Community College President, Dr. Tony Zeiss, stated, "In my view, community colleges are the economic engines that will keep our state moving forward" (p. 6). With more than half of America's undergraduate student enrollment, community colleges are a cornerstone of undergraduate teaching and learning.

High-Level Workplace Employability Skills Must be Taught to Students

In order for highly skilled workers to be available to meet growing demands, faculty members must focus on teaching high-level workplace employability skills to students. Levin, Kater, & Wagoner (2006) stated community college faculty are much more than teachers. Community college faculty are now expected to behave with an entrepreneurial edge, experimenting with state-of-the art information technologies, and interacting with external interests ranging from contract training with businesses to establishing business partnerships. Community college faculty are expected to train workers for industry and become the human connection between the institution and the markets (p. 22). Oblinger & Verville (1998) believe adequate response to such challenges by community college faculty will require active understanding and commitment in order

to develop and teach high level workplace employability skills to meet existing and future workforce needs.

As noted by Ashmawy (2005), at Collin Community College in Texas, faculty colleagues were asked about their knowledge of economic development. Each faculty member had a vague idea, but no instructor fully grasped how economic development fit into the big picture of academe. Ashmawy further noted some colleagues seemed to look down upon such activities, considering them outside the realm of academic inquiry. Without the appreciation of economic development, it is very difficult to get faculty actively engaged and involved. Levin, et al. (2006) noted remarks from an academic faculty of two decades who recently assumed a senior administrative position:

> As I look at most full-time faculty … I see many of them, especially the 'academic faculty' who are still almost completely buffered from these economic and globalization effects. Most of them engage in traditional instruction for 12 to 15 hours a week, maintain office hours, and serve traditional roles. Most do not have any contact with local businesses and few contacts within the community as community college professionals. Most 'academic' faculty in California do not live in the world they describe. Few have any sustained contact with business or community. (p. 117)

While such comments may stir considerable debate among faculty, the idea that education is the single most important factor for economic success of individuals and the nation is seldom challenged. U.S. higher education must organize itself for competence and success in an interdependent world. For community colleges to remain relevant,

Harkin (2003) indicated faculty must continue to work at aligning curricula to external standards of emerging workplace and job performance requirements, and must manage the transformation of academic programs to respond to the needs of employers and workers. Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) concluded education and business communities must agree applied skills integrated with core academic subjects are the design specs for creating an educational system that will prepare high school and college graduates to succeed in the modern workplace (p. 7).

Change: A Generative Process

Change is difficult for organizations, yet, in order to respond to the demands of a knowledge economy, changes and reform in the nation's educational systems are necessary and have been extensively described in the literature. The knowledge economy has transformed the workplace in ways that were unimaginable a decade ago, where once simple jobs have now become high performance, requiring workers to reason through complex processes rather than predictable rote behaviors (McCabe, 2000). In the higher education arena, community colleges are distinguished for their responsiveness to support the educational needs of their communities, but seldom does change occur in institutions without altering the framework of an institutional environment where change strategies can happen.

Lorenzo & LeCroy (1994) asserted fundamental change is necessary when solutions available from institutions are inadequate for society's problems, and when new skills and talents are required to resolve current problems. In order to satisfactorily meet the 21st century needs of society, colleges will be required to redesign curricula to complement student and stakeholder expectations. In order to bring about large-scale

curricula change across all levels of an organization, effective strategies must be consistently communicated by administrators for institutional understanding and implementation to occur.

The old image of the community college president as the captain at the helm, the all-seeing leader scanning the horizon and shouting commands to the crew is now replaced by an image of the president as the architect or the designer of the community college. Community college leaders must design not only the strategic elements of the organization such as the mission and core structures, but various operational units, systems, and strategies used to execute institutional change as well (Myran, Baker, Simone, & Zeiss, 2003). The process for institutional change is slow and deliberate, and as noted by Kezar & Eckel (2002), broad initiatives can take up to ten years to successfully implement. Institutions fail at large-scale change because they do not engage the process over the long term. The success of a change strategy depends on how well administrators, as well as faculty and staff, continually comprehend and modify behaviors and processes to institutionalize an initiative.

Raising the Bar – Guilford Technical Community College

Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), located in Jamestown, North Carolina, is the third largest community college in the state. In 2007-2008, GTCCs Office of Institutional Research and Planning reported a total enrollment of 40,595 students, and noted GTCC employed 263 full-time faculty and 689 part-time faculty. The institution offered more than 30 associate degree programs, and had a long-standing history and success to economic and workforce development, including numerous local, national, and international recognitions.

This study focused on faculty impact and commitment to teaching employability skills to students. GTCC, the purposefully selected site for this study, was the only community college in North Carolina to place a campus-wide institutional focus on teaching employability skills to students. Driven by this effort, in 2004, GTCC established institutional priorities to align student learning with high-level workplace employability skills. The college determined this was of such great importance to the institution that GTCCs Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaccreditation would depend on the comprehensive teaching and evaluation of high-level employability skills. Required by SACS, the ambitious Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) at GTCC sought not only to enhance and improve student learning, but to create an environment in which employability skills would be routinely modeled by faculty and staff across the institution as well (GTCC QEP, 2004).

As stated in the literature, the workplace has changed dramatically over the past couple of decades, requiring workers to acquire high-level skills in order for companies to compete globally, and effectively implement efficiencies through a convergence of technologies. As President of GTCC since 1991, Dr. Donald Cameron, understood the intricacies of large-scale institutional change, and was accomplished at designing platforms and support for implementing broad change to successfully meet the workplace needs of the citizens and businesses in Guilford County. In a show of support for his efforts, Guilford County voters have endorsed three bond referendums for construction, renovations, land acquisitions and equipment upgrades for GTCC since 2000; the latest to help train workers for transportation and aviation jobs (Wireback, 2008).

In the publication titled, *Guilford Technical and Community College: A Story of Patience, Persistence, Perception, and Change* (Roueche, Richardson, Neal, & Roueche, 2008), Dr. Cameron discussed the fortitude and determination required to bring about successful transformational change and lasting partnerships between GTCC and Guilford County Schools. Many lessons were learned in this 25 year endeavor for implementing large-scale strategic change with the public schools, and as expressed by Dr. Cameron:

> Presidents of community colleges pride themselves on their colleges' abilities to respond rapidly to changing needs. Sometimes, though, change comes slowly, even in community colleges. Sometimes desired change comes only after much effort and several false, or less than successful, starts. Sometimes change comes only as a result of pressure by outside forces. My story is one of slow, patient change. I would like to claim that I produced this change, that it would not have happened had I not been president, but that would be less than honest. Quite frankly, I do not know if it would or would not have occurred. I can say that it is a story of patient and persistent leadership that eventually produced results I never dreamed of when I began. (Cameron, 2008, p. 29)

Just as the transformational change and partnerships between GTCC and Guilford County schools demonstrated, the campus-wide implementation of the QEP to focus on faculty delivery of employability skills required large-scale institutional curriculum change in order to occur. This current study, with an emphasis on GTCC faculty commitment and impact relative to teaching high-level workplace employability skills to

students, also centered on how broad change transpired within the institution in order to understand strategic leadership in both visionary and operational terms.

The Problem

Institutional Commitment

Characteristics of a knowledge economy have been extensively documented, indicating the occurrence of a nationwide worker shortage gap, skills gap, and wage gap. A national survey of faculty from two-year and four-year institutions by Huber (1998) revealed two-year community college faculty, when compared to faculty at four-year institutions, are leading the way in many of the efforts at the center of post-secondary reform for delivering and teaching high-level workplace employability skills. While 41% percent of faculty at four-year institutions believed preparation for a career was an important outcome of college education, 59% of two-year community college faculty held that opinion. With increased calls by postsecondary education's stakeholders to make education more work-relevant, community college faculty demonstrate significant leadership in answering the challenge of relating education to work. Additionally, the survey indicated community college faculty, more than faculty at any other type of institution, believed students should be exposed to a stronger mix of theory and practice, and that education should be more relevant to contemporary lives and issues (Huber).

Grubb, Worthen, Byrd, Webb, Badway, Case, et al. (1999) noted some community colleges have taken on roles in economic development to strengthen the communities in which they work, but this role is often narrow, usually denoting training for employees of a specific firm. As jobs of the future will demand workplace skills of a higher level, faculty collaboration and interaction with business and industry will likely

increase if the U.S. is to remain globally competitive. Overtoom (2000) and Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) concurred that considerably more research is needed on creating and assessing large-scale curricular changes that integrate employability skills. However, commitment levels of community college faculty to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills to students is unknown.

With over 6,200 full-time faculty teaching in North Carolina's community colleges (North Carolina Community College System, 2007), it is important to understand how community college faculty--those who interact most directly with students--relate and respond to the increased focus on comprehensively addressing economic development needs through teaching high-level workplace employability skills to students. It is also important to understand the strategic framework in which institutional commitment and change can occur.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC.

Research Questions

A review of research related to educational reform indicated the need to evaluate the inclusion of high-level workplace employability skills into post-secondary classrooms. The existing research confirmed the significance of examining commitment and impact of community college faculty regarding economic and workforce development. This study will provide stakeholders a broader idea of the current

commitment and practices of GTCC faculty to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills, and will examine strategies for large-scale curriculum change implemented at one North Carolina community college.

The study will address the following questions:

1. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?
2. What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?
3. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?
4. What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?
5. How did Guilford Technical Community College overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

Significance

Economic Development and Workplace Employability Skills

Oblinger & Verville (1998) asserted without a strong education system, we cannot have strong communities; without strong communities, we cannot have strong businesses; and without these, we cannot have a strong economy or a strong democracy. Indeed, the fabric of our individual and collective aspirations in the U.S. is inextricably linked to a successful educational system. There is sentiment among policymakers and practitioners that changes in the U.S. economy necessitate closer, reciprocal communication between educators and industry. In a study by Brewer & Gray (1999) college administrators cited numerous benefits of linkages between their institutions and

business and industry, including increased enrollments as a result of community awareness, an enhanced institutional reputation, stronger academic programs, additional resources, and improved job placement rates for graduates.

Significance to Faculty, Staff, and Administration

Individual faculty need to know the institutional level of commitment expected of them, and they need to have the tools and knowledge to engage in building links to promote economic development. As noted by Huber (1998), community college faculty may be the best equipped to contribute to a growing scholarship of teaching and learning across all colleges and universities. Staff and administration need to understand strategies for institutional change and faculty commitment for teaching high-level workplace employability skills to comprehensively assist in the development and support of the efforts.

Brewer & Gray (1999) found that historically institutional support for building and sustaining economic and workforce development was inconsistent and had not led to systemic change that would create conditions for comprehensive integration, planning, and assessment of such activities. Staff and administration need to understand the faculty level of commitment for teaching workplace employability skills in order to provide release time to promote incorporation of these skills into the classroom, offer professional development opportunities, or reward faculty for linking education with workplace employability skills.

Significance to Businesses, Economic Developers, and Policymakers

For businesses to be successful, learning must become the core value (Oblinger & Verville, 1998). Businesses want adaptive employees who can acclimate to the

organization, understand job requirements, and quickly produce work that has a clear return. Businesses also want employees who are transformative agents that can help the organization evolve, and they want the support of education systems in America to teach these skills to prospective employees (Harvey, Moon, Geall, & Bower, 1997).

Economic developers need to know the institutional level of commitment to economic development and teaching workplace employability skills. Gershwin (2005) stated workforce development is too important to be left solely to educators. Economic developers can play an important role by working with community colleges to develop standards and agendas addressing workforce development needs that are necessary for driving economic vitality. Gershwin further stated, “It is time for economic developers to view the readiness of the workforce as a national priority” (p. 10).

The study will be significant to policymakers who have a keen interest in the preparedness and funding of the state’s economic development and workforce efforts. Further, the study will be significant to students who must obtain the skills and competencies required to successfully compete for 21st century jobs.

Delimitations

The focus of this study was limited to one purposefully selected North Carolina community college, and purposefully selected full-time curriculum faculty at that institution. While the use of part-time faculty in community colleges continues to increase, part-time faculty are typically on the periphery of committees and other administrative structures of the college, and typically come to community college campuses only to teach classes. No doubt this group fulfills an extremely important teaching role in community colleges, but scheduling interviews with this group would

likely have been prohibitive. Therefore, only full-time faculty were selected for this study.

Several broad-scale institutional initiatives existed at Guilford Technical Community College during the time of this study. Existing initiatives included workforce preparedness, performance-based learning, becoming a learning-centered college and an Achieving the Dream grant. The QEP sought to capitalize on the existing initiatives; however, for the purpose and context of this study, only the QEP was examined.

Conner's Conceptual Framework

In the global and knowledge economy, the pursuit by business and industry to identify trained workers with adequate skills levels for jobs in the 21st century is critical. A thorough review of the literature indicated existing gaps between the skills students are learning and the skills employees need for businesses to remain globally competitive. In the quest to examine educational reform and how large-scale initiatives were broadly implemented at institutions, community college faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills, needed to be understood.

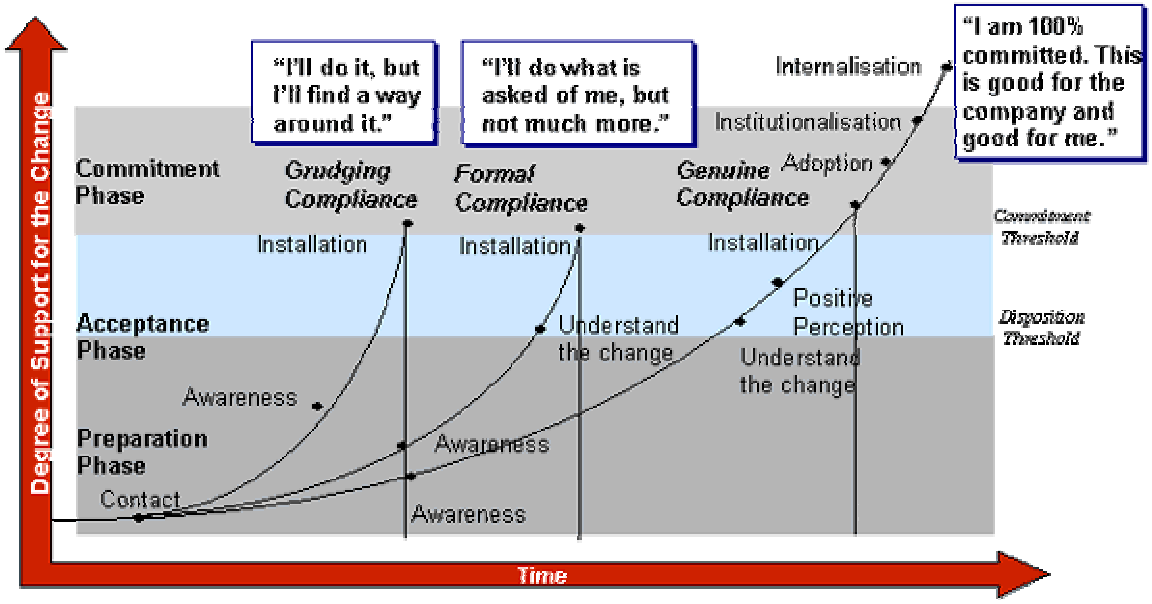
Twenty years ago Johnston and Packer (1989) noted the emphasis on educational quality, and a proliferation of new approaches intended to bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. The research laid the groundwork for significant changes in U.S. educational systems. Since that time, numerous studies have underscored the importance of educational reform as the economy generates fewer jobs in which workers engage in daily repetitive tasks. With a ten year emphasis on employability skills, GTCCs QEP focused on large-scale institutional change for delivering high-level workplace

training needs. GTCCs QEP also capitalized on existing college initiatives, creating a stronger institutional commitment for successfully preparing a 21st century workforce.

Businesses and industries today are trying to adapt to ever-changing market demands and international competition in an uncertain economy. In order for businesses to be successful, educational institutions must adopt new practices, develop new curricula, and train highly-skilled workers for the global economy. Institutional change is difficult to understand and implement, and educational reform will only occur when those impacted by the change are willing and able to commit to implementation.

Conner (1992) stated successful change is rooted in commitment, and noted three specific stages in the commitment process. The three stages of change commitment included preparation, acceptance, and commitment. Conner's conceptual framework, titled Stages of Change Commitment (Figure 1) included a diagram in which the vertical axis displayed the degrees of support for a change, ascending from preparation and acceptance, to commitment. The horizontal axis, moving left to right, displayed the length of time an individual had been exposed to a process of change. The diagram illustrated developing degrees of commitment to change in which an individual moved from initial contact through additional phases of awareness, understanding, positive perception, installation, adoption, and institutionalization of the change.

Figure 1: Stages of Change Commitment



Note: Adopted from Conner. D. R. (1992). Managing at the speed of change. New York, NY: Random House.

Change threatens an individual's level of comfort and control, and it is important for college administrators to understand that resistance is a normal reaction to change. It is also important for leaders and administrators to understand how individuals become committed to change. Conner (2005) suggested four primary reasons individuals resist change: (a) they disagree with what is changing; (b) they disagree with how the change is being planned, designed, or implemented; (c) they are concerned about the personal impact of the change; or (d) they have the desire to change, but fear they lack the skills or abilities to do so.

College administrators and leaders must understand that commitment for change begins with them. The manner in which others initially commit to an initiative is directly related to the level of commitment they perceive from their institutional leadership. A determined focus on an initiative must be recognized by others, and time and resources

must be openly invested by leaders to ensure a desired outcome. In order to understand and address individual concerns and resistance to change, Conner (1992) offered the following: Institutions must create proper awareness of an initiative by (a) taking time to provide relevant information and explanation to all potentially involved; (b) actively listening to understand the underlying reasons or objections to a change; (c) dispelling misunderstandings and directly addressing concerns of individuals through effective communications; and (d) clearly communicating expectations for individuals in terms of actions, behaviors, and results.

Conner's model of Stages of Change Commitment related to the research questions in this study for examining GTCCs faculty levels of commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills in the classroom. In the context of this research, the vertical axis of Conner's model represented GTCCs faculty degree of support for economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills to students. The horizontal axis of Conner's model represented stages of GTCCs faculty exposure to the initiative which were addressed in this research through protocols, interviews, and other relevant institutional documentation obtained from GTCC.

Definition of Terms

Associate degree is defined as a degree program requiring completion of 64 to 76 credit hours in North Carolina's community colleges. Associate Degree programs require a minimum of 15 semester hours of general education courses that include humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences and mathematics. Certain associate degree programs may be accepted by four-year colleges or universities for transfer credit in an associated field (NCCCS, 2007).

Community college in North Carolina is defined as an institution of higher learning established and operated as part of the community colleges system in North Carolina under Chapter 115D of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Community college full-time faculty is defined as personnel employed at institutions and technical schools with regular assignments that primarily include instructional delivery of a specified number of courses applicable to an associate degree, diploma, or certificate.

Common core subjects comprises a set of general education courses required for all major concentrations. These subjects are selected, offered, and deemed transferable between institutions (Northeast State Technical Community College, 2008).

Continuing education is a non-credit course or combination of short-term courses offered for business, professional, or personal development. Continuing Education course units are used to record student completion, and are not transferable toward a degree.

Curriculum program is a term used interchangeably with credit program to describe a wide variety of planned educational offerings ranging in length from one

semester to two years. These programs lead to certificates, diplomas or associate degrees, depending on the nature of the curriculum (NCCCS, 2007).

DACUM (Developing a curriculum) is an occupational analysis technique utilizing a committee of expert workers in a group process to define a particular occupation. The DACUM chart identifies general behaviors, knowledge and skills required in an occupation (DACUM Training Process, n.d.).

Economic development is any range of activities which contributes to job creation and wealth either through expansion or relocation of businesses and industry (Jacobs & Hawley, n.d). This occurs through the mobilization of financial, physical, human, and natural resources to improve financial stability and quality of life to a region.

Employability skills are defined as the abilities, skills, and knowledge essential for long-term career success (*GTCCs QEP, 2004).* These skills cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer (Sherer & Eadie, 1987).

Full-time equivalency (FTE) is a measure based on enrollment and utilized by the NCCCS to prepare annual operating budgets for equitable distribution and allocation of state funds. Funding formulas for FTEs differ between community college divisions (NCCCS, 2007).

Global economy is defined as the international spread of capitalism, especially in recent decades, across national boundaries and with minimal restrictions by governments. The free movement of capital is designed to stimulate investment in poor nations and create jobs in areas of greatest economic efficiency (The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, n.d.).

Human capital theory is defined as the importance and relevance of investment in education and research, resulting in an improvement in human skills and knowledge (Business Dictionary, n.d.).

Knowledge economy or knowledge environment refers to an environment or society in which the creation, dissemination, and utilization of information and knowledge is the most important factor of production. In recent years, this type of intellectual capital has become the most powerful producer of wealth, sidelining the importance of land, labor, physical, and financial capital (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2007).

Low-skilled employment is defined as a job which can be performed with few requirements of skills, knowledge, or abilities. The educational requirement for low-skilled employment typically requires a high school diploma or less.

Market-driven economy is an economy in which the basic questions of what, how, and for whom goods or services shall be produced are answered by market forces, or the tendency for adjustments for consumers' preferences (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Economics, 1986).

Non-credit faculty refers to instructors who teach any course that does not result in college credit upon completion or transfer (Northeast State Technical Community College, 2008).

Non-credit programming is defined as courses designed for short-term professional training, upgrading or general interest. Non-credit programs often serve as a first point of entry for many underserved students as well as a transition to credit

instruction. Non-credit courses do not provide college credits for degree completion (NCCCS, 2007).

Quality enhancement plan (QEP) is defined as a Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) mandatory requirement for all accredited institutions. The QEP is an ongoing quality enhancement program designed to evaluate quality and effectiveness in achieving an institutional mission. Each institution is charged with developing and implementing a QEP, and each institution is expected to collect data and provide documentation on the effectiveness of the continuous improvement process as indicated by the central theme of the QEP (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2007).

Workforce development includes any one of a relatively wide range of policies and programs related to learning for work (Jacobs & Hawley, n.d.).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC. A qualitative case study approach was used to gather information about GTCCs QEP as a large-scale strategic initiative, including commitment and impact of faculty to economic and workforce development. The intent of the research was to add to the greater body of knowledge by examining the implementation of employability skills in the classroom, and how the strategic initiative was executed to obtain college-wide commitment. The results of this study have institutional implications for 57 additional North Carolina community colleges, business

and industry, policymakers, economic developers, and students. The findings lend support for examining large-scale curriculum change initiatives to improve student learning and workplace success.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Higher Education Focus on Workforce Development

The idea of creating higher education institutions with the mission of training a workforce is not new. Approved by the U.S. Congress on July 2, 1862, the First Morrill Act, Donating Lands for Colleges of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (Public Law 37-108, 12 Statute 503) granted public land to states for the establishment of colleges with programs focused on agriculture and mechanical arts. In 1862, at a time when most of rural America was agriculturally based, the Industrial Era was well under way in more densely populated regions of the nation. The First Morrill Act brought higher education within the reach of an increased number of individuals, and trained Americans in disciplines such as agriculture, industrial mechanics, home economics, and other professions relevant to the day.

Another turning point in the history of American higher education followed World War II, when hundreds of American soldiers returned home to the promise of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-346, 58 Statute 284), more commonly known as the "GI Bill of Rights." Thousands of American veterans, in search of new beginnings, registered for college classes in astounding numbers. As a result of growing enrollments, the resources and facilities of U.S. higher education institutions were becoming strained, and a more contemporary society was emerging. In an effort to reexamine the system of higher education, in 1946, President Harry S. Truman appointed a 28-member commission to examine objectives, methods, facilities, and the role of higher education in America. Further, the commission was charged with examining educational opportunity expansion for all, the adequacy of the curricula, and the

desirability of establishing a series of intermediate technical institutes (Higher Education For Democracy, Truman Letter of Appointment of Commission Members, 1947).

The President's Commission on Higher Education released a six-volume report under the title, *Higher Education for American Democracy: A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education* (1947), more commonly referred to as *The Truman Commission Report.* The lengthy volumes set forth educational goals for all citizens of the nation by asserting, "Higher education must inspire its graduates with high social aims as well as endow them with specialized information and technical skill. Teaching and learning must be invested with public purpose" (p. 11). With an emphasis on comprehensiveness and affordability, the report called for establishing an affordable network of public community colleges in the United States.

The American Community College

Since their inception, community colleges have been a vital part of the higher education system in this country. Educational programs and course offerings differ among institutions, but the mission of the nation's community colleges has been shaped by a common commitment to providing a comprehensive curriculum, open-access, and serving the needs of a local community. Community colleges are committed to offering technical and transfer programs, but part of their uniqueness comes in their flexible nature and how they respond to the fluctuating conditions of the economy by addressing the needs of the local workforce.

In 1950, a total of 330 community colleges were operating in the United States. As many junior colleges closed or converted to four-year institutions during this time, the 1960s brought extraordinary growth for public two-year colleges. Between 1960 and

1970, 547 new community colleges opened their doors across the nation. As the role and scope of community colleges continued to broaden, 1,186 community colleges were operating in the United States by 2005 (Vaughn, 2006).

Today, community colleges employ more than 114,000 full-time faculty and approximately 206,000 part-time faculty. Student enrollments have grown to 11.5 million across the U.S. with 555,000 associate degrees, and 295,000 certificates awarded annually. The average expected lifetime earnings for a graduate with an associate degree are $1.6 million, nearly a half million more than the expected lifetime earnings of a high school graduate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008).

A Broader Role in Economic and Workforce Development

In the past two decades, many community colleges have broadened their economic and workforce development roles from occupational training to small business incubations, contract training, and various partnerships with business and industry. These new programs promised to advance community colleges from institutions focused not only on training students for jobs, but to institutions centered on comprehensively addressing the needs of businesses in a changing economic environment (Dougherty & Bakia, 1999).

Local, state and federal funding encouraged community college expansion efforts for economic development. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (1998) substantially altered the federal government's role in adult education and job skills training, and cited community colleges as a major component in the delivery of these services. The goal of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (Public Law 105-220) was to increase employment, retention,

and earnings of participants. Further, the law served to increase occupational skills attainment by participants, and as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competiveness of the nation. The Act also provided incentive grants to states meeting the requirements set forth, and was considered a significant policy shift for vocational education.

The Carl Perkins Act (Public Law 105-332), signed October, 1998, attempted to move vocational education from job-specific training toward a broader education that focused on the integration of a variety of learning experiences within a context of vocational and academic competencies in the curricula. The Carl Perkins Act also required institutions to develop a set of performance indicators to be reported annually and made available to the general public. The mandate represented new and expanded government roles in the areas of workforce and economic development.

Community Colleges in North Carolina

Fueled by the high birthrates in the 1940s, throughout the nation, in city after city, community colleges opened their doors, and by the late 1960s, the percentage of students beginning college expanded dramatically (Cohen & Brawer, 1987). North Carolina was no exception. In 1957, in an effort to meet the growing needs of business and industry in the state, the North Carolina General Assembly approved the first Community College Act to transfer funds from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to establish the state's first Industrial Education Centers. Under the leadership of Dr. Dallas Herring, seven initial sites were chosen for the Industrial Education Centers (IECs), with the goal of providing North Carolina with a highly prepared labor force by training both adults and recent high school graduates. The value of IECs became widely recognized as

North Carolina's businesses and citizens demonstrated huge support. By 1961, 18 IECs were operating in North Carolina.

That same year, North Carolina Governor, Terry Sanford, established the Governor's Commission on Education Beyond the High School. The Commission was charged with developing plans for post-high school educational opportunities to all citizens of the state. In 1962, the Governor's Commission presented, *The Report of the Governor's Commission on Education Beyond the High School*, better known as the *Carlyle Commission Report*. The 153-page report declared education to be a right of every citizen under the Constitution of the State of North Carolina, and noted it was the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right. Additionally, the report declared:

> In pursuance of this duty, the State must make appropriate post-high school educational opportunities available to all of its citizens who have the ability and the ambition to benefit from them…And yet no one can contend that our philosophical commitment to public education beyond the high school has been fulfilled. So long as scarcely half of the youth of North Carolina complete high school, so long as only one-quarter of our youth seek any formal education beyond the twelfth grade, so long as only one-fifth of our youth enter college and less than one-tenth of them complete four years of college study, there is unfinished business for all of public education--and for private education as well. In a day when some kind of post-high school training is essential to any sort of profitable employment, North Carolina cannot afford the economy of sending a smaller percentage of

> our young people to college than do four-fifths of the 50 states (North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1962, pp. 2-3).

In 1963, the General Assembly followed the recommendations of the Governor's Commission and passed the Community Colleges Act of 1963, creating North Carolina's comprehensive community college system. North Carolina General Statute 115A, later changed to North Carolina General Statute 115D, provided for the establishment and administration of a Department of Community Colleges under the North Carolina State Board of Education.

By 1966, there were 54 North Carolina community colleges operating, with a combined total of 59,329 full-time equivalencies (FTEs). The system continued to expand rapidly through the 1970s, and in 1979, the North Carolina General Assembly altered control of the system from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, establishing a separate North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges. With a new board appointed, the first meeting of the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges was held in 1980. The establishment of the State Board of Community Colleges sealed the development of the North Carolina Community College System as its own entity.

The early beginnings of the IECs established the foundation for today's community colleges, with a mission and commitment to workforce development. In 1988, the North Carolina Community College System celebrated its 25th anniversary, recognizing that in its first quarter century of service, the system had emerged as the third largest community college network in the nation. In 2006 alone, 800,000 individuals took advantage of opportunities present in North Carolina's community colleges (NCCCS,

2007). In 2008, more than half of all health-care and public service workers nationwide received training from community colleges. Further, 95% of businesses and organizations employing community college graduates recommended community college workforce education and training programs (Marklein, 2008). The role of the North Carolina Community College System to promote economic development and prepare a skilled workforce remains evermore relevant and important to the economic vitality of the state.

The Mission of the North Carolina Community College System

As support for economic growth was the underlying concept in the development of the North Carolina Community College System, the original statutory mission of the NCCCS, founded on the idea of workforce and economic development, is as fundamental to its existence today as when it was first established. In 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges adopted the following mission statement for the North Carolina Community College System:

> The mission of the North Carolina Community College System is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing:
>
> - Education, training and retraining for the workforce, including basic skills and literacy education, occupational, and pre-baccalaureate programs.
> - Support for economic development through services to and partnership with business and industry and in collaboration with

the University of North Carolina System and private colleges and universities.

- Services to communities and individuals, which improve the quality of life. (NCCCS, 2007)

North Carolina's economic system has continued to shift from a traditional manufacturing-based economy, to a globally competitive economy. Certainly, technologies and programs designed to adequately prepare the workforce in North Carolina have changed over the years, but the community college emphasis on economic development and workforce training has endured. According to Quinterno (2008), given its mission and history, the task of preparing North Carolina's workforce will likely fall squarely on the shoulders of the North Carolina Community College System (p. 59).

Globalization

In the 1960s during the early establishment of community colleges in North Carolina, manufacturing, the economic lifeline, was booming. Industries in large numbers migrated to the South, and jobs for both skilled and unskilled workers were plentiful. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of individuals employed in textile mills in North Carolina at any given point, but estimates indicate 505,000 people were likely employed in the state's textile mills during their peak of production (Drye, 2004). With the subsequent aid of community colleges, this impressionable growth continued through the 1980s as jobs increased and new manufacturers and new people moved to the state.

Over the next decade, thousands of manufacturing jobs were lost to international competition, leaving many individuals and mill towns with much uncertainty. Many of the mill workers who had dedicated a lifetime of service to industry production lacked

education and skills for alternative employment opportunities. While community colleges enrolled displaced workers for job-retraining, a large number of displaced workers lacked the resources or confidence to take advantage of new educational opportunities. As many individuals fell victim to the changes brought about by the shifting global environments, their financial futures were at risk. For the next twenty years, other industries in North Carolina followed similar fates. The once thriving furniture industry, along with many production type manufacturing operations in the state, could not keep the doors open for American workers with off-shore competition and cheaper labor costs.

According to the *North Carolina Rural Economic Center Biennial Report, 2002-2004*, expansion of jobs in the service sector and the creation of biotechnologies industries will offer growth for the future, but workers with no more than a high school education will experience difficulty finding jobs for which they are qualified. As America's economic strength depends on the education and skills of its workers, the good news for North Carolina is the presence of 58 community colleges. In an economy where jobs requiring at least an associate's degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience, it has never been more essential to continue education and training beyond high school.

In a 2009 speech at a Warren, Michigan community college, U.S. President Barack Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative, designed with the goal of leading the world in college degrees awarded by 2020:

> We believe it is time to reform our community colleges so that they can provide Americans of all ages a chance to learn the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for the jobs of the future. Our

> community colleges can serve as 21st century job training centers, working with local businesses to help workers learn the skills they need to fill the jobs of the future. We can reallocate funding to help them modernize their facilities, increase the quality of online courses, and ultimately meet the goal of graduating five million more Americans from community colleges by 2020. (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, July 14, 2009)

In a 2009 editorial titled, "*Plan to Boost Community Colleges*," NCCCS President Ralls praised President Obama's recognition of the value of the nation's community colleges and noted the American Graduation Initiative focused on the right things and would be a welcome boost for North Carolina's community colleges. Providing all Americans with the skills they need to compete for jobs on a global platform is the economic foundation for successfully building the future of America.

While 2009 continued to bring economic downturns, mass layoffs, and record unemployment figures for North Carolina and the nation, the NCCCS 2009-2011 Operating Budget Request (2008b) noted in tough economic times, North Carolina's citizens and businesses turn to the community college for help. As North Carolina's unemployment rate climbed to double digits in 2009, North Carolina's citizens became desperate for jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Many displaced workers found it difficult to earn sustainable wages without additional education and training. As a result, North Carolina's community colleges experienced record enrollments, with many returning to college to upgrade job skills and retrain for the knowledge economy.

North Carolina's community colleges have a four-decade history of directly supporting economic development. However, the global economy requires new approaches to sufficiently support economic development efforts (Young, 1997). Industry standards and technological developments have become increasingly sophisticated and complicated, and employers seek highly-skilled employees who are not only technically competent, but individuals who possess employability skills such as innovativeness, responsibility, and adaptability to changing work environments. Economic and social changes in the 21st century will require community colleges to rethink their responsibility to strengthen the state's economy, and their role in sufficiently preparing students for learner-centered work environments.

Employability Skills

The growing emphasis on teaching high-level employability skills has been widely documented in a variety of national and international research projects and documents (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The idea of teaching high-level employability skills in the classroom is nothing new. In 1987 when the Career-Vocational Preparation Division of the California State Department of Education convened a technical committee to identify essential employability skills, they began by providing the committee with a synthesis of previous research on the topic that included more than 100 studies and reports from across the country (Sherer & Eadie, 1987).

The massive research and discussion on the topic of employability skills reached far beyond the borders of the United States. In 1992, Canada's Corporate Council on Education created an employability skills profile which has been widely utilized with

success by educators and employers in Canada (McLauglin, 1995). The European Union's Council extensively documented the market decline of skilled labor and need for highly skilled workers in a global economy (De Grip & Zwick, 2005). The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry long noted all individuals need a set of personal attributes and skills to prepare them for all levels of employment. In 2002, the Australian Chamber proposed a suite of employability skills agreed upon by both education and industry committees to be taught at universities and technical schools. The proposal included assessments to measure employability skills attained, and certifications for completion.

If so much research has existed on the topic for such a long period of time, and if employability skills are as critical to our economic success as the research has indicated, why have educational institutions experienced such difficulty effectively implementing employability skills in the classroom, and why are they still struggling with teaching, learning, and assessing these skills? According to Sherer & Eadie (1987), there is no unanimous agreement about exactly what constitutes employability skills. Chris Humphries, Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills, (as cited in works by Stanistreet, 2008), noted every couple of years, we change the name, as though to convince ourselves we have done the job and can move on to the next one. Over the years, employability skills have been referred to as core skills, workplace skills, key skills, functional skills, generic skills, hard skills, or soft skills. "The problem, stated Humphries, is that we have spent too much time seeking to define employability skills and too little time effectively developing them in our people and our

workplace" (Stanistreet, 2008, p. 13). It is past time to transform the practice of teaching and learning to promote necessary skills for 21st century workers.

The nature of jobs may change, but skills, such as those identified in the 1991 U.S. Department of Labor *SCANS* report, apply horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs. In addition to technical and literacy skills, problem solving, responsibility, information processing, effective communication, adaptability, and teamwork are fundamental to obtaining and retaining employment in today's global economy. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in 2002 declared itself "astonished and disturbed" by the lack of higher education information about students' knowledge and skills. Assessing student knowledge and competence is important; however, Grubb & Lazerson (2004) deemed assessments were inconsistent and often entailed little more than another set of forms to complete. The abilities to think critically and solve problems took on different meanings in a Berkley physics program as compared to a community college auto mechanics program, and proper assessments were needed to correspond accordingly.

Successful delivery and assessment of employability skills to students demands their active understanding and participation in learner-centered classroom. In a previous study by Grubb, et al. (1999), they noted the extent and quality of class participation by students, was not necessarily a characteristic of students themselves, but was instead, determined by instructors who deliberately or inadvertently, socialized students to certain patterns of classroom involvement. Students were particularly disengaged by conventional lecture, but student interest almost always increased when instructors began asking evaluative or interpretative questions to students. Many students come to

community colleges poorly prepared to participate in active and thoughtful discussion, but competent instructors can provide a process to move students from fear and non-participation in class, to more active and engaging participation. As employers cited the need for evaluative and interpretive reasoning in the workplace, development of these skills in the classroom would provide students with a foundation to be more successful in the workplace.

As noted in research by Immerwahr & Johnson (2007), almost half of Americans say their state's public community colleges or universities needs to be completely overhauled. When more than 1,000 Americans were surveyed and asked to prioritize essential qualities students should gain from attending college, skills of employability emerged to include responsibility, good oral and written communication, teamwork, the ability to think analytically and solve problems. In addition to employability skills the general public also felt specific job skills and technical skills were highly important to gain from college. This finding supported the idea that employers are seeking highly-skilled individuals and that many believe America's educational institutions are responsible for adequately training students not only in technical skills, but in high-level employability skills as well.

Studies and Reports Addressing Employability

Since the release of the Truman Commission Report in 1947, many studies and reports have addressed the role of the community college in economic and workforce development (Carnevale & Desrochers (2001); Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006); Ellwood (2006); Dougherty & Bakia (1999); Grubb & Lazerson (2004); Oblinger & Verville (1998); Vaughn (2006). Certainly, much of the existing research and reports

substantiated the need for educational reform in order to adequately fulfill 21st century employment needs of business and industry.

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform

In August, 1981, Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell, created the National Commission on Excellence out of concern for the widespread public perception that something was seriously amiss in our nation's educational system. In April, 1983, the Commission released, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Among other things, the report declared:

> We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people….Thus, we issue this call to all who care about America and its future: to parents and students; to teachers, administrators, and school board members; to colleges and industry; to union members and military leaders; to governors and state legislators; to the President; to members of Congress and other public officials; to members of learned and scientific societies; to print and electronic media; to concerned citizens everywhere. America is at risk. (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, pp. 3-9)

A Nation at Risk was the first of many reports to issue a call for educational reform by emphasizing more rigorous academics and standards. The report further declared

individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of training and skills essential to this new era, will effectively become disenfranchised from many of the material rewards that accompany competent performance.

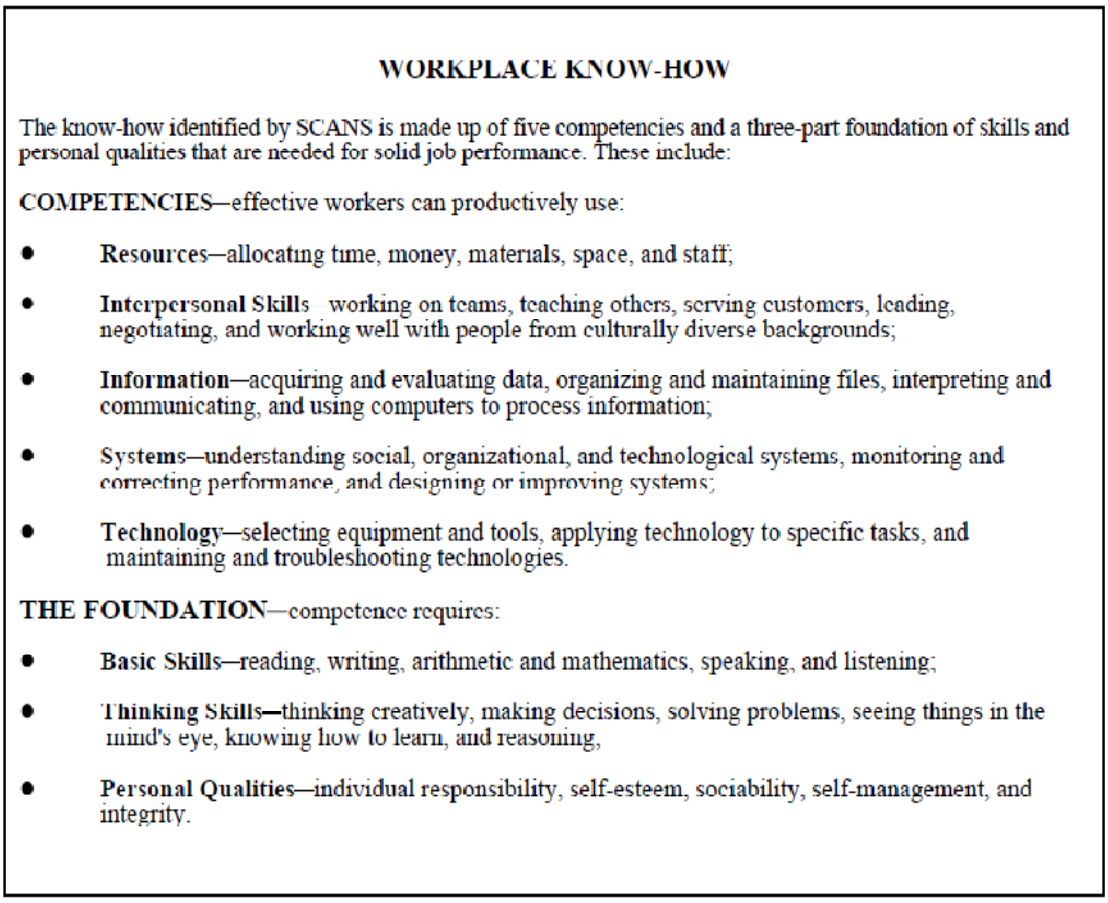
In April 2008, the U. S. Department of Education released a report, *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-Five Years After a Nation at Risk*, reviewing the progress made since the release of the original report in 1983. The report emphasized, "If we were 'at risk' in 1983, we are at even greater risk now" (p.1). The report also noted the United States is now a nation informed, accountable, and a nation recognizing there is much work to be done. While standards and accountability increased, in 2008 the fact remained, out of a typical group of 20 children who began kindergarten in 1988, only five would earn a college degree by the age of 25.

What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000

Another landmark publication released in 1991, *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000 From the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills*, addressed the skills gaps between what education provided and what employers state is required for employment. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, was directed to advise the Secretary of Labor on the level of skills required to enter employment. Over a period of 12 months, the Commission met with employers, managers, and front-line employees in a number of businesses across the United States. The message received was much the same – good jobs would depend on people who could put knowledge to work. The report identified five competencies and a three-part foundation required for 21st century success in all

employment levels and sectors (see Figure 2 for SCANS Competencies and Foundations).

Figure 2: SCANS Competencies and Foundations



WORKPLACE KNOW-HOW

The know-how identified by SCANS is made up of five competencies and a three-part foundation of skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance. These include:

COMPETENCIES—effective workers can productively use:

- **Resources**—allocating time, money, materials, space, and staff;
- **Interpersonal Skills** working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- **Information**—acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information;
- **Systems**—understanding social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
- **Technology**—selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

THE FOUNDATION—competence requires:

- **Basic Skills**—reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking, and listening;
- **Thinking Skills**—thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
- **Personal Qualities**—individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1991, June). *What work requires of schools: A SCANS report for America 2000 for the secretary's commission on achieving necessary skills.* Washington, DC.

The report noted SCANS competencies and foundations could and should be integrated into every course and every curriculum in the nation's high schools and institutions of higher education. Defining the competencies was not enough. Schools must teach them, and students must learn them. While reports and recommendations had

been developed and calls to arms issued, little has changed in many of the nation's classrooms. The majority of classes in a typical school or college do not adequately prepare students for their roles as employees because skills identified by SCANS are seldom discussed in the classroom (Witherspoon, 1997; Koffel, 1994). According to Koffel (1994) a disparity exists between educators who discuss theories, share knowledge, experiment, and search for concepts, and employers who hire students graduating from the educational systems. Employers want to see successful educational results and they want their employees to be able to add something of value to the company's bottom line with the knowledge.

Following extensive work as the Assistant Secretary of Labor and release of the *SCANS* Report, Dr. Arnold Packer co-authored a book titled, *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century*. In the book, Johnston & Packer (1987), outlined trends shaping the U.S. economy to include:

- Continued integration of the world economy;
- Continued shifts of production from goods to services;
- Industry utilization of advanced technologies;
- Faster gains in productivity, particularly in services;
- Deflation of world prices; and,
- Increased competition in product, service and labor markets (Johnston & Packer, 1987, p. 1).

The predictions outlined 20 years ago have certainly come to pass. All of the trends listed above influenced the rise of the knowledge economy, and required new workforce skills for businesses and industries to remain globally competitive. Among

other measures, Workforce 2000 noted education and training are the primary systems by which the human capital of a nation is preserved and increased, and once again called upon the nation's institutions to raise educational standards.

During a personal interview in January, 2009, Dr. Arnold Packer offered his opinions about workplace skills and the need for education reform. He noted successes have occurred since the release of the 1991 *SCANS* Report, but there are still many problems to overcome, such as successfully accessing workplace skills. As stated by Packer, one of the problems is the way we still handle academics:

> We need to incorporate project-based learning in classrooms and assess all skills with something more than a multiple-choice test. I once said to an educator in New York, some of these kids in your class haven't learned to speak fluently and you are going to flunk them because they can't factor a polynomial? They need to know how to effectively communicate. This kind of thing needs to be challenged. Math is one of the biggest obstacles to people completing a degree. They get in – they have to take a remedial math course or two – they fail – and that's that. Math gets real only when it is simulated with a real-life project or situation. But this kind of thing takes a lot of time and technique on the part of educators [A. Packer, personal communication, January 19, 2009].

Are They Really Ready to Work?

Research has indicated U.S. educational institutions are not doing enough, fast enough, to prepare a vibrant economic future for our nation. In 2006, four national

boards, the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resources Management collaborated to conduct a study of corporate perspectives on the readiness of new entrants into the U.S. workforce by level of educational attainment. The nationwide effort was supported by some of the largest organizations in the country including Dell, Microsoft, Phillip Morris, SAP Software, and State Farm. It was the shared hope of the boards that through combined resources and associations with high-profile corporations, the business community, educators, policymakers, students, and families would listen to what employers collectively thought of the preparedness of the workforce in America, and results of the study would inspire action (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

Over 400 employers across the Unites States were asked to complete a survey ranking job readiness of new entrants to the workforce as adequate, deficient, or excellent. Survey respondents were also asked to rank job readiness of new entrants by educational attainment including a high school diploma, a two-year degree, and a four-year degree. Two major skills categories--basic and applied were identified (see Figure 3 for Basic and Applied Skills).

Figure 3: Basic and Applied Skills

Basic Knowledge/Skills	Applied Skills
English Language (spoken)	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
Reading Comprehension (in English)	Oral Communications
Writing in English (grammar, spelling, etc.)	Written Communications
Mathematics	Teamwork/Collaboration
Science	Diversity
Government/Economics	Information Technology Application
Humanities/Arts	Leadership
Foreign Languages	Creativity/Innovation
History/Geography	Lifelong Learning/Self Direction
	Professionalism/Work Ethic
	Ethics/Social Responsibility

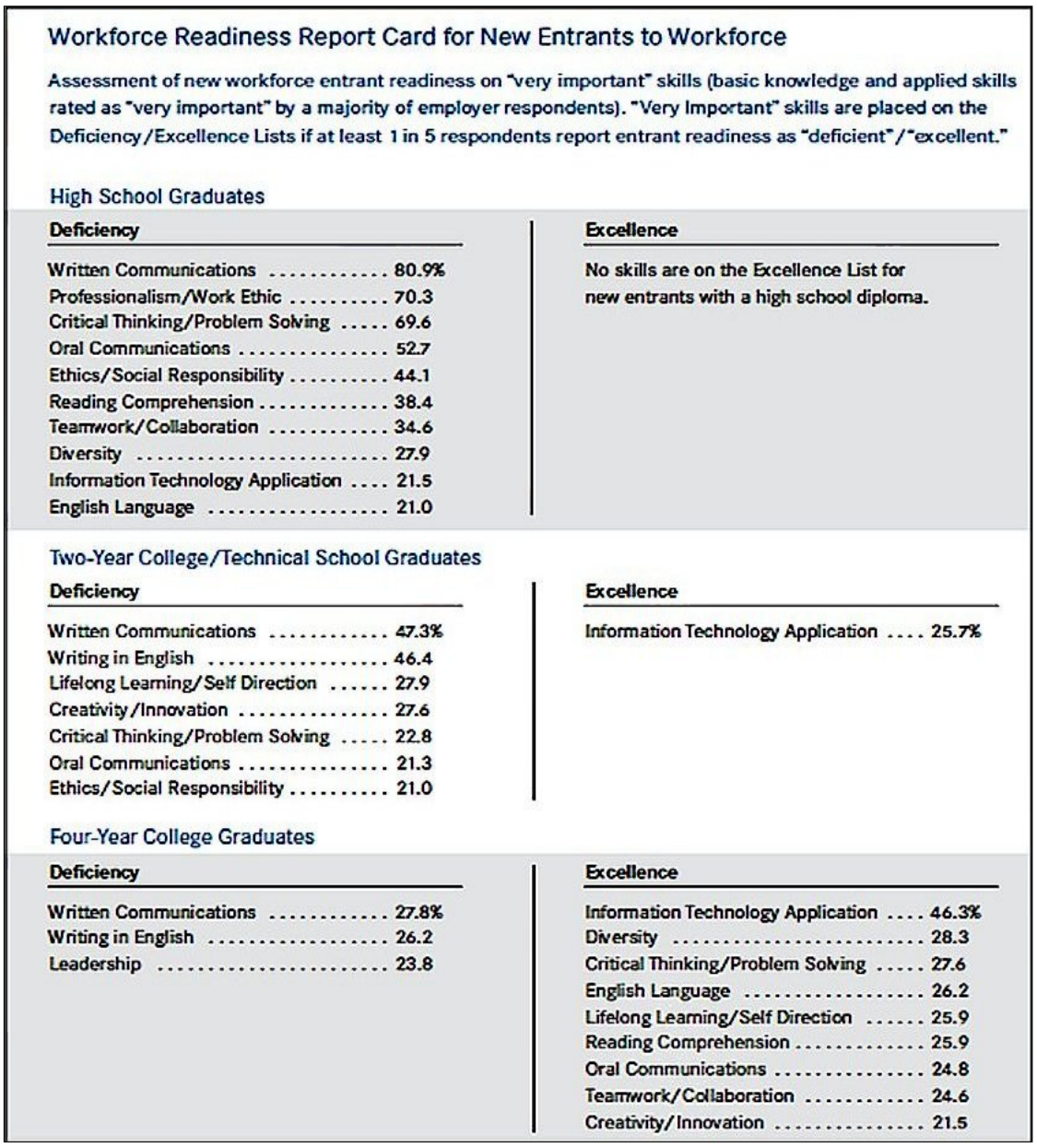
Casner-Lotto, J. & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work: Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce.* Conference Board, Inc., Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

Based on the basic and applied skills criteria, employers reported many of the new entrants lacked skills essential to job success. As employers expected individuals to arrive in the workplace with an adequate set of basic and applied skills, the Workforce Readiness Report Card (Figure 4) left little doubt that employer expectations were not being met. More troubling was the fact employers added only one additional item of excellence to the list associated with the two-year college-educated entrant than the list associated with the entrant with only a high school diploma. These findings indicated the need for additional research related to teaching applied and basic skills to students, and

suggested two-year community colleges should expand efforts related to successfully incorporating workplace skills.

According to J. Willard Marriott, Jr., Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Marriott Corporation, “Our nation’s long-term ability to succeed in exporting to the growing global marketplace hinges on the abilities of today’s students” (as cited in Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p. 11). Notably, the Workforce Readiness Report Card suggested employers felt community colleges were doing a better job providing technical skills to students than providing applied skills such as problem solving and responsibility. However, the following results left no uncertainty that improvements were needed in the readiness of new workforce entrants, if “excellence” is the standard for global competiveness.

Figure 4: Workforce Readiness Report Card



Workforce Readiness Report Card for New Entrants to Workforce

Assessment of new workforce entrant readiness on "very important" skills (basic knowledge and applied skills rated as "very important" by a majority of employer respondents). "Very Important" skills are placed on the Deficiency/Excellence Lists if at least 1 in 5 respondents report entrant readiness as "deficient"/"excellent."

High School Graduates

Deficiency		Excellence
Written Communications	80.9%	No skills are on the Excellence List for new entrants with a high school diploma.
Professionalism/Work Ethic	70.3	
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	69.6	
Oral Communications	52.7	
Ethics/Social Responsibility	44.1	
Reading Comprehension	38.4	
Teamwork/Collaboration	34.6	
Diversity	27.9	
Information Technology Application	21.5	
English Language	21.0	

Two-Year College/Technical School Graduates

Deficiency		Excellence	
Written Communications	47.3%	Information Technology Application	25.7%
Writing in English	46.4		
Lifelong Learning/Self Direction	27.9		
Creativity/Innovation	27.6		
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	22.8		
Oral Communications	21.3		
Ethics/Social Responsibility	21.0		

Four-Year College Graduates

Deficiency		Excellence	
Written Communications	27.8%	Information Technology Application	46.3%
Writing in English	26.2	Diversity	28.3
Leadership	23.8	Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	27.6
		English Language	26.2
		Lifelong Learning/Self Direction	25.9
		Reading Comprehension	25.9
		Oral Communications	24.8
		Teamwork/Collaboration	24.6
		Creativity/Innovation	21.5

Casner-Lotto, J. & Barrington, L. (2006) *Are they really ready to work: Employers perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrance to the 21st century U.S. workforce.* Conference Board, Inc., in collaboration with Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society of Human Resource Management

More than one-quarter of the 400 employer survey respondents projected their companies would reduce hiring of new entrants with only a high school diploma over the next five years. Conversely, employers projected their companies would increase hiring of two-year and four-year college graduates over the next five years.

A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education

In 2006, under a Commission of educators and business leaders appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, a report was released by the Department of Education titled, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education.* The report declared other nations were matching and surpassing the United States in educational attainments at a time when education was more important to our collective prosperity than ever, and specifically noted in 2006, the United States ranked 12th among major industrialized countries in higher education attainment. As the global landscape demands innovation and flexibility from institutions that serve the nation's learners, the report outlined specific goals for all public and private institutions of higher education:

- We want a world-class education system that creates new knowledge, contributes to economic prosperity and global competiveness, and empowers citizens;
- We want a system that is accessible to all Americans, throughout their lives;
- We want postsecondary institutions to provide high-quality instruction while improving their efficiency in order to be more affordable to the students, taxpayers, and donors who sustain them;
- We want a higher-education system that gives Americans the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy; and,

- We want postsecondary institutions to adapt to a world altered by technology, changing demographics and globalization, in which the higher-education landscape includes new providers and new paradigms, from for-profit universities to distance learning. (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. xi)

The report noted at a time when innovation occurred increasingly at the intersection of multiple disciplines (including business and social sciences), curricula and research funding remained largely contained in individual departments. Further, faculty must be at the forefront of defining educational objectives for students, and developing meaningful, evidence-based measures of their progress toward those goals (p. 24).

North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development

North Carolina has a long history of traditional textile, apparel, and furniture manufacturing. In recent years; however, the state's economy has shifted from one based on traditional manufacturing to a new, increasingly knowledge-intensive economy. In January, 2007, the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development, in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Commerce, released a report, State of the North Carolina Workforce: An Assessment of the State's Labor Force, 2007-2017. The goal of the report was to describe challenges and opportunities facing North Carolina in the transition from a traditional industrial economy to a knowledge economy.

The report outlined eight key issues and challenges for North Carolina:

- Many of North Carolina's traditional manufacturing industries continue to shed jobs as part of an on-going economic transition.

- North Carolina's traditional middle jobs, those that paid a family-sustaining wage and required minimal formal education or training, are disappearing as part of this transition.
- New job creation is concentrating in certain fast-growing metropolitan areas.
- Many areas of North Carolina are not prospering from the economic transformation.
- The future prosperity of all North Carolinians depends on achieving higher educational attainment levels for all citizens.
- Impending baby-boom retirements will exacerbate an emerging skills gap among experienced, skilled workers.
- High-skill in-migrants will help fill part, but not all, of the skills gaps.
- Low-skill in-migrants present both opportunities and challenges in meeting the state's workforce needs. (p. iii)

The tragedy of this transition is many low-skilled workers do not have the expertise to compete for jobs in high demand occupations. To compete for the new jobs, workers must invest years in obtaining additional education and job retraining. As a result, North Carolina must not only train current high school graduates for a new economy, but the existing workforce must be provided better access to longer-term training and education in order to meet the needs of the state's businesses and industries. The report further predicted North Carolina's community colleges must generate nearly 19,000 more program completers each year in order to meet the state's need for people with associate degrees and occupational licenses (p. 44).

North Carolina Insight: Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina

In May, 2008, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research released a report, *North Carolina Insight, The Future of Community Colleges in North Carolina*. The report presented brutal facts as outlined by NCCCS President, Dr. Scott Ralls, and addressed key issues facing the NCCCS:

> The first step for our state to realize another 50 years of future economic prosperity is break our natural assumption that the educational trajectory prompted by the educational leadership of past generations will be sufficient to coast us into a future economic promised land. New innovations will be required in our current educational systems, including an increased recognition of the importance of community colleges in having an impact on broad-based education achievement and statewide prosperity. (Ralls, 2008b, p. 24)

Implementing Large-Scale Strategic Initiatives

Changes in global economies, national demographics, and increased inequities in income and opportunity have heightened demands for improvements in workforce development and the educational systems that are part of that development (Barr & Rossett, 1994, p. 1). In their 1994 study, Barr & Rossett surveyed 265 full-time faculty members to determine their motivations for curriculum change. Similar to past findings, comparisons of academic and technical faculty yielded differences in motivations for updating or changing curricula. Technical faculty more frequently cited new technologies in the field, outdated materials, student employability requirements, or response to licensing requirements for motivating change. In contrast, academic faculty more

frequently cited a new interest or theory for teaching, response to four-year institutions, or standards updates for motivating change. This research indicated curriculum change was primarily faculty driven, and in the same way, Zoglin (1981) determined the role of faculty in curriculum change was far greater than that of college administrators or outside agencies.

Over the past 20 years, many authors have written books and articles describing organizational change. A leader reviewing writings on change could find nearly 100 recommended strategies, however, most of the research has been written with application to businesses, with little research addressing the change process in colleges and universities (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Moreover, higher education change research has primarily occurred through the use of quantitative surveys, excluding the thick descriptions of implementation. As the authors noted, “Suggestions such as ‘involve the faculty’ or ‘improve communication’ provide little comfort to leaders faced with implementing deep and pervasive change” (p. 296).

Qualitative research was conducted by Kezar & Eckel in 2002, and because teleological change models had previously been applied to higher education studies, seven strategies were utilized in relation to higher education transformation including: (a) a willing president or strong administrative leadership; (b) a collaborative process; (c) persuasive and effective communication; (d) a motivating vision and mission; (e) long-term orientation; (f) providing rewards; and, (g) developing support structures.

As this was one of the few identified studies with a detailed examination of the implementation of transformational change in higher education institutions, useful change strategies were identified in the research to guide the change process for other

institutions. Findings revealed five core themes and two essential characteristics most important for implementing strategies related to transformational change in higher education institutions:

1. Senior Administrative Support: Referred to active participation by those with authority over budgets, personnel, and institutional priorities to carry out an initiative. Balance and buy-in must occur from all constituents in the position to implement change.
2. Collaborative Leadership: A willing president or strong leadership waned in importance compared to organizing a collaborative process. Collaboration referred to involving stakeholders throughout the organization to participate in the change process.
3. Strong Vision and Mission: Change often invited risks and uncertainty. A motivating vision or mission can become the stable blueprint and compass for many employees in times of change.
4. Staff Development: Staff development can take on many forms such as one-day workshops, formal or informal meetings, and can be conducted externally or by different groups on campus. Adequate staff development provided campus change agents with the necessary context-based knowledge to begin to implement change initiatives.
5. Taking Visible Action: Adequate communication recognizing incremental institutional progress and success was essential in maintaining continued momentum for a change.

6. Sensemaking: Institutions that made the most progress toward a change initiative had processes in place that allowed campus members to engage in creating a new sense of direction and priorities for the institution. The study illustrated sensemaking by change agents as key to successfully creating change.
7. Balance: This term applied to the interrelationship of strategies and to the nature of the change process itself. Successful institutions balanced inside and outside perspectives, and long-term and short-term goals by creating long-term goals, coupled with short-term actions. They also created balance between ongoing institutional projects and new initiatives (Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

Change can have a profound impact on an institution, but it was important to remember while institutions in the study were making successful steps forward, transformational change was a reconstruction process, and as noted in the study, large-scale change can take up to ten years to accomplish.

More directly related to CEOs and business executives, Kaplan & Norton (2001) studied 275 managers who were implementing change strategies in their organizations. The managers in the study cited strategy implementation as the most important factor shaping management and corporate valuations. The authors remarked, “The ability to execute strategy can be more important than the strategy itself” (p. 1).

Despite its noted importance, the authors cited a 1980s survey of management consultants that reported fewer than 10% of effectively formulated strategies were successfully implemented. At the same time, Kaplan & Norton (2001) proposed

companies could no longer attempt to implement industrial-age strategies when 21st century businesses required knowledge-age strategies. In the industrial economy, companies created value with tangible assets by transforming raw materials into finished products. Opportunities for creating value have shifted from managing tangible assets to managing intangible assets such as customer relationships, information technology and databases, and employee capabilities, skills, and motivations.

In their study of 275 managers, Kaplan & Norton (2001) discovered a consistent pattern for achieving successful implementation of strategic initiatives. Utilizing the balanced scorecard, a term designed to focus all organizational resources on new strategies, the patterns evolved into five principles for implementing strategic change:

1. *Translate the Strategy in Operational Terms***.** Once leaders identify specific performance measures and develop an implementation strategy, it is important to describe the new performance measures to employees. In a strategy-focused organization everyone understands the performance measures and the goals and objectives of the organization.
2. *Align the Organization to the Strategy***.** Leaders work around organizational barriers to achieve success. In a strategy-focused organization, work units become linked to the strategy through common goals and objectives, thus creating a synergy that ensures that the linkages continue to work.
3. *Make Strategy Everyone's Everyday Job.* In a strategy-focused organization, leaders and managers focus all organizational resources in the direction of the new strategy and successfully communicate and educate their employees about

the new strategy. Everyone understands the strategy and understands how they impact the goals and objectives of the organization.

4. *Make Strategy a Continual Process***.** In a strategy-focused organization, the strategy is linked to the budgeting process, thus protecting long-term initiatives. Leaders meet regularly to discuss and review the strategy; they use the strategy to learn of new issues and goals and to adopt new processes for change. As a result, the managers gain new ideas and knowledge that they immediately use to improve organizational performance.
5. *Mobilize Change Through Executive Leadership.* In a strategy-focused organization, leaders instill in their employees how important the change is to the organization and provide leadership and support for the change (Kaplan & Norton, 2001, pp. 9-16).

The Role of College Administrators

Today's community college leaders are faced with unprecedented challenges where global competition, changing demographics, and technological advancements are forcing educators to re-examine efforts to meet the needs of a 21st century workforce. When there are solid linkages between business and industry, a college's board of trustees, president, and vice-presidents, the delivery of workforce development initiatives are greatly enhanced. College-wide cooperation and response to the needs of business and industry is developed and advanced by administrator support, especially when institutions are asked to deliver workforce training in ways that are not customary or traditional (Zeiss, 1997).

As companies must view community college faculty as credible and effective, it is the duty of administration to identify instructional experts who can rapidly respond with customized programs to meet employer needs. It is also the role of community college administrators to identify quality faculty who are willing to learn a company's culture, incorporate innovative teaching strategies, possess a sensitivity and understanding of the adult learner, and alleviate fears and build confidence in students who may be new to classroom environmental settings, and lack confidence in their ability to succeed.

Grubb & Lazerson (2004) stated such collaborative approaches provide a model for institutions to incorporate occupational goals, while respecting the academic foundations and the intellectual traditions of a college. The vision of community college administrators to successfully train a workforce must be communicated and woven into the fabric of the institutional mission and strategic planning process. Curricula and budgets must be aligned with the needs of the community, and administrators must be advocates on a state and national level for adequate funding and support of credit and non-credit programs. America's community colleges are ready and willing to play a leadership role in training the nation's workers, and should be at the forefront in designing and delivering strategies for producing a world-class workforce (Zeiss, 1997).

Trustees Call to Action

Decisions made by the nation's community college trustees affect more than 1,200 institutions and over 11 million students annually (American Association of Community College Trustees, 2009). As policymakers, community college trustees have a responsibility to help keep their communities strong. The nation faces many challenges, and community colleges are increasingly being forced to respond in new and different

ways. Boggs (2007) asserted community colleges are largely seen as one of the few solutions to current and emerging challenges to improve the nation's economic competiveness. How community college trustees respond to these challenges will have everything to do with maintaining a viable standard of living and continuing a commitment to the democracy of our nation (Brown & Burke, 2007).

As public accountability is increasingly discussed, community college boards are public entities, and therefore, publically accountable. However, the authors strongly suggested holding community colleges accountable by traditional standards such as seat time, or transfer rates may be inappropriate, and may fail to capture the real nature of what occurs on community college campuses such as responsiveness, innovation, and flexibility, to prepare the nation's workforce.

In an effort to appeal to the advocacy efforts of the nation's community college trustees, the American Association of Community College Trustees directed trustees to communicate priorities to elected officials, noting trustees are highly regarded by members of Congress as important links to the communities they are elected to serve. "As community colleges officials are often absent from the table when accountability is debated in the halls of Congress or state legislatures, trustees need to assume a greater leadership role in making the economic importance and impact of community colleges both obvious and undeniable to policymakers." (Brown & Burke, 2007, p. 444)

The Unique Role of Community College Faculty

Since the inception of community colleges, the monumental task of adequately serving all who enter the open doors has been undeniably critical to the welfare of the nation. The role of community college faculty, and the impact and difference they make

in the lives of students, has never been more important. More than all other higher education institutions, community college faculty expend enormous amounts of time and energy toward the service of teaching and learning as a primary responsibility. In spite of their devotion to teaching, today's knowledge economy is requiring more versatility, involvement and instructional expertise from community college faculty (Waiwaiole & Noonan-Terry, 2005). Though community colleges are widely accepted and valued as student-centered, learning organizations, historically little research has been conducted on specific practices, attitudes, and activities involved in the daily work of community college faculty.

According to Stephen Kinslow, President of Austin Community College in Texas, "Community colleges are deeply unsexy. Most people don't understand community colleges very well at all" (as cited in Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 1). To further confound these perspectives, those who teach in community colleges are sometimes viewed in the higher education arena as second class. Because much of the literature regarding community colleges has been written from the perspective of elite universities, community colleges (and their faculty members) often appear distorted and substandard (Hagedorn, 2004).

Twombly & Townsend (2008) offered that research for publication is often a primary focus for professors at research universities, while teaching, rather than research, tends to be the primary focus for community college faculty. Another barrier to gaining consistent insight about community college faculty may arise from the fact two-thirds of community college faculty are employed on a part-time basis, making it difficult to effectively study and track their activities. Yet, in light of heightened expectations for the community colleges to adequately respond to the needs of the knowledge economy, it is

important to gain a deeper understanding of the individuals who not only serve millions of students, but likely students who are often desperately seeking a second chance. For these reasons, it is essential to understand community college faculty, who they are, and what they do.

In the late 1990s, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching released a national study of community college faculty with a focus on backgrounds and practices. This study highlighted the fact community college faculty make up 31% of all U.S. higher education faculty, teaching 39% of all higher education students, and 46% of all first-year students. These statistics suggested the way two-year faculty teach and interact with their students has a profound effect on the overall conduct and direction of American higher education (Huber, 1998).

Released in 2002, the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (Abraham, Steiger, Montgomery, Kuhr, Tourangeau, Montgomery et al., 2002) was one the most comprehensive studies conducted on higher education faculty that specifically included data on community college faculty. The study determined full-time community college faculty taught an average of 17.2 hours per week, compared to 11.0 hours per week for faculty at other institutions. This finding supported the idea that the primary focus of community college faculty was to teach students.

Along with the emphasis on adequately delivering the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in today's global environment, the knowledge economy has placed greater demands on educational institutions and faculty for relevance and accountability in the classroom. As technology and the global economy have made it possible for people anywhere in the world to compete for employment opportunities,

employers may not be tolerant of students who fail to develop sufficient initiative and self-control to master subjects and participate in academic life (Davis & Murrell, 1994). Employers are insistent upon knowing student learning outcomes are effectively evaluated, and that students have mastered competencies and materials in order to transfer high-level knowledge to the workplace. Considering the primary focus on teaching and the sheer numbers of faculty who teach in community colleges across the nation, community college faculty, perhaps more than all other faculty, are well positioned to take the lead in developing best practices for how stakeholder expectations should be addressed and achieved.

The importance of community college faculty on higher education cannot be underestimated (Outcalt, 2002). As the global economy continues to push higher education institutions to become more relevant and accountable, Palmer (2002), utilizing data from the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (Abraham, et al., 2002), asserted the primary purpose of the community college was to help students learn academic disciplines and career-related skills. His study highlighted interesting variations to instructional approaches for career-related and academic-related disciplines of full-time community college faculty. For example, faculty in career-related areas relied less frequently on classroom lectures for instructional delivery, likely due to the hands-on nature of certain technical and vocational skills needs. Career-related faculty utilized competency-based assessments and grading methods at a far higher rate than colleagues teaching in academic fields such as Humanities.

The differences in instructional deliveries and assessments may be explained by the fact 59% of vocational or career-related faculty have, at some point, been employed

in businesses or industries outside the walls of higher education, while only 23% of Humanities faculty reported previous employment outside of higher education (Palmer, 2002). As Humanities and other general education courses may seem far more removed from the workplace than career-related courses, employers expect college graduates to arrive at the workplace with comprehensive skills necessary for successful employment. Therefore, cross-disciplinary connections and business and industry partnerships are critical as faculty have the primary responsibility for providing students with the skills they need for the workplace (Brewer & Gray, 1999).

One benefit for faculty and administrators, who work closely with customized training in businesses and industries, is the golden opportunity for exposure to cutting-edge training requirements and state-of-the art technologies (Kantor, 1997). Again, community college faculty, with the emphasis on preparing students for the workplace, may be best positioned to serve as a model in higher education for helping the nation's economy prosper through internal and external partnerships connecting the classroom and the workplace.

In 1998, work by Oblinger & Verville, titled, *What Business Wants from Higher Education*, described the increased demand of skilled graduates for businesses to keep pace with changes brought about by globalization and technology. While teaching and learning is indeed a dual partnership and commitment between faculty and students, community colleges, through their comprehensive missions, have been given the responsibility and duty to successfully prepare a skilled workforce.

Perhaps more than any other time in the history of the United States, high expectations exist for post-secondary education in America. Employers, researchers, and

elected officials articulate the importance of raising the national educational attainment in order to achieve broad-based economic growth. Community colleges will be critical to that effort (Goldrick-Rab, Harris, Mazzeo, & Kienzl, 2009). The training and education provided by community colleges will fill important labor market needs, including some of the fastest growing occupations projected for the future.

Exhaustive research related to classroom to workplace transitions has been documented. The need to close the skills gaps between training and education occurring in the classroom, and what employers state is necessary to remain competitive in a 21st century global environment has been documented. Globalization is rapidly driving major economic change, and the need for a highly educated workforce has never been greater for the prosperity and stability of our nation. Jobs requiring a minimum of an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast in America as those requiring no college experience, yet there is a shortage of highly-skilled workers to adequately fill the needs of businesses and industries. In order for individuals to obtain high-level workplace skills, community colleges faculty must be committed to teaching them to students. The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC.

Summary

Chapter One served as an introduction to the study. Chapter Two provided research addressing the need for commitment from community college faculty to teaching high-level employability skills in the classroom, and institutional strategies for

change initiatives. Chapter Three will provide a detailed description of design, methods, and protocols utilized in the study. Chapter Four will present a synopsis of Guilford Technical Community College, and the significance of the institution as the site selected for this case study. Chapter Five will describe research findings in the study, and Chapter Six will summarize findings and conclusions, present implications for practice, and recommendations for additional studies.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to examine the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC. A qualitative case study approach was used to gather information about GTCCs QEP as a large-scale strategic initiative, and commitment and impact of faculty to economic and workforce development. The intent of the research was to add to the greater body of knowledge by examining the implementation of employability skills in the classroom, and how the strategic initiative was executed to obtain college-wide commitment. The results of this study have institutional implications for 57 additional North Carolina community colleges, business and industry, policymakers, economic developers, and students. The findings lend support for examining large-scale curriculum change initiatives to improve student learning and workplace success.

Chapter Three describes the design and methodological procedures utilized in conducting the study. This research examined commitment of faculty to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills at one North Carolina community college. Conducted in spring and summer 2009, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?
2. What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?

3. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?
4. What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?
5. How did Guilford Technical Community College overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

Chapter Three, devoted to methodology, will present the rationale for the research design, a description of the sample and how participants were selected, instrumentation, data collection procedures and data analysis. Through this detailed design and explanation, others can adequately judge the results and the trustworthiness of this study.

Research Design

Qualitative research strategies have particular advantages and disadvantages depending on three conditions: (1) the type of research questions; (2) the control an investigator has over actual behavioral events; and (3) the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena. Yin (2003) stated case studies are the preferred research design when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon. The qualitative case study method is a common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, social work and in more recent years, business and economics. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, procedures, and future research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Whatever the discipline of study, utilization of a case study arose out of the need to deeply understand complex social phenomena. GTCCs implementation and assessment of employability skills across the curriculum was a huge undertaking, with little existing research for best practices. A qualitative analysis enabled

insights of the events at GTCC to be told in the original words and actions of the participants, yielding a deeper understanding for implementation in other institutions.

As case studies have been denigrated by many as having insufficient precision, objectivity or rigor, Yin (2003) noted case studies are becoming increasingly accepted and utilized by distinguished scholars. Over the past 20 years, evolution and maturation of case study research has occurred through numerous applications and high-profile projects. Research by Peters & Waterman (1982) titled, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*, is one example of a qualitative case study that has stood the test of time with findings widely utilized in businesses and schools across the country today.

In today's competitive 21st century economy, mastery of employability skills is a characteristic highly valued by employers. North Carolina's community college mission placed a high emphasis on economic development and workforce training, yet, the practice of incorporating employability skills in college classrooms was not so common (Oblinger & Verville, 1998). Therefore, a single qualitative descriptive case study yielded a more in-depth analysis of a real-life phenomenon at one North Carolina community college.

GTCCs Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) outlined a long term, college-wide commitment to better prepare students for work in a knowledge economy by teaching employability skills in the classroom. The state-wide significance of this issue to stakeholders, including business and industry, economic developers, college administration and faculty, policymakers, and perhaps most importantly, students, justified the need to intensely examine GTCCs course of action.

Complex human behaviors and changes in behaviors were most commonly studied through qualitative research methods. By utilizing a case study methodology, the researcher developed a detailed understanding of one "case" as it related to faculty commitment levels to teaching employability skills, successes and barriers to implementation, planning, internal and external relationships, change readiness, and strategies utilized by faculty, staff, and administration.

Yin (2003) stated a rationale for choosing a single case is when the situation represents a unique case. Lessons learned from the single case were assumed to provide thick descriptions about the experiences of a person or institution. In work by Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006), findings suggested the need for additional qualitative research, specifically case studies of programs that develop workforce readiness skills for graduates (p. 59). While each research design had advantages and disadvantages, quantitative analysis in this study would have failed to produce the rich descriptions and understanding of organizational dynamics, human feelings, interactions, and motives aimed at addressing the posed research problem.

Characteristics of an Exemplary Case Study

Case study research is not without challenges; however, the intent of the study was to make a significant research contribution to stakeholders across various levels of education and business. Yin (2003) outlined five general characteristics of an exemplary case study:

1. *A case study must be significant*. A situation likely to produce a significant case study was one in which the case was of general public interest, or issues related to the case study were important in theoretical, political, or practical terms. In

addition to an extensive body of existing research, the knowledge economy and the rise of the financial crisis in 2009 led to an even greater community college emphasis on economic and workforce development as a means of stimulating a lagging U.S. economy. This study was significant to stakeholders across North Carolina, in particular, to the remaining 57 community colleges, for successful development and implementation of workplace employability skills on other campuses.

2. *A case study must be complete*. The researcher thoroughly examined existing documents related to the topic of this study. This case study provided thorough examination of one North Carolina community college's efforts to implement and institutionalize economic development efforts and commitment to teaching high-level workplace employability skills. This was accomplished through an exhaustive investigation of documentation, interviews with faculty and key administrators at GTCC, and GTCCs President. Additionally, the study provided best evidence of trustworthiness, dependability, and credibility by correctly established operational measures, appropriate design of research questions, corroboration of data collected, proper use of theoretical concepts, and minimization of researcher errors and biases.
3. *A case study must consider alternative perspectives.* A descriptive case study that fails to account for different perspectives may raise the suspicion of readers and jeopardize credibility of the study. This study acknowledged alternative views among those interviewed, and did not seek particular information to fit expectations of the chosen site or researcher.

4. *A case study must display sufficient evidence.* Evidence was presented neutrally, allowing the reader to conclude credibility and truth value in the interpretations of the case. Legitimacy and trustworthiness of the data were substantiated through triangulation of multiple data sources including a thorough review of existing literature on the subject, interview data, faculty syllabi, surveys, background studies conducted by the institution, and GTCCs QEP.
5. *A case study must be composed in an engaging manner.* Stake (1995) suggested a case study was expected to catch the complexity of a single case. As opposed to an inventory of numbers and statistics used in a quantitative study, this qualitative case study engaged and informed the reader in a user-friendly, rich narrative of meaningful characteristics of economic development efforts and teaching workplace employability skills in one North Carolina community college.

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection – Guilford Technical Community College

North Carolina's community colleges were established with the goal of promoting economic development and providing a skilled workforce to support the demands and needs of the state's business and industry. Clearly, a priority of the North Carolina Community College System is the focus on providing necessary skills to citizens of the state and to promote and enhance economic and workforce development. Institutional goals for meeting the needs of businesses and industries varied greatly among community colleges, but Guilford Technical Community College's focus and priority to institutionalize and teach employability skills in the classroom was unique among the state's 58 community colleges.

Among the 58 North Carolina community colleges, GTCC stood above all others and was identified as a state and national leader in the focus on economic and workforce development. GTCC, founded in 1958, was created as a training center to prepare people for jobs generated by the rapid manufacturing growth of the 1950s. GTCC's purpose and mission has remained basically unchanged; to give the people of Guilford County the training and education they need to successfully compete in the job market. While the mission has remained the same, college enrollment and the size of the GTCCs service area has grown substantially. In 2007-2008, GTCC enrolled 14,112 curriculum students, and 27,542 Continuing Education students, for an annual enrollment of 41,654 students (NCCCS, Statistical Reports, 2008a). With Greensboro as its largest city, Guilford County is the third largest county in the state, including GTCCs service area totaling just under 422,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

In 1996, the *Wall Street Journal* cited the importance of GTCC to the local workforce (Bleakley, 1996). Most recently, GTCC was chosen by the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas - Austin, to be represented in the latest publication, titled *The Creative Community College*. The narrative highlighted partnerships, and the patience and persistence necessary for institutional advancement and change. This North Carolina community college has led the way for innovative programs with Guilford County Schools, partnerships with business and industry, and economic development efforts vital to the success of Guilford County.

Foundation for the QEP

Built upon the U.S. Department of Labor's recommendations of the *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)*, in 1995, GTCC commissioned

Market Horizons to conduct an assessment of the preparedness of Guilford County's workforce through data collected from local employers, employees, high school and college graduates, unemployed individuals, guidance counselors, and other locally defined stakeholders. Just as the SCANS report had previously indicated, the results of GTCCs 1995 study emphasized high-level employability skills as qualities key to the success of individuals in the workplace.

In 2000, GTCC conducted an update to the 1995 Market Horizons study to determine what, if any, changes in Guilford County employer sentiments had occurred since the 1995 assessment. The study also provided data and information for GTCC to use in developing additional workforce preparedness strategies. The 2000 study was unique in that two populations were surveyed for assessment. The study assessed 112 area employers, and additionally surveyed 176 GTCC faculty members. In a comparison of the two populations, Guilford County employers and GTCC faculty strongly agreed the delivery of employability skills previously identified in the 1995 study remained crucial for successfully preparing the workforce. The comments captured by employers revealed their belief many employees entered the workforce still lacking necessary employability skills. Moreover, findings suggested company expectations for employee involvement on bottom-line profit and loss in the future would increase, requiring individuals to possess high-level employability skills.

In 2005, The Herman Group provided an additional report on the preparation of the workforce in the Piedmont Triad area. The report reiterated the crucial role for GTCC in the development of a current and future workforce. Findings from the reports on labor

market demands and issues further guided institutional decisions and policies at GTCC regarding economic development and workforce preparedness efforts.

Years of internal and external studies had been conducted in the Guilford County region to assess economic and workforce development. In 2004, faculty and staff at GTCC, addressing requirements of the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), aggressively sought to deliver and improve specific measurement of student attainment of employability skills. Chapter Four provides a detailed description of GTCC's QEP.

At the time of this research, no additional community colleges in North Carolina were identified with such intense efforts and college-wide commitment for developing and incorporating employability skills standards into the curriculum. The extensive prioritization of efforts by GTCCs administrators, faculty, and staff to focus on economic development and teaching employability skills, served as the criteria for purposeful site selection.

Site Access

In both quantitative and qualitative research, permissions for site access are typically required to successfully complete a study. Creswell (2005) noted in conducting qualitative research, greater access to the site is needed because the researcher will typically go to the site and interview or observe people. This process requires a greater level of participation from the institution and individuals at the site. An email and conversation in November, 2008, with GTCCs President, Dr. Donald Cameron, provided the researcher with permission and access to staff, faculty, and documents, setting the

stage for a deep and rich case study analysis of one institution's efforts for economic development and implementation and measurement of workplace employability skills

On December, 2, 2008, the researcher met with GTCCs President to present the proposed study and become acquainted with key administrators affiliated with the implementation of GTCCs QEP. The key administrators, identified as those who had worked closely with various aspects of the QEP, were GTCCs Vice President of Instruction, the Director of Institutional Research & Planning, and the Division Chair, Arts and Sciences Division. The key administrators supported the researcher by providing requested documentation, and assisting in the purposeful selection of a rich mix of individuals for interviewing. In a conversation during the meeting with Dr. Cameron, he granted full support for this study and stated he felt strongly with the background and expertise of the North Carolina Community College System President, Dr. Scott Ralls, the focus on economic and workplace skills development would intensify. A follow-up email from Dr. Cameron to the researcher granting site access was obtained.

Selection of Participants

In utilizing a qualitative case study research design, sampling techniques vary greatly in size from those utilized in quantitative research designs. Patton (2002) stated perhaps nowhere is the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods better captured than in the different strategies and purposes distinguishing statistical probability sampling from qualitative purposeful sampling. In qualitative research, participants and sites are purposefully selected based on places and people that can best aid in the detailed understanding of central phenomena. As previously noted, this study utilized purposeful sampling techniques for site identification and sampling of participants for interviewing.

Qualitative research methods produced a wealth of detailed information about a small number of individuals. There were no distinct rules for identifying sample size for qualitative inquiry. Once preliminary documentation from GTCC had been thoroughly reviewed, the researcher interviewed three groups of GTCC participants. The three groups included full-time curriculum faculty, key administrators, and GTCCs President.

GTCC Curriculum Faculty

All faculty interviews were conducted face-to-face at a one of the GTCC campuses. The initial sampling of six GTCC faculty was identified by the researcher through an examination of a repository of GTCCs course syllabi supplied by GTCC key administrators. While a specific number of course syllabi were not requested, the researcher requested a good representation of syllabi across disciplines. In order to identify faculty for interviewing, the researcher purposefully selected a faculty sample through evidence present in examination of syllabi with inclusion of “employability skills” outlined in course objectives on syllabi, noted applications for “employability skills” utilized in the courses, and documented methods of employability skills assessment in the syllabi. The six individuals initially chosen and asked to participate agreed to become part of the study.

The first of the initial six faculty interviews served as a pilot to assist the researcher with feedback on the faculty interview protocol and clarity of questions prior to conducting additional interviews. Minor modifications were made to the protocol as suggested in the pilot interview. A “snowball sampling” approach was utilized by asking each of the original six faculty members in the sample to suggest additional participants to interview at a later date. Qualitative snowball sampling occurs when the researcher

begins a study and does not necessarily know the best people to study. Patton (2002) suggested by asking a small number of preliminary respondents to recommend additional participants, the sampling snowball gets larger as information-rich cases unfold. Each of the participants in the original sample recommended additional faculty to interview based on perceived availability and willingness to contribute to the study.

Additional faculty participants were recommended by GTCC key administrators. The additional participant request by the researcher did not specifically ask for individuals with a history of success with implementing employability skills, but rather, the request was based on faculty willingness and availability to participate. As the key administrators understood the context of this study, it is possible faculty recommendations from key administrators included preconceptions of individuals with noted success for implementation of employability skills. In the event there were duplicate recommendations of faculty during this process, the researcher requested additional faculty names from GTCC administrators.

Key GTCC Administrators

Three key administrators, identified by GTCC's President as those closely involved in various aspects of the QEP, were interviewed. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face at one of GTCCs campus locations, and one interview was conducted via telephone. The key individuals provided documentation to the researcher throughout the process and enabled the researcher to address discoveries, incidents, and receive follow-up email and documentation for events or experiences that were repeatedly discussed or described by GTCC faculty participants.

GTCC President

A final interview with Dr. Donald Cameron, President of GTCC, took place following all interviews with GTCC faculty and GTCCs key administrators. The interview with Dr. Cameron was conducted face-to-face at GTCCs Jamestown Campus. An informal preliminary interview was previously conducted at the time permission was granted to use GTCC as the site, and former studies on the research topic were obtained at that time by the researcher. In the final interview, the researcher presented findings to gain additional insight from the president's perspective of the organizational context of the QEP, and further obtain viewpoints from top-level administration on the campus-wide initiative.

Instrumentation

One factor greatly affecting the decision to use a qualitative or quantitative approach involved the relationship of the researcher to those being studied. For qualitative research, the goal was to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants', and not the researcher's perspective. This is called the *emic*, or insider's perspective, as opposed to the *etic*, or outsider's perspective. Because the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in this qualitative research, significant amounts of time took place in the environment with those being studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Information collection was generally in segments of short-term interviews using a carefully constructed protocol specifically designed to generate credible data. Information collection has no clearly defined time frame, but is conducted as long as it takes for

adequate answers to the research questions to emerge. Patton (2002) noted the credibility of qualitative methods hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor by the researcher. The researcher documented as many operational steps as possible throughout the process.

Interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with participants, based on specified criteria, were conducted, recorded, and used as the primary method of data collection for the study. All interviews took place at one of the GTCC campuses. As noted by Hancock & Algozzine (2006), semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for case study research. Additionally, Richards & Morse (2007) asserted the use of semi-structured interviews is appropriate when the researcher knows enough about the study topic to frame central discussion questions in advance of the interviews. Utilizing this approach, the researcher asked predetermined questions, but the use of semi-structured interviews allowed follow-up questions designed to probe more deeply into issues or areas of interest. In this manner, semi-structured interviews invited participants to express their feelings openly and freely, and to define the world from their own perspectives, not from the perspectives of the researcher. Care was taken by the researcher to discern or sense when interviews had gone long enough, or when the participant was becoming uncomfortable or fatigued. Because of the importance and complexity of case study data collection, the first interview with a GTCC faculty member, identified through review of the course syllabi, was conducted as a pilot to gain feedback on the interview protocol.

Faculty interviews were conducted between April 2009 and July 2009. A total of 15 faculty members were interviewed, representing of a cross-section of technical and

academic disciplines. Ten faculty participants were identified from technical disciplines, and five faculty were identified from academic disciplines. Disciplines included English, math, sociology, healthcare and hospitality, business, cosmetology, and entertainment. All participants in the study indicated teaching primarily seated or hybrid classes. None of the faculty participants identified in the study indicated teaching solely online courses. Three of the faculty were employed at one of GTCCs satellite campuses, with the remaining 12 located at GTCCs main campus. Of the 15 faculty participants interviewed, seven participants had been employed at GTCC less than six years, and eight participants had been employed at GTCC for more than six years. As the QEP was completed and submitted to SACS in 2004, six years was representative of faculty who were employed at GTCC during the initial planning and implementation of the QEP, and those who became employed after the initial planning of the QEP had occurred. Seven of the participants were between the ages of 50-60 years, four between the ages of 40-49, three between the ages of 30-39, and one participant was between the ages of 20-29.

In order to effectively serve as instrumentation of the study, the researcher was immersed in the context for this study, and invited response and dialogue from participants, and guarded against language or reactions indicating acceptance or rejection of participant responses. Five common interview skills described by Yin (2006) were utilized by the researcher for this study as follows:

1. Ask good questions and interpret the answers;
2. Be a good listener;
3. Be adaptive and flexible;
4. Have a firm grasp on the issues being studied; and

5. Be unbiased by preconceived notions.

Informed consent (Appendix A) was reviewed, signed, and received by all participants prior to conducting interviews. Informed consent was granted by participants with the understanding all data collected would be confidential and secured from potential harmful use. Unless permission was granted from the participants, strict measures were taken to ensure personal identification of participants was not disclosed at any time.

Richards & Morse (2007) noted data gathering must continue until research responses are rich and thick, and until data begins to replicate. Replication indicated the data was reaching a point of saturation. Saturation provided the researcher with certainty and confidence the data collected was credible, and that the analysis and conclusions were a true reflection of the phenomena being studied. When the data collection offered no new directions or no new questions, there was no need to further sample.

As a professional courtesy and validation procedure, the researcher emailed each participant a draft of respective interview transcripts for member checking. The participants were given seven days to review and corroborate comments and facts as presented in the transcripts. Additional comments from participants were solicited to enhance accuracy of the information obtained for the study, and thus, increasing credibility of the study. Participants responded to the transcript reviews with few revisions or remarks, indicating the participants were satisfied with the information they received. All faculty participants were offered a copy of the final dissertation upon completion.

Interview Protocols

As stated by Yin (2003), because case study data collection procedures are not routinized, preparing for data collection can be complex and difficult. Establishing an interview protocol is an especially effective way to overcome some of the difficulties in case study research. The use of an interview protocol increased the reliability of the research, and was used in spring and summer, 2009 for each of the GTCC faculty interviews.

Serving as a guide to the inquiry, the interview protocol provided semi-structured, open-ended questions central to related topics of the study. Central questions outlined in the interview protocol changed over time, depending on the broad or narrow scope of understanding gained by the researcher. The protocol provided space for field notes, observations, and comments noted during each of the faculty interviews. The interview protocol also served as a checklist to aid in preparations, clarifications, and procedures (see Appendix B for Faculty Protocol).

Documents

A good case study will utilize as many sources of evidence as possible (Yin, 2003). The analysis of documents is a commonly-used triangulation method in case study research, and may provide a rich source of information to confirm or augment data collected through interviews or observations. Many documents related to the study were provided to the researcher by GTCCs President. Meetings with faculty and administrators yielded additional documents, records, minutes, reports, and course syllabi, applicable to the research topic. The GTCC website also produced a number of institutional committee

reports and surveys related to the research. More specifically, over 45 documents were collected from GTCC for this study.

While existing institutional studies and documents were produced with a purpose other than the case study under investigation, the documentation obtained provided background and additional information on what was happening in the data collected for this study. For the purposes of this research, the most important use of documents was to gain background information, and corroborate and augment evidence collected from other sources.

Researcher Inventory Log

Throughout the data collection process, a researcher inventory log was developed and updated as needed to assist with organization and management of data. The researcher inventory log included information regarding all documents, interviews, and meetings during the course of this study. The researcher inventory log included the date, what was being inventoried, source of the information, and relevant commentary and notes pertaining to each source.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. There is no exact formula for transforming qualitative data into findings, though many authors have offered guidance in the process. Patton (2002) stated each qualitative study and analytical approach to qualitative analysis is unique. Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights and capabilities of the researcher, the human factor is the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis.

The fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic qualitative inquiry lessens the distinction between data collection and data analysis. Too much structure can work against the development of a rich, interpretive study, so balance must be appropriately achieved. For the purpose of this study, data collected was transcribed, analyzed, and documented as it was collected. The early analysis of the data guided further actions and directions for gathering, recording, and analyzing data.

An audio recorder enabled the researcher to focus more fully on the intricacies of the interviews, and with written permission from participants, all interview data was collected through the use of an audio recorder. During the interview process, the researcher took brief field notes, and immediately following each interview, the researcher reviewed the audio recordings for content and clarity, and additional notes and memos were compiled utilizing space provided on the interview protocol form. Field notes captured descriptions of participant characteristics, themes, subthemes, additional viewpoints, and new discoveries that potentially altered the nature of central questions for future participants. Upon completion of each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by the research within one week. When each transcript had been typed and checked for accuracy by the researcher, transcripts were emailed to each participant for member checking.

The next major step in analysis of qualitative data was primary tagging and coding of the information into meaningful categories. Developing and defining category codes enabled the researcher to organize large amounts of text and begin discovery of patterns to address research questions. Category codes were shaped by the central questions and theoretical constructs utilized and captured themes aimed at addressing research questions of the study.

According to Richards & Morse (2007) coding moves data from diffuse and messy texts to organized ideas about what is going on. For the purpose of this study, category codes included respondent perspectives on commitment levels as it related to faculty teaching employability skills, successes and barriers for implementation, planning, internal and external relationships with business and industry, and strategies utilized by faculty, staff, and administration for institutional implementation of employability skills. As qualitative data was emergent in nature, new observations and insights produced new category codes.

Coding is done in different ways for many different purposes. Richards & Morse (2007) noted one of the first steps in data management was to begin the process with descriptive coding. Descriptive coding required little interpretation and was defined as "known things" about the participants. This included categories and descriptions about people, sites, or settings. Establishing descriptive codes early in the process allowed the researcher to access and sort factual knowledge such as participant's primary discipline, how long participants may have been teaching, or dates, times, or locations of the interviews.

Coding by topic or theme has been commonly used in many qualitative research methods, and is a useful next step to more interpretive coding. Two levels of coding by topics or themes allowed broad categories to emerge, and allowed the researcher to assess and analyze the data. To ensure credibility in the coding procedures, importance was placed on the coding process to maintain consistency in the interpretation and placement of data to categories that had been established. As this process grew in volume and complexity, the coding process became more analytic and interpretive in nature. The researcher took sufficient care in continually examining codes and themes to ensure

correct interpretation was established and that accurate meanings were discovered (see Appendix C for Themes and Codes Defined).

As coding was an ongoing process, analytic coding combined, subdivided, and reduced coding categories by repeated ideas and larger themes. Theme charts were used to visually illustrate, organize, and confirm themes. Using detailed methods described by La Pelle (2004), the researcher utilized a native word-processing program to perform the functions typically provided by dedicated qualitative data analysis software. Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel were successfully utilized for systematically managing the coding process. The known software, utilized in managing the coding process, allowed the researcher manage more than 150 pages of transcribed data with functions such as Table, Table Sort, Find/Replace that were familiar to the researcher.

Once coding was completed, hierarchical categories were established based on noted frequencies of themes. The summarized themes by codes and frequencies assisted in establishing relationships of findings with documents and studies obtained throughout the research, and assisted in establishing relationships with the theoretical framework and research questions. Summarized findings were utilized in addressing results in Chapter Five, and conclusions in Chapter Six.

Quality of the Data

Lincoln & Guba (1985) noted of utmost importance is trustworthiness of the data through accurate representation and basis of its truth value. As this was a significant case study focusing on commitment of economic and workforce skills development at one North Carolina institution, procedures and protocols were maintained to ensure credibility and dependability throughout the study. Theoretical concepts and findings

addressing the research questions were linked to existing documentation and data collected.

Throughout the research process, accuracy of findings and interpretations were ensured. The terms used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative data vary greatly. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability were commonly used to establish quality of naturalistic inquiry. Because case studies are one form of such research, the four tests addressed trustworthiness and were considered relevant to this research as follows:

1. Confirmability – The degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not the biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The researcher established confirmability in collecting data through use of multiple sources of evidence, through convergent lines of inquiry, and by establishing a chain of evidence. Methods and procedures have been described in detail. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and included member checking. Developing clear research questions to be addressed, and relating them specifically to the objectives and theoretical concepts for the study ensured confirmability.
2. Credibility – Activities increasing the probability credible findings will be produced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several major techniques were presented to ensure credible findings and interpretations would be produced to include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The researcher was very aware of biases that could occur in moderating, protocol questions, sampling, and reporting, and was vigilant in protecting the integrity of the study against distortions. The researcher carefully established credibility through

appropriate design of the research questions and protocol and through corroboration of data collected and transcribed from participants. Field work continued until data saturation occurred, and great care was taken to triangulate data by seeking alternative sources of information in order to substantiate findings.

3. Transferability – The extent to which findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested in qualitative naturalistic inquiry, the obligation for demonstrating transferability belonged to the reader, but suggested purposeful sampling and thick descriptions with sufficient precision and detail could better allow transferability to be determined by the reader. The transferability of this case was enhanced through appropriate inclusion of a theoretical model, and establishment of significant purpose and need for the research. Chapter Four comprehensively described GTCC, the purposefully selected site, and the QEP. The researcher made every attempt to represent the findings of the participants by utilizing accurate descriptions to inform the reader through unbiased data collection, analysis of the data, and reporting of the findings.
4. Dependability – Since there can be no credibility without dependability, a demonstration of the former was sufficient to establish the latter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The role of the researcher has been described, and interviewing skills, as described by Yen (2003), were utilized. The researcher consistently followed all procedures and protocols to ensure dependability.

Transcribing and coding data were done consistently, and a detailed record of all coding definitions, decisions, methods, procedures, and protocols was recorded and stored for audit trails and retrieval. In order for data to be accurately synthesized and analyzed for key concepts, patterns and themes, the researcher developed a consistent system to properly manage data.

Summary

The process of developing, designing, and conducting the research was illustrated in Chapter Three. The research was conducted with an emphasis on standards and quality. To ensure trustworthiness of the study, works of well-established researchers were utilized to guide design, data collection, analysis, and conclusions. Protocols, coding procedures, and themes were described.

Chapter One provided an introduction to the study. Chapter Two presented a thorough review of existing literature on the research topic. In Chapter Three, case study design procedures, purposeful site and participant selections, protocols and data analysis were presented. Chapter Four will present “The Guilford Story,” including historical data and overview of GTCC and the development of the QEP. Chapter Five will present findings of the research, and Chapter Six will discuss conclusions of the case study, implications, and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GUILFORD STORY

"In any economy, having a knowledgeable, skilled workforce is critical for organizations to grow and be successful," said Tony Bingham, President and CEO of the American Society of Training and Development. "As the skills gap widens among new entrants to the workforce, it is clear that all stakeholders--employers, education, and the public workforce system--must collaborate to effectively prepare workers to be successful on the job" (as cited in Casner-Lotto, Rosenblum, & Wright, 2009, p. 1). One community college in North Carolina has been highly motivated in changing its institutional culture and instructional mechanisms to successfully support the needs of business and industry, and is considered a national leader in promoting economic and workforce development. Over the past fifteen years, Guilford Technical Community College has conducted numerous studies and assessments of local workforce needs, and is unique among North Carolina's 58 community colleges for its long-term commitment to implementing workplace skills necessary in a global economy. For these reasons and for the purposes of this research, GTCC was identified as the appropriate site for the current case study.

Guilford County, North Carolina

Guilford County, located in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina, is the third most densely populated county in the state. Greensboro and High Point are two of the largest cities in the county, and each has a long history of economic growth, rooted primarily in the manufacturing of textiles and furniture, and the availability of rail to move products. Although the textile and furniture industry has substantially declined in the last decade, manufacturing continues to employ more individuals in Guilford County

than all other business sectors (U.S. Census, 2005). Guilford County is also host to the world's largest home furnishing trade show, attracting buyers and sellers from the United States and 100 other countries.

As raw materials and rail were plentiful in the Piedmont Triad during the early 1900s, furniture manufacturers in large numbers began to settle in Guilford County. By 1940, manufacturing in America was operating at its peak, and new industries were locating to the South in record numbers. In 1946 alone, 66 new manufacturing plants were scheduled to open in Guilford County (Kinard, 2008). While the race to the moon in the 1960s spawned national recognition for science and technology in the classroom, agriculture and traditional manufacturing was rapidly being transformed by modern industrialization as well. Strong industry growth continued for the next 20 years in North Carolina, and Guilford County continued to expand its manufacturing base.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, North Carolina manufacturers experienced sharp declines and plant shutdowns due to modernization and off-shore competition. For the industries that remained, the survival strategy called for increased modernization with labor-saving technologies. While the new labor-saving technologies created greater efficiencies, the new strategies also eliminated the need for as many traditional manual laborers as well. The advancements also brought a new awareness that the modern technologies would require a higher level of skills for production workers. North Carolina's collapse of traditional manufacturing, coupled with a workforce lacking skills to compete in a knowledge economy, forced GTCC to reexamine its workforce mission in the 1990s. GTCCs long-standing commitment to economic and workforce development in Guilford County has remained strong, but the changing landscape of the

global economy was requiring different strategies and technologies for training highly-skilled workers for employers.

Guilford Technical Community College

Two major public universities were located in Guilford County during the peak of rapid manufacturing growth; however, universities were typically not viewed as institutions designed to deliver entry-level vocational skills training to workers. Recognizing the increased need for workforce preparedness, in 1958, a citizens committee chaired by State Representative Clarence Edward Kemp of High Point, petitioned the Guilford County Commissioners to establish a comprehensive workforce training facility. The commissioners approved the project, offering the former Guilford Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Jamestown as the site. The new site served as one of the state's first Industrial Education Centers (IECs) and became known as Guilford Industrial Education Center (Kinard, 2008). Approximately 50 students registered the first semester, taking courses such as machine fixing, upholstery, sheet metal fabrication, and cutting and sewing. The IEC grew with distinguished success, and in 1965, Guilford Industrial Education Center became known as Guilford Technical Institute.

In 1982, Guilford Technical Institute (GTI) submitted an application to the North Carolina State Board requesting approval to add two-year college transfer to its program offerings. The request became highly controversial and politicized as this was the first time a request had been made for community college status in a county with two public universities and four private colleges. The opposition was strong, and a majority of leaders and citizens viewed the transfer function and the change in status to community college as a dilution of the original mission of the IECs to train skilled workers for

technical and vocational trades. However, many of the community colleges in surrounding counties made the transition as objections to approve the GTI status continued. One opponent, Former Governor Dan Moore, stated his opposition in a letter to Guilford County Commissioners:

> The original idea of the technical institutes across the state, was, as their name implies, to give technical training to those who are not interested in going to a liberal arts college. As a former governor, I have been concerned with the trend to make these institutions colleges. This, in my opinion, should not be done unless there is a definite need for additional opportunities for institutions of higher learning. (Moore, D., as cited in Kinard, 2008, p. 209)

While the State Board encouraged Guilford Technical Institute to pursue individual transfer agreements with area universities and schools during this time, Ralph Byers, executive secretary for the North Carolina Independent Higher Education, wrote the following in an effort to protect the interests of private higher education institutions:

> If [GTIs] request is approved, there will absolutely be no grounds for disallowing any other technical institute from becoming a community college and we'll have 58 community colleges. We just don't think that's the way the state ought to be going. (Byers, R., as cited in Kinard, 2008, p. 209)

The debate over the request took many turns before Guilford Technical Institute gained approval to offer transfer programs in June, 1983. In keeping with its mission and commitment to vocational and technical education, the term "technical" would remain in

the institution's name. In 1983, GTI trustees unanimously approved a new name for the institution. Guilford Technical Institute became Guilford Technical Community College. Students taking advantage of transfer programs at GTCC today would likely say the battle over transfer status was well worth it. In 2007-2008, approximately 1,600 students were enrolled in GTCCs curriculum transfer program (NCCCS, 2008a).

Since its beginning, GTCC has had a total of seven leaders at the helm. In 1958, Bruce Roberts, never officially named as president, became the Director of Guilford Industrial Education Center. The following individuals served as President at GTCC since 1965:

Herbert F. Marco	1965-1967
Luther R. Medlin	1967-1975
Woodrow B. Sugg	1975-1977
Harold J. Owen	1978-1980
Raymond J. Needham	1980-1990
Donald W. Cameron	1991-Present

A President and a Vision

In 1990, under the leadership of President Ray Needham, a newly-developed ten-year plan was on the table at Guilford Technical Community College. Included in the plan was an ambitious construction proposal for eight new buildings and two satellite centers. However, the impressive construction plan lacked one important component – funding. Adding further complexity to the issue, just several months after the initiative was revealed, Dr. Ray Needham decided to return home to Washington State, and accepted a position at Tacoma Community College.

Under Needham's leadership, Dr. Donald W. Cameron had served in the role of vice president for academic affairs at GTCC nearly ten years. During that time, Dr. Cameron supervised every instructional program at the college, the Learning Resource Center, two satellite campuses, and had gained the respect of many. In May 1990, Dr. Cameron became interim president of GTCC. First on his agenda as interim was the successful promotion of an $18.5 million bond. Cameron also realized that his path to the presidency potentially rested on the success of the referendum (Kinard, 2008).

The citizens of Guilford County unanimously supported the bond referendum, and on February 7, 1991, Dr. Cameron rose above 100 applicants to become the sixth president of Guilford Technical Community College. On the day of his installation as GTCCs sixth president, Cameron pledged to sustain the mission of a comprehensive community college by emphasizing commitment to occupational education and training as an economic development strategy for the county and state. Dr. Stuart Fountain, Chairman of GTCCs Board of Trustees had these words to say about Cameron during the installation: "We were looking for a diamond, wherever it may be found, even if was in our own backyard, and it was" (as cited in Kinard, 2008, p. 253).

As Dr. Cameron assumed the helm of the state's third largest community college, he quickly traded time behind the desk for a more public role of raising the image of GTCC and selling his vision of providing a highly-skilled workforce to the region. Dr. Cameron clearly understood the community college system and the political and social make-up of the institutions as well. His prior experience had sufficiently prepared him to confront unpredictable shifts in politics and corporate power (Kinard, 2008).

Many local, state, and national presentations were scheduled, with the goal of conveying his vision as an institutional leader to workforce education and training. Not only did Cameron forge thriving partnerships with high-profile industries such as Konica, Volvo, and Banner Pharmacaps, he successfully teamed with Guilford County Schools to develop curricula aimed at producing workers with industry-specific skills to meet the demands of local industry. By his own admission, Dr. Cameron was unwavering in his commitment to transform workforce preparedness in Guilford County: "If our students receive the degree and go to work in a company at an entry-level position, then they need to be able to perform the tasks for the company. If they cannot perform, then we need to reexamine our curriculum" (Cameron, D., as cited in Kinard, 2008, p. 269).

These efforts led to an appearance of a front-page article in the prestigious *Wall Street Journal.* The article by Bleakley (1996) elevated GTCCs reputation to attract and keep manufacturing in Guilford County to a national and international level. Following publication of the article, officials from several states visited GTCC to discuss Cameron's workforce development model. Inquiries arrived from Mexico, and a donation toward the effort arrived from New York (Kinard, 2008).

Numerous economic and workforce development initiatives were implemented at GTCC throughout the 1990s. In fulfilling another dream, in 2000, Cameron gained the attention and support of Grammy award winning entertainer, Larry Gatlin, to establish the GTCCs Larry Gatlin School of Entertainment Technology. In 2004, the school of country music had materialized into an unparallel success, enrolling more than 400 students.

In 2009, the Greensboro Economic Development Alliance (GEDA) awarded the Stanley Frank Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Cameron. The award acknowledged Cameron's dedication to economic development and noted his leadership had been instrumental in bringing many new companies to Guilford County (GEDA, 2009, March 3). This acknowledgement is but one of innumerable recognitions documented in Dr. Cameron's 18 years of service to GTCC. As stated by Kinard (2008), "Cameron is a man known for his values, integrity, loyalty, political astuteness, and above all, his unwavering vision and commitment to serve the citizens of Guilford County" (p. 251).

Dr. Cameron (personal communication, December 2, 2008) spoke passionately about workforce development and training, and the many successes that have taken place over the years. Unselfishly, he credited reforms that bridged the landscape between the classroom and the workplace to the collaborative efforts of many visionary community leaders, and credited a solid faculty, staff, and administration, for giving feet to his many visions. One of GTCCs faculty described the vision and commitment of the president to students and business and industry:

> Dr. Cameron is focused on the success of students in providing Guilford County with a reliable, educated workforce that is skillfully trained, to provide students with strong base and foundation to further their education, and to provide continuing education programs to meet the needs of the community and business and industry for training and economic development.

During a visit, Dr. Cameron provided the researcher studies conducted by GTCC and other agencies, and internal documents spanning a 15-year period. With each

document provided, he described the circumstances surrounding the studies, and how each built on the other to eventually lead to GTCCs Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

Workforce Development Studies

In 1995, Dr. Cameron had four years of presidential experience behind him, and numerous special projects were underway. In the short time period, satellite campuses were added or expanded, the 1993 statewide educational bond referendum was approved, the state was moving from a quarter to semester system, and revolutionary distance learning tools were installed in classrooms. That same year, the Guilford County public school system merged into a single system. As one of the last counties in the state to consolidate, the three-system merger set off a series of controversies shadowed in part by race relations and integration. In spite of the controversies, Dr. Cameron saw the merger as an opportunity to work with one centralized public school system, rather than the three former systems that were fragmented and competitive (Kinard, 2008).

Immediately, the new founding Guilford Schools Superintendent and Dr. Cameron went to work to determine how the two systems could collaborate. With workforce development in common, the two systems partnered on a Tech Prep agreement designed to enhance technical teaching standards and workforce preparedness for Guilford County. With strong support from the community, the two leaders proposed a county-wide assessment through an outside marketing agency, Market Horizons, to determine the preparedness of the Guilford County's workforce. The study, titled, *Workforce Preparedness Assessment*, was completed in June, 1995, and involved more than 700 participants. The study revealed employers believed the overall quality of job

applicants in the county was low. Moreover, the study specifically indicated job applicants were lacking employability skills such as responsibility, teamwork, problem solving, communication, and technical skills (Market Horizons, 1995).

The release of the study provided concrete data to business and industry leaders, and confirmed what college officials already thought to be true – changes were needed in the classroom to ensure the existence of an adequately skilled workforce in Guilford County. A grant from CIBA Specialty Chemicals, awarded to GTCC and Guilford County Schools followed. This gift provided professional development opportunities for public school teachers and community college instructors to develop and learn new strategies for incorporating employability skills in the curriculum. The CIBA grant offered scholarship opportunities to students in technical programs, and also supplied funding for GTCCs institutional DACUM specifically focused on employability skills (Appendix D). As a result of the efforts supported by CIBA, a manual for integrating curriculum-specific skills, core academic skills, and employability skills, was internally published in 1998 and distributed to GTCC faculty in all curriculums.

The new millennium ushered in good economic times with local production steadily climbing. At the same time, Dr. Cameron was planning his strategies to successfully lead GTCC into the 21st century. Several major challenges were on the horizon. A controversial local bond was on the ballot, and equally important, a $3.1 billion statewide higher education bond was on the table as well. Both bonds passed, providing credibility to the economic importance of GTCC to the region and the state.

While the passing of two bond referendums in 2000 was exciting for GTCC, the excitement was quickly overshadowed by increased plant closings and large numbers of

displaced factory workers. Many of the largest employers in Guilford County, such as tobacco, textiles, furniture and apparel manufacturers, experienced rapid decline. Manufacturing, as it had been known, was disappearing, and a diverse and global shift was visible. Dr. Cameron knew that updated technologies and innovative training would be necessary to sustain a viable economy for Guilford County, and he knew GTCC was the institution to provide it (Kinard, 2008).

In December 2000, GTCC conducted follow-up to the Market Horizons study completed in 1995. This time, the populations surveyed included two groups: Guilford County employers and GTCC instructional faculty. It was a fascinating study of comparisons designed to validate findings from the previous study and confirm a solid direction for future workforce training. GTCCs faculty and Guilford County employers agreed problem solving, responsibility, teamwork, and ethics were critical employability skills for workplace success. In the unpublished document, *Workforce Preparedness Assessment: An Update to the 1995 Study*, one employer in the study commented, "I don't know how you 'teach and test' for responsibility and ethics, but we need to find a way … and if it can be done, I know Don Cameron will" (GTCC, 2000, p. 14).

Over the next several years, industries and their leaders, once engaged in partnerships with GTCC, were no longer in business. While significant declines had occurred in the business and industry sector, 450 local business and industry leaders remained on various program advisory committees at the college. However, the changing landscape of the economy was adding many new small businesses, and many of the new businesses were unfamiliar with how the local community college could help them.

In 2005, the Herman Consulting Group conducted a study collecting and assimilating the perspectives, visions, expectations, and opinions of 100 influential community leaders. Participants were asked about their knowledge, use, and expectations of services available through GTCC. The study outlined the growing need for skilled workers and noted the number of eligible workers was not the critical factor, but instead, the number of qualified workers was the critical factor. Following the study, the learning-centered college model became a major focus at GTCC. The foundation of the concept provided an institutional transition to move from producing students with credit hours, to producing students who successfully achieved learning outcomes. Support from the Achieving the Dream initiative and the QEP would also insure that students acquired the necessary technical and employability skills to succeed in the workplace (Kinard, 2008).

In celebration of the institution's 50th anniversary, and in keeping with the tradition of business and industry partnerships, GTCC recognized the need to look to the business community for insight regarding future initiatives and programming. To that end, in April 2008, through a sponsorship with Transtech Phama, GTCC planned a business symposium designed to share collective challenges facing Guilford County regarding economic and workforce development, cultivate a deeper understanding of business concerns and opportunities facing higher education and the business community, and create a framework for dialogue to be integrated in GTCCs strategic plan. GTCCs Business Symposium was attended by approximately 180 individuals representing a variety of business and industry sectors.

Participants identified 15 business trends shaping Guilford County, obstacles and gaps employers faced with the current workforce, and advice on how GTCC could assist.

Many of the worker deficiencies noted by business and industry during the symposium such as effective oral and written communication, team skills, and adaptability, mirrored those previously identified in GTCC's DACUM (GTCC, 2008a). The workforce gaps conveyed by the business community provided further credence to the significance of the institution's QEP to the local economy.

The QEP

The QEP Defined

In 2004, the SACS liaison and other college representatives were gearing up for the 10-year reaccreditation review from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS). At the same time GTCC was preparing for the accreditation review, SACS added a new element to the reaccreditation process that included the development of an institutional Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). GTCC would be one of the first institutions in North Carolina to seek reaccreditation under the new guidelines for the QEP. According to the 2004 *Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, the QEP, as a component of the accreditation process, would reflect an opportunity and an impetus for an institution to enhance overall institutional quality and effectiveness by focusing on an issue the institution considered important to improving student learning. Specifically, SACS Core Requirement 2.12 required the institutional development of a plan for increasing the effectiveness of an aspect of its educational programming related to student learning as follows:

> *Core Requirement 2.12*: The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based

> institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment; (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution; (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2007, p. 3)

This meant a dual process occurred in 2004 when the visiting team from SACS reviewed not only the institution's compliance for reaccreditation for the past ten years, but the visiting team looked to the future in reviewing the new QEP as well.

In a letter to faculty and staff posted on GTCCs SACS website, President Cameron discussed new guidelines:

> Our reaccreditation process this time is made up of two key parts. The compliance audit looks at SACS-established guidelines for colleges. Ten years ago, these guidelines were called *Criteria* and were broken down into a series of *Must* and *Should* statements. We measured our performance against these criteria. In the revised version of SACS guidelines, we now have *Core Requirements*, *Comprehensive Standards* and *Federal Mandates*…The QEP is the new part to the accreditation process. SACS has now mandated that every college undertake a multi-year project that engages everyone in the college in

> a specific plan to enhance quality as it relates specifically to student learning. (GTCC SACS Website, n.d.)

When the SACS team visited GTCC in September, 2004, only one suggestion for improvement was cited, indicating GTCC had successfully met all reaccreditation requirements. At the time of the visit, the SACS representatives assigned to the college suggested GTCCs self-study was of such quality that it could serve as a model for other colleges. The SACS representatives were also impressed with the newly developed QEP, and indicated the plan was "on the cutting edge" (Kinard, 2008, p. 368).

GTCCs QEP

By the time GTCCs visiting SACS team arrived in 2004, the process to develop the QEP had been underway for more than a year. SACS guidelines stated the institution's leadership team was charged with providing oversight for both the Compliance Review and the development of the QEP, and when the central theme of the QEP was identified, the leadership team could then assign responsibility for its development to a select group (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2007). In this manner, the new guidelines for implementation of the QEP had been reviewed by GTCCs college administration, the president had publically announced the general content, and the groundwork was laid for common understanding of the initiative through correspondence posted on the website to all faculty and staff. Numerous campus-wide communications followed with emails, faculty and staff meetings at all levels, printed materials, and the internal SACS website (GTCC QEP, 2004). During interviews with faculty, participants in the study recalled how they first heard of the QEP:

> I first heard of the QEP through email and also in various meetings that were held such as all personnel meetings where it was discussed and we learned what it was all about.
>
> As I recall, it [QEP] was communicated through emails, and memos, and word of mouth. Seems like we had an all personnel meeting, or some sort of college-wide meeting--could have been a convocation, but I remember it was communicated to all of us.

Following campus-wide announcements of the initiative, GTCC administrators identified a QEP planning team to begin the process of comprehensively identifying a central theme for the QEP. To assure the QEP theme was not a top-down, mandated initiative, the QEP planning team devised a process to engage all college constituencies in the process of determining the central theme. From the outset, the QEP planning team determined that the appropriate campus constituencies meant everyone at the college, not just those with direct and obvious links to student learning. “We felt strongly that everyone at the college was responsible for aspects of student learning and that the more broadly based our commitment to enhancing student learning, the more impact we would have on students and their success” (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 3).

To identify a central theme, throughout spring and summer, 2003, the QEP planning team and the Institutional Research and Planning Office conducted numerous college-wide focus groups and administered surveys. From the focus groups, three central themes emerged as the focus of GTCCs QEP. After additional input from faculty and staff, the single theme of employability skills emerged. That fall, two campus-wide events were used to communicate the identification of the theme.

While employability skills became the topic for GTCCs QEP, many long-time faculty at the institution spoke of how the institutional focus of employability skills pre-dated the development and implementation of the QEP. One faculty commented on her knowledge of employability skills prior to the identification of the QEP topic: “I was very familiar with employability skills--we have been talking about it for a long time.” Another GTCC faculty discussed the origination of efforts to incorporate employability skills in the classroom:

> GTCCs focus on employability skills long pre-dated the development of the QEP. The CIBA grant in 1996 actually helped us get started with employability skills. There was almost a dual process happening. We were already in partnership with the local school district here, and CIBA said they would help us. The CIBA grant helped create the employability skills chart, and helped us look at strategies for teaching employability skills. At the time, there was existing research from local business and industry that said-- these are our needs. Then there was the *SCANS* Report – *A Nation at Risk* – those studies from the workforce that said--we have real issues here and people aren’t prepared. We [faculty] reviewed the studies and discovered it was not the academic skills lacking, but the soft skills. So GTCC identified eight people from a variety of businesses and industries to take part in a DACUM process. Bottom line, they were the ones who came up with employability skills categories. Here is the order we want them in--here are the skills needed for each--it went to faculty for

> feedback-- it went back to them again for a little tweaking--and basically--the employability skills DACUM chart was born.

SACS guidelines stated the QEP need not be a brand new idea. An institution's QEP may extend, modify, redirect, or strengthen an improvement already under way. To this end, the institutional focus on employability expanded the long-term commitment to workforce development and to existing institutional initiatives as well. Accordingly, as stated in the QEP;

> The topic chosen by the college [GTCC] is not only appropriate to the institution, it is in many ways the logical 'next step' in several critical college initiatives. In fact, the QEP has the potential of bringing what may have been viewed as disparate initiatives into one clearly focused, long-term plan. The initiatives are workforce preparedness, performance-based learning, becoming a learning-centered college, and the Achieving the Dream, Lumina Foundation Grant. (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 6)

For the purpose of defining employability skills for the QEP, GTCC utilized a previously developed DACUM chart which identified skills and competencies for six employability skills. Employability skills were defined by the DACUM as learning skills preparing students for the workforce to include teamwork, responsibility, communication, problem-solving, information processing, and adaptability. As employability skills had been an integral part of curriculum planning since 1997, GTCCs goal for the QEP was to make observable, measurable progress to improve student learning, and to become a national model in developing the standards for employability skills and incorporating and assessing them in the curriculum. With the QEP in place, each of GTCCs 115 planning

units was charged with creating a specific, measurable, objective towards the teaching and learning of employability skills for the coming year, and employability skills would be evaluated for each employee through an annual performance appraisal (GTCC QEP, 2004).

QEP – A Narrowed Focus

The QEP had been in place at GTCC since 2004. The QEP document provided to SACS described the ambitious characteristics of the initiative, and after several years, it became obvious to GTCC administration that the broad nature of GTCC's QEP, as it was designed, presented huge challenges for successful implementation. In March, 2008, as the institution examined the impact of the QEP, an internal document obtained from GTCC cited recommendations by the QEP planning team for significant changes to the QEP:

> Ambitious in its initial scope, GTCCs QEP proposed to measure all six of the identified employability skills. After the first year of working with the QEP at the college, we began to discuss the possibilities of narrowing to just one skill: responsibility. This skill in particular seemed to link most directly with the Achieving the Dream initiative and with the Learning College work that the institution has undertaken…Responsibility became the obvious choice for a central focus. However, while urged to focus on helping students learn a sense of responsibility, all college programs and departments were certainly free to focus on other employability skills that their students need to help them succeed (GTCC, 2008b, p. 3).

In December, 2008, GTCC was granted verbal approval by SACS to narrow the focus of the QEP. In personal correspondence, one GTCC key administrator offered the following:

> It was very obvious that we had tackled too large of a project for our QEP. We reviewed the DACUM and recognized that responsibility was the top 'employability skill' mentioned by employers. It made sense to use their feedback to narrow our focus. We talked with our assigned liaison at SACS during the December, 2008 conference, and discussed our proposal to narrow our QEP focus. She understood our predicament and gave us verbal approval to move forward (B. Kays, personal communication, July 23, 2009).

As directed by SACS, institutional QEPs are reviewed in a Fifth-Year Interim Report to the Commission. At the time of this study, GTCC was working on the Fifth-Year Interim Report and will formally report to SACS regarding the impact of the QEP in September, 2010. The Fifth-Year Interim Report will cover the status of the QEP, as well as other pertinent institutional compliance issues.

The DACUM

The term, DACUM, is an acronym meaning "developing a curriculum." The process for developing a DACUM generally includes a one or two day workshop involving a panel of subject matter experts (DACUM Training, n.d.). With help of the CIBA grant, in 1998, experts from area businesses and industries, and GTCCs faculty and staff, participated in facilitator led discussions and activities, to develop a DACUM chart. The discussions led to a summary from the panel of experts on what a worker does in

terms of duties, tasks, knowledge, skills, and traits. The information was presented in a graphic form, known as a DACUM chart. GTCCs DACUM chart, provided competencies and skills for each of the six employability skills.

The original DACUM chart (Appendix D), developed at GTCC in 1998, was widely utilized in the pre-QEP days for integrating employability skills competencies into curriculum programs and courses. The original DACUM chart served as a foundation for helping faculty incorporate employability skills and competencies in syllabi and curricula, and established the groundwork for incorporating and assessing employability skills in the classroom.

Following lengthy discussions by the QEP planning team, in July, 2008, the ten-year old DACUM chart was revised. In a review of the 1998 DACUM, it was noted by the planning team that many of the businesses and industries involved in the original panel to develop the DACUM were no longer in existence. Many of Guilford County's primary employers in the 1990s such as textiles, tobacco, and furniture manufacturers, had closed their doors. The QEP team felt strongly that the original DACUM chart should be revisited by present-day employers. In 2008, a new panel of business and industry representatives, more accurately reflecting current employers in the county, convened to develop a new DACUM chart (Appendix E). The new DACUM chart more accurately reflected the opinions and needs of current employers in Guilford County, and was distributed to all faculty and staff to be utilized in applications for the QEP. One participant in the study conveyed approval of the new DACUM:

> It (DACUM) was already in place when I got here. So the way I learned about it here was a list of things on the syllabus I was giving out, so I

> read about it and asked some questions about it, and it made sense. I was very impressed with the DACUM and how the list was created, and then very excited to see some ten years later that we revised it to reflect more contemporary issues.

The original DACUM chart provided the framework for early efforts to incorporate employability skills in the classroom, and was used to develop an internal manual to assist GTCC faculty and staff with incorporating employability skills in their classes. The 2008 DACUM reflected a more current framework for employability skills to be utilized in the implementation of the QEP.

Additional Initiatives

In 2004, the college also launched an "Achieving the Dream" initiative and was awarded a $50,000 planning grant. The Achieving the Dream initiative focused on creating an outcomes-based, data-driven system designed to improve success of at-risk students. GTCC was subsequently awarded a four-year, $400,000, Achieving the Dream grant. By coordinating the work of the QEP and Achieving the Dream initiative, the two projects would complement and add strength to each. One faculty elaborated on the connections of the Achieving the Dream initiative and the QEP with these remarks:

> I think there are connections between the two. That effort [Achieving the Dream] is more our gateway, and there is a relationship with our QEP, but I don't think it has been widely articulated as such. The retention and persistence rates of students will be interesting research coming out of this study. That, to us, would have a real connection to employability skills, because much of what we are asking of people

> with employability would probably be buried in that course. So that might mean that as we do curriculum or program reviews, we would make certain recommendations from that.

In early 2009, as funding of the Achieving the Dream initiative was coming to a close, GTCC was awarded a three-year, $743,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and MDC, Inc. to continue to support and expand programs for at-risk students. The new grant would again complement efforts to address employability skills for the QEP. In a personal interview with Dr. Cameron in 2009, he spoke of the new grant and GTCCs initiative to implement a student advocacy program aimed at pairing faculty and staff with students to assist in their progress:

> Part of the new grant is an initiative to develop a series of student advocates. I've chosen to take on three students, which means I call each one of them four times during the semester. I meet with each of them three times, and have also chosen to teach one of the study skills classes. So I am a student advocate and teaching a class, and I am trying to lead by example. (Cameron, D., personal interview, August 19, 2009)

Strategic efforts went in to aligning the QEP with existing college initiatives. Grant funding from Achieving the Dream and the Gates Foundation provided financial resources for implementing each of the grant proposals related to at-risk student success. The implementation of the projects outlined in the grants also provided strength to the efforts described for employability skills in GTCCs QEP.

Summary

Chapter Four described GTCC, the purposefully selected site for this study. GTCC was selected because it was unique among North Carolina's 58 community colleges for its long-term institutional focus on workforce and economic development. The implementation of the QEP in 2004 focused on institutionally developing, teaching, and assessing employability skills across curriculums. Chapter Four described Guilford County, the history of GTCC, and GTCCs leadership strategies to implement large-scale strategic change. Further, Chapter Four provided descriptions of internal and external studies and initiatives leading to the development of the QEP, and described specifically how GTCCs President and administrators communicated and facilitated the campus-wide strategic initiative.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the institutional impact and commitment of faculty to teaching high-level employability skills at Guilford Technical Community College, located in Jamestown, North Carolina. Additionally, the study provided an awareness and understanding of faculty and administrator roles surrounding the institutional implementation of large-scale strategic change as they related to economic and workforce development. Participants in the study included 15 full-time faculty teaching at GTCC, three key administrators, and GTCCs President. Findings reported in this chapter were amassed utilizing document analysis, face-to-face interviews, and follow-up emails. Chapter Five findings were guided by Conner's (1992) theory of Stages of Change Commitment, and organized around the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?
2. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?
3. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?
4. What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?
5. How did Guilford Technical Community College overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

Conner's Stages of Change Commitment

If organizational change could be limited to affecting only physical attributes within an institution, implementation of a new strategic innovation would be relatively simple. However, most important initiatives within a work environment require employees to modify something about the way they think, feel, or react. When acceptance or resistance to a new initiative occurs, it is usually based on personal agreement or disagreement with the content of the change, the manner in which the change is being implemented, personal concern regarding the impact of a change, or individuals may agree with the concept, but fear they lack the skill or aptitude to successfully implement the change (Conner, 1992).

Conner's theory of the Stages of Change Commitment was represented by three phases for successful implementation of change to include preparation, acceptance, and commitment. Brief descriptions of the characteristics of the phases are listed below:

Preparation: This is the earliest encounter an individual has with a new initiative. Methods for delivering news of an initial contact primarily include general announcements, staff meetings, or interoffice communications through campus-wide memos or emails.

Acceptance: The individual knows an initiative is being contemplated. If this stage is successful, individuals will understand that modifications affecting operations will occur; they will develop a general acknowledgement and understanding of the initiative, and most likely be ready to move the next phase.

Commitment: This stage represents a threshold that is critical to the commitment of an initiative. Indications of awareness and acceptance have taken place, which

forms the foundation for development, support, and commitment to the implementation of the initiative (Conner, 1992).

As faculty commitment and impact to teaching employability skills to students was a primary foundation for this study, Conner's Stages of Commitment was linked to findings from documentation and interviews as it related to the research questions in this study. In order to clearly articulate the views and feelings of the participants engaged in the study, direct quotations from participants were included throughout the narrative of this chapter.

Research Question #1

What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?

Conner's theory stated change is not a one-time event ending at a particular point, but rather, a constantly managed and evolving process requiring vigilance from those charged with implementation. Utilizing Conner's three Stages of Change Commitment, the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to incorporating employability skills in the curriculum was examined. GTCC has a documented history of commitment to economic development and workforce preparedness; however, the SACS initiative provided a formal, college-wide, platform for establishing and implementing the QEP, developing and connecting strategic goals and objectives, and reporting outcomes. The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) was defined in Chapter Four by *Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement Core Requirement 2.12*.

Conner: Preparation

Conner's preparation stage involved the earliest encounters or exposures individuals had to a new initiative, and suggested early communication and involvement of those affected by a new initiative would likely lead to increased success of an initiative. For GTCC, the QEP represented not only a new institutional initiative, but GTCC was one of the first colleges in North Carolina to apply for SACS reaccreditation under new guidelines. For these reasons, it was crucial for college employees to fully understand new processes and procedures for SACS, and how the institution would arrive at one central theme for the QEP.

Campus-wide meetings, emails, and information obtained from GTCCs SACS website indicated extensive communication efforts took place by college administrators to provide the foundation for the QEP, and through these efforts, individuals were aware a new initiative was underway. Documents and interviews indicated successful campus-wide communications about the QEP had adequately led to faculty understanding. One faculty described how she remembered GTCCs effort to communicate the initiative:

> As I recall, it [QEP] was communicated through emails, and also various meetings that were held for all faculty and staff, and then in our division meetings, we discussed the initiative quite a bit.

Faculty and staff understood from SACS documentation provided to them that identifying a theme for the QEP mandated a bottom-up approach, and that the entire campus would be invited to participate in this process. Further, a letter from Dr. Cameron was posted on GTCCs SACS website to all GTCC faculty and staff discussed differences

in the former SACS reaccreditation process at GTCC, and the requirements that would be necessary for compliance with the QEP under the new SACS requirements.

A QEP Planning Team was identified by GTCCs administration, and throughout spring and summer 2003, approximately 30 hour-long, non-instructional focus groups were held, and all instructional areas met as well to identify a central theme. The purpose was to involve all constituents in a two-way conversation to develop a central theme most important to the institution, and to bring everyone into the change process leading to successful implementation of the QEP. This process was described in the QEP document:

> The QEP planning team felt that every effort had been made to engage fully the entire college community, from students to Board of Trustee members, from grounds keepers to counselors, from administration to faculty. In addition, everyone was provided multiple points of entry into the process and given a chance to join focus groups, comment on the work-in-progress, or even join the QEP planning team. Ultimately, all became aware of their roles in the QEP. (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 5)

As directed by SACS, the college's mission provided a foundation for the central theme. The focus group results were summarized and emailed to all GTCC faculty and staff. Three themes emerged from the focus groups: (1) improving student personal growth and development; (2) improving student workforce preparedness/employability skills; and, (3) improving development of other skills such as diversity. Retention was a topic frequently discussed, yet the responses had less to do with retention and more to do with student success. In particular, focus group summaries uniformly described student behaviors in all phases of the academic process. Everyone was invited to comment on the

three themes, and after extensive discussions and much input from all constituents, a central theme of employability skills emerged as the focus for the QEP. One faculty summarized internal events surrounding the rationale of the identification of the QEPs central theme this way:

> The QEP had to come from the ground up, so we created a number of focus groups, did piloting of it just to see how it work, approved the protocol and executed it with every group in the college. And from what people were telling us across faculty, staff, and administration, it didn't matter, what came up repeatedly was that students did not have the kind of common sense things that typically we think by the time you get to age 18,19,20--you would have scaffold into your cognitive structures. There were issues of responsibility, communication, even basic civility and decorum. So what is suggested to us as we reviewed the research that evolved was that the employability skills should be the primary focus and we would try to execute that across the campus.

Indeed, the very skills GTCC had previously identified through a former DACUM process as skills that would make students more employable, were the same skills faculty identified for the QEP to assist students with success in the classroom. One faculty shared thoughts on the success of the campus-wide focus groups:

> This [QEP] was a huge undertaking to get planned and implemented college-wide. I thought they [Administration] did a really good job conducting the focus groups and getting input from members of all aspects of the college.

Another participant described how the grassroots nature of the development of the initiative led to a campus-wide commitment to the QEP theme this way:

> If you treat people professionally and involve them in the planning and execution of things, it is not that hard to sell new initiatives. This [QEP] was a ground roots thing. If someone from the third floor Medlin had come to us and said, 'This is our QEP to implement--have a nice day, I think there would have been resistance.' Probably they [faculty] would have said, 'Come here, when is the last time you have been in a classroom--come back when you can talk to us.' But because it [employability skills] was a simmering up--bubbling up issue--everyone could say this was something they were behind.

GTCCs initial course of action to include all college constituents in the identification of the QEP theme was significant in that it produced understanding. Evidence from interviews and documents describing the development of the theme of the QEP indicated great care was taken to build early commitment to the campus-wide initiative by utilizing clear communication and active faculty involvement.

These activities fell under Conner's first preparation stage to enable individuals to progress to the next stage. Since awareness of the new initiative was a progression, sufficient understanding at the beginning of the process, impacted the transition to Conner's second phase of acceptance, and ultimately to commitment.

Conner: Acceptance

Internal document and studies showed many GTCC faculty and staff had previously been engaged in numerous projects and activities involving area businesses

and industries. Further, a number of national studies had also been published stressing the importance of preparing a highly-skilled workforce. Faculty exposed to studies and participating in local projects with businesses and industries recognized advanced technologies and the knowledge economy required individuals to possess higher-level workplace skills. Faculty participants in the study understood the growing concern of corporate leaders in identifying skilled workers, and they acknowledged the economic health of their community depended on their efforts to successfully teach high-level workplace skills. One participant in the study elaborated on faculty awareness of studies indicating the need adequately prepared students for the workplace by incorporating employability skills:

> We [faculty] had awareness because there was research from business and industry that said, 'we have these needs.' There was the SCANS Report, A Nation at Risk, those studies from the workforce that said, 'We [industries] have real issues and people aren't prepared.' When we looked at it [research] it was not the academic skills, but the soft skills that were most needed.

In the same way, interviews with faculty participants revealed they understood GTCCs history and mission to successfully serve the needs of business and industry, and indeed, they understood Dr. Cameron's vision and determination for the institution to become a national leader in workforce preparedness. One faculty who had been employed at the college only a few years characterized Dr. Cameron's foresight and expectations for serving the community and businesses and industries in Guilford County with these remarks:

> Dr. Cameron's vision for GTCC is for our use and our connections to the community to bring value to individuals and to businesses. As a community college, we do support our community and we want to make sure our business and industry partners in the area are satisfied with our students.

Previous institutional efforts in the development of a DACUM and processes such as the creation of a "how-to" manual to assist faculty in the incorporation of employability skills in their classes, provided faculty with a general awareness and acceptance in preparation for the new QEP. In 1998, following the development of the DACUM, an internal manual was designed and distributed throughout the campus and titled, *Educating the Workforce: A Manual for Integrating Institutional-Level Student Competencies into Curriculum Programs and Courses.* The manual provided a guide to faculty for incorporating three cores:

1. Academic skills expected of a two-year degree graduate as established by the accrediting association (SACS).
2. Curriculum-specific skills as required by a particular program/field of study (DACUM or national standards).
3. General employability skills as required in the working world (Employability Skills DACUM).

Faculty comments about the three cores referred to previous efforts to incorporate employability skills in the curriculum, and referred to the internal manual created to assist faculty with the integration of the three core competencies. Comments from faculty

illustrated that the QEP brought organization to prior institutional efforts, and connected the initiative to long-term planning unit goals.

> The QEP helped get people organized as to how to incorporate all three cores [academic, curriculum specific, and employability skills] into their syllabi and planning units. We were told by our department chairs to make sure the objectives we developed were measurable.

Another faculty member described how prior efforts were associated with the QEP:

> I think it [the manual] helped get people organized as to how to incorporate all three of those cores into their syllabi and planning units, and into their DACUMS. We did a lot with that, then we went into dividing employability skills out for the QEP. I remember meetings with all department chairs where we were evaluating to make sure the objectives were measurable and that we could actually do something with them in the way that they were written. Then, on end of year reports, people were able to address their measures they had attempted to implement.

The DACUM had been in place at GTCC since 1998. Many informal efforts had been made by faculty to incorporate employability skills in their classes when the QEP was developed. Through syllabi, documents, and interview, faculty had been involved in the development of the central theme for the QEP, and accepted their role to teach employability skills to students. Their understanding and acceptance led to the last phase in Conner's theoretical model--commitment.

Conner: Commitment

According to Conner's model, the groundwork laid by college administration for the initiative led employees through the acceptance stage. Internal documents such as focus groups responses, surveys, and interviews with faculty acknowledged recognition and importance of the need to integrate and teach employability skills to students. GTCCs QEP had major impact on formalizing a comprehensive approach for faculty commitment to teaching, assessing, and reporting workplace skills.

Documents and interviews revealed faculty believed their efforts to successfully incorporate employability skills in their classes would improve learning and job success. Equally important, the QEP served to elevate campus-wide consciousness of the importance of regular assessment to ensure that measurable outcomes were clearly articulated for all programs and courses. One faculty participant emphatically described the importance of teaching and modeling employability skills not only to students, but across all levels of employment:

> Without incorporating employability skills, I don't care how good a faculty member is, how many degrees we have on our walls, or how skilled we are, if we don't teach and model employability, we will not be successful. Without them [employability skills] we will set our students up for failure.

Conner's acceptance stage represented a critical threshold to the commitment of an initiative, and formed the foundation for acceptance for implementation of the initiative. A review of documents and interviews substantiated faculty preparation and awareness of the QEP had occurred. Similarly, documents and inquiries also revealed

GTCCs faculty understood and accepted their responsibility to deliver employability skills to students, and all 15 participants in the study offered solid evidence of their commitment.

Conner's theoretical framework suggested the length of time individuals are exposed to a new initiative was directly associated to the degree of support or commitment they invested in an initiative. Campus-wide identification and commitment for employability skills as the QEP may be explained by more than ten years of documented institutional focus on economic development and workplace skills. As noted by one faculty, "GTCCs employability stuff was long before the QEP." Throughout the history of the college, many state and national recognitions had been awarded to GTCC for their involvement in economic and workforce development. Faculty had been exposed to local and national news articles, journals, books, and presentations consistently describing GTCCs involvement in economic and workforce development as a top priority of the president and the institution. One long-time faculty member of the college summarized commitment to workforce development in her area in very simple terms. "You know…in my department, we talk about employability skills every day of our lives." Another participant expressed institutional communication and commitment from the president's level to the student's level this way:

> I think this college is completely about employability skills. Dr. Cameron talks about it--we all talk about it. We are always talking in class about when you [students] are in the workplace, and students bring up all kinds of situations for discussion. We are always trying to give them the tools and guidance to help them succeed in the workplace.

Conner's theoretical framework also stated if stakeholders agreed with the content of an initiative, they were more likely to have a desire to embrace and accept it. One reason employability skills was likely chosen as the institutional topic of the QEP by faculty and staff was they could relate to the initiative, and it simply made sense to them. As one faculty member noted, "The basis of it [employability skills] just makes sense whether you have a document in front of you saying you need to do it or not. These are things that need to be focused on anyway." This comment indicated the institutionalization of the initiative, and suggested the implementation of employability skills was integrated into the fabric of the organization.

In particular, all faculty interviewed highlighted the importance of successfully preparing students to be successful in the workplace, and teaching employability skills in the classroom was key to that preparation. One faculty described the logical nature of teaching employability skills to students with this comment, "I thought they [employability skills] made perfect sense. They are consistent with goals and objectives for any education along with preparation for employment, so it just makes sense to teach them." Another faculty participant stated their obvious support for the initiative, "This is what I felt we should be teaching. In my division, we have always felt employability skills are vitally important to student success."

As a general catchphrase described in the QEP, "Expect and Reflect" became a slogan for the QEP at GTCC, meaning college faculty and staff were expected to model employability skills in their daily practices, so that their attitudes and behaviors would impact and reflect positively on the behaviors of students. In particular, one faculty participant described the meaning of expect and reflect:

> Employability skills affect everyone at the institution. So in the planning units, all of us, even facilities and groundskeepers, must see how our own employability skills become a model for students. You hear expect and reflect often, and we reflect what we expect by modeling it.

Another faculty explained how one instructor drew upon a personal circumstance to model employability skills to students through the concept of expect and reflect:

> Funny I had an instructor who was late for class one day. Couldn't help it, his car broke down – you know – it happens. So I went up and visited the class, and when the instructor did arrive, he walked through the door and announced, 'Well, I am unemployable!' This made me feel good because we, as instructors, try to mirror proper behaviors to students and this is important. The class laughed, but the students appreciated the fact that not only did he expect this from them, but he expected this of himself as well.

The concept of "Expect and Reflect" also led to a campus-wide survey in 2006 to assess how faculty and staff viewed their own actions and behaviors related to the six employability skills. The 61-page report, conducted approximately one year following the launch of the initiative, included many comments from faculty and staff on the need to improve internal customer service and communications. On the survey, faculty and staff were asked if they felt they reflected the employability skills they would like to see in students. One section of the survey (Table 1) was included, representing responses from

faculty and staff indicating their own perceptions of modeling employability skills. Within each department, the following were responses were noted:

Table 1: Expect and Reflect Survey Result--GTCC

I reflect the employability skills I would like to see in students.				
	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Combined Faculty and Staff Responses	92.4%	1.7%	0.0%	5.9%
Faculty Responses	93.6%	1.1%	0.0%	5.4%
Staff Responses	92.1%	2.1%	0.0%	5.7%

The survey results indicated faculty, slightly more than staff at GTCC, strongly agreed they reflected employability skills behaviors they would like to see present in student behaviors. While all faculty and staff agreed employability skills were adequately demonstrated within respective departments, additional findings of the survey suggested improvements could be made across the campus. Findings in the campus-wide survey were important, however, equally important were the institutional efforts to gather and assess institutional data to further encourage understanding of where the institution was, and where it needed to be regarding the QEP.

Interviews with GTCC faculty consistently revealed a high awareness and commitment to incorporating and teaching employability skills in the classroom. The institutional impact of the QEP was that it formally established the campus-wide incorporation of employability skills in classrooms, and specifically linked the initiative to the institution's strategic plan, and to the annual performance appraisals of faculty and

staff. Faculty comments indicated commitment to incorporating employability skills was much greater than the requirement of the QEP. In fact, the commitment to teach employability skills was institutionalized as a normal part of the culture.

Research Question #2

What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?

For the purposes of this study, economic development was defined as a range of activities contributing to job creation and wealth either through expansion or relocation of businesses and industries (Jacobs & Hawley, n.d). This occurred through the mobilization of financial, physical, human, and natural resources to improve financial stability and quality of life to a region. Adequate faculty understanding of the needs of employers in the region was important as employability skills became the focus for GTCCs QEP in 2004. In an effort to accurately reflect the views and feelings of the participants engaged in the study, direct quotations from participants were included.

Conner: Preparation

Workforce development is a part of economic development; therefore, as expressed in interviews, faculty were aware that their efforts to incorporate employability skills in their classes would enhance economic development efforts through an adequate understanding of the needs of employers in Guilford County. As one faculty expressed, "Our workforce development efforts, in my opinion, are about producing adequately prepared individuals to enter the workforce based on economic demands here." As stated in the QEP document to SACS, GTCCs faculty and staff had chosen an ambitious topic for the QEP. Faculty and staff believed the application of employability skills in the

classroom would lead not only to acquired skills and changed behaviors for students in the classroom, but acquiring these skills and changing student behaviors would better prepare them for the workforce as well. Employers had indicated many times through such means as surveys and program advisory meetings that they needed to hire individuals who possessed high-level skills in order to stay competitive and remain in business. One faculty illustrated an understanding of GTCCs role in providing skilled workers for Guilford County:

> I have general anecdotal information such as letters to the editor in the paper. The stuff I read in the papers is positive in terms of GTCC trying to meet the needs of the community and in terms of providing employers with prepared workers.

Documentation on GTCCs history revealed a deep organizational commitment to serve the needs of the businesses and industries in Guilford County. As Dr. Cameron described, “If our students receive the degree and go to work in a company at an entry-level position, then they need to be able to perform the tasks for the company. If they cannot perform, then we need to reexamine our curriculum” (as cited in Kinard, 2008, p. 269). Newspapers and other local documents revealed many jobs had been lost in Guilford County. Faculty expressed concerns about what would happen if more jobs were lost in the county, and what could be done to help reverse this trend.

Kaplan & Norton (2001) suggested for a change strategy to become meaningful, objectives must be aligned with personal goals of an individual. The possibility of additional job losses was very real and meaningful to GTCCs faculty, and as evidenced

through their efforts to successfully train students, they were committed to helping students obtain and retain viable jobs.

Conner: Acceptance

Over a ten year period, several major studies had been conducted by GTCC to assess the economic climate of Guilford County. In particular, one GTCC study conducted in 2000, compared responses of GTCC faculty and Guilford County employers on the preparedness of Guilford County workforce. This lead to a greater understanding and acceptance of faculty and employers to partner to meet regional economic development needs.

Documents revealed GTCC had received many local and national awards and recognitions for their economic development models. In 2008, the 50th Anniversary Business Symposium was held, and the event brought more than 180 business and industry representatives to GTCCs campus to collectively discuss challenges and concerns facing the business community, and to provide framework for GTCC to address future business and industry concerns. The challenges and concerns noted by the business representatives highlighted many of the needs that GTCC had committed to addressing in the institution's QEP.

In 2009, the Greensboro Economic Development Alliance (GEDA) awarded the Stanley Frank Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Cameron. The award once again publically acknowledged Cameron's dedication to economic development and noted his leadership had been instrumental in bringing many new companies to Guilford County (GEDA, 2009, March 3). Faculty had read the newspapers and internal documents acknowledging the school's leadership role in economic development for many years

and, as they expressed, were accepting of their roles to help drive economic efforts in the county as well.

Additionally, as noted in the QEP, there was increasing pressure from advisory committees and local employers for graduates to possess high-level skills leading to enhanced economic development efforts, and the institution was committed to do so. One faculty participant commented, “We say to students, treat this class like a job. After all, employers call us for references.” GTCCs faculty felt through their commitment to successfully provide workplace skills to students, area businesses would benefit, resulting in improved economic development as well.

Conner: Commitment

The involvement of all faculty and staff in the identification of the QEP led to an acceptance for serving the needs of business and industry. Many efforts to incorporate employability skills had been underway for several years at GTCC when the QEP was identified, so there was widespread general understanding of what it would take to implement the initiative. The original DACUM was accomplished through the support of local businesses and industries, and many other initiatives had been supported financially and otherwise from local businesses. Advisory committee members from business and industry were utilized extensively in various curriculums. This provided faculty an opportunity to work directly with business and industry representatives, and gain insight of their needs.

The long-term institutional exposure to workforce development, and requirements of the QEP to effectively measure and report specific employability outcomes, led faculty to a better understanding of their roles in economic development. The commitment of

faculty to economic development was critical for constituent approval of an institution. As one faculty commented, “The community evaluation of this institution rests on our involvement in economic development.”

When GTCC faculty were asked to define the differences in economic development and workforce development, the majority of participants in the study understood the differences in the concepts and how their roles as faculty related to each. While most faculty described economic development in terms of bringing new industry to the region, many faculty included details that illustrated their understanding of economic development such as of quality of life, or improving the community as an economic development strategy. As one faculty participant believed, “Economic development includes developing a workforce, but it also concentrates on such things as the outside appearance of the local high school, taking down graffiti or cleaning up garbage, for example.”

By nature of their disciplines and connections to business and industry, interviews revealed technical faculty were more aware and directly involved in the economic development aspect than academic faculty. No one participating in the study indicated they had personally been involved in economic development efforts leading to a new industry start-up or relocation, though several technical faculty described their involvement once a new industry was operational. The following words describe one technical faculty’s commitment to economic development:

> When I find out about a new industry, I make contact with them. I keep abreast of what is going on with new industries, and contact

> them for internships and feedback about what they are looking for that may possibly make our students more attractive to them.

Academic faculty associated their involvement in economic development in less obvious ways, yet, all faculty involved in this study understood and articulated their unique roles. For both groups, there was an implied understanding and importance of economic development, and how economic development was directly linked to their efforts to deliver employability skills in the classroom. Other faculty expressed familiarity and involvement in economic development this way:

> It is important for faculty to be involved. I serve on several boards in the community, and coordinate events with them. I go out and speak to a lot of organizations. And we try to do things very industry specific. For example, two semesters ago there was a huge company--really big in the industry--and I found out they were looking for a place in the area to display and demonstrate some of their equipment. Other companies across the Southeast would be attending also. And I got to thinking; we have the perfect place for that. So I offered our facility with one stipulation…that they spend one day with my students. I mean these were real experts. So it was a win for them, a win for my students, and a win for area businesses as well.

The following faculty participant described involvement in economic development efforts more indirectly. For this faculty member, economic development depicted quality of life in Guilford County, and illustrated an understanding for providing

community service and volunteerism opportunities to students to not only enhance their personal and professional growth, but society as well.

> Our department has gotten very involved in a coalition in Guilford County to address access to health care for uninsured and underinsured. Our students are involved in the community care clinic, which meets a need for our community, but also helps our students understand volunteerism. And when they leave from here, hopefully that will continue.

The following description represented a statement from an academic faculty participant signifying an understanding and commitment to economic development, however, the participant was aware that for most, economic development was defined solely in terms of job creation.

> I know our technical programs are very involved in economic development. But it is different for the General Education area. I serve on an education board, but I don't think anyone here would think of it as economic development--but instead creating good vibes for GTCC. But there aren't going to be a lot of jobs created because I interact with them.

The painstaking efforts to involve all faculty and staff in the process of identifying the central theme of the QEP led to institutional acceptance and commitment to workforce and economic development. The focus on employability skills as the central theme of the QEP also led to increased institutional impact and efforts to connect to businesses and industries, and the community to improve the quality of the workforce in

Guilford County. As workforce development is a part of economic development, the findings confirmed faculty roles and commitment to economic development.

Utilizing Conner's model, all faculty participants, even those employed at the institution for only a few years, had been adequately exposed and understood GTCCs commitment to economic development. Likewise, all participants, regardless of length of time employed at GTCC, described genuine acceptance for their roles as educators to enhance economic development efforts in Guilford County. At this stage of Conner's model, faculty were highly committed to the change because it was congruent with personal and professional interests and their value system.

Research Question #3

How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?

Because GTCC was one of the earliest colleges in North Carolina to seek reaccreditation under the new SACS guidelines requiring a QEP, models and research of best practices from other institutions was limited. Employability skills were not new to the institution, however, for GTCC, the 2004 institutional implementation of a QEP represented uncharted territory. Within the mandated guidelines developed by SACS for institutional requirements of the initiative, GTCC administrators understood their role to successfully lead efforts for campus-wide involvement and understanding of the new SACS process in general, and the process and preparation to embark upon the new QEP.

Based on documents and interviews obtained in this research, Question Three was addressed utilizing themes identified in Table 2. In order to accurately reflect the opinions and views of the participants in this study, actual comments and expressions of participants were presented.

The Role of Administrators

As directed by SACS, the role of the college administration was to communicate the SACS requirements, including the development of the QEP. In the SACS *Quality Enhancement Plan: Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, institutional responsibilities of the college's leadership team were explicitly outlined as follows:

> The institution's leadership team is charged with providing oversight for both the compliance review and the development of the quality enhancement plan. After the institution has identified the topic or issue, the leadership team may assign the day-to-day responsibility for its development to a select group representing those individuals who have the greatest knowledge about the interest in the ideas, content, processes, and methodologies to be developed in the QEP, along with expertise in planning and assessment and in managing and allocating institutional resources. Since the QEP addresses enhancing student learning and/or environment supporting student learning, faculty typically play a primary role in this phase of the reaffirmation process. (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2007, p. 6)

Determined through interviews and documents, one of the first individuals at GTCC to become aware and gain access to SACs documentation outlining the new requirements of the QEP was GTCCs SACS Liaison. As one faculty participant remembered, "I feel like I first heard about the QEP in a conversation with our SACS liaison." As previously described, all available communications channels were used by college administrators to lay the ground work for the new QEP. Further, as stated in the

QEP document, GTCC administrators identified a QEP Planning Team, and college-wide focus groups and surveys were administered. Focus group inquiries were guided by one fundamental question, "If your group could work on one thing to help students learn and/or advance the learning environment at GTCC, what would it be?" The common theme of employability skills emerged for the QEP. An announcement of the central theme was presented and endorsed by Dr. Cameron in August, 2003, during the fall convocation held for all GTCC faculty and staff:

> The QEP theme we have chosen certainly affirms the focus of the learning-centered college. First of all, students who can learn the basic employability skills will have a much better chance at learning other content. Students who are taught--and who learn--these skills will have a far better chance to succeed in the college environment and to be successful learners. If we succeed in our QEP initiative, we would, across all campus services as well as in curriculum courses, be teaching and documenting the learning of employability skills. This would produce students who have learned to be good communicators and problem solvers, who learned to adapt and be responsible, who can participate as effective team members and are adept at information processing skills. (GTCC QEP, 2004, pp. 11-12)

While many participants in the study recalled the meeting, one faculty stated, "We had a college-wide meeting--a convocation I believe--but I remember the QEP was communicated to all of us." As described in the QEP, the new initiative served to assist GTCC in the previously established institutional goal of becoming a national leader in

developing standards for employability skills and incorporating them into the curriculum (GTCC QEP, 2004). As one faculty participant explained:

> Dr. Cameron made a point of mentioning employability skills and talking about it in all personnel meetings we had. Not that he beat a dead horse to death, but he just kept talking about it and calling it to our attention, and telling us how important it was for our SACS visit. He also stated that it was not going away--that it was here to stay--and that all of us should embrace it. These skills are what employers within our community have said they wanted our graduates to come out with, not just the technical skills, but that they are able to obtain and retain employment.

The QEP had been endorsed by GTCCs administration, a QEP Planning Chair had been identified, and a working planning team was developed. One faculty participant discussed the importance of the abilities of the identified QEP Chair to collaborate across divisions, and that it should be an individual who was respected across the campus so that others would listen to what they had to say:

> Make sure the person or persons who are in charge of implementing or managing the initiative have cross-college appeal, that they can get things done across the college, and that they know how to work with faculty, staff, and everybody, because things such as implementing employability skills--this is really a movement. And I think you may not necessarily need a charismatic person, but a person in charge who can direct other folks to open lots of doors, or they themselves can open lots

> of doors. This is someone who can come over here and talk to these folks and figure out how to implement employability skills in one area, then in another, then say, let's coordinate our efforts now.

Administrators had successfully communicated the initiative, and had identified qualified individuals to lead focus groups and other institutional efforts related to the QEP. Dr. Cameron openly endorsed the central theme in campus-wide meetings. While employability skills had been informally implemented for a number of years at GTCC, participants described how the QEP required new processes and procedures for assessing competencies and reporting outcomes.

Building on Existing Initiatives

Before the QEP focusing on employability skills was established, several institutional initiatives had been underway at GTCC for a number of years. As noted in the QEP document and interviews, GTCC administrators understood faculty and staff had invested enormous amounts of time and energy on existing initiatives, so the goal was bring what may have been viewed as disparate initiatives into one clearly-focused, long-term plan for the college. Dr. Cameron had described existing initiatives in his August, 2003, speech to all faculty and staff, and administrators understood the need to build the QEP upon existing initiatives. This was also noted during an interview with a faculty member, "At the time the QEP was identified, there was almost a dual process occurring within the institution on other initiatives." As described in GTCCs QEP, the prior initiatives included workforce preparedness, performance-based learning, becoming a learning-centered college, and the Achieving the Dream initiative funded through a Lumina Foundation Grant. Previous institutional initiatives laid the foundation for

employability through construction of the first DACUM, professional development activities focused on the integration of employability skills in the classroom, and writing concise and measurable competencies to be included on all syllabi. Further, previous initiatives provided a continued basis for moving GTCC from a teaching-centered college to a learning-centered college, and fostered a heightened awareness of data-driven decisions. As one faculty noted during an interview:

> We have increased the focus on employability skills, but they were in place anyhow. I think the teaching of it being part of what we talk about with all our students has always been a vital part of the education in this program. However, what we have done more of is document it.

As each of the existing initiatives contained certain elements of compatibility with the implementation of employability skills in the classroom, the QEP capitalized on previous institutional efforts to link college-wide goals and objectives to one long-term strategic plan. As written in the QEP, each of the four initiatives had been significant to the college, and each, with the exception of Achieving the Dream, had been part of the president's annual initiatives. By coordinating existing institutional efforts, the goal was to make observable, measurable progress to improve student learning and workforce preparedness.

QEP Implementation

Through a campus-wide initiative, the central theme of identifying employability skills had been completed. To provide framework for formal implementation of the initiative, with a previously developed DACUM chart in

hand, each instructional area at GTCC was asked to meet with their respective program advisory committees and request that members rank importance of the DACUM skills specific to the particular field of study. The feedback received from advisory committees allowed faculty to more clearly identify and define employability skills as part of their curriculum competencies. Another charge was for each department to review existing policies and procedures to determine which of them were already in place to support the QEP.

However, across campus, there was apprehension by administrators and the QEP planning team that the QEP would place another responsibility on many faculty who already had heavy teaching loads. The danger of adding the new initiative held the potential for failure if college-wide commitment and support was not present. Along those lines, one faculty shared concerns of implementing the QEP, and commented on assurance received from her Division Chair:

> When the QEP first came up, and you know how this is being a community college employee, your stomach sort of turns when you hear about a new initiative coming on board. So it was quite a relief to us that we were not going through a total revamp. As my Division Chair kept reassuring me--you are already there, you just need to have something measurable--something you can prove.

In an effort to ease the transition for faculty, rather than completely reinventing the wheel, items addressing the employability skill of responsibility, for example, student attendance and coming to class on time surfaced as one the first measurable employability skills to incorporate and assess in the curriculum.

One faculty commented, “Student absences--not accepting late work, all these things were already addressed in existing policies and were measurable, so we immediately realized we could rename these policies according to the employability skills chart.”

Division Chairs – An Important Piece of the Puzzle

When faculty were asked when they began to hear about employability skills leading to internalization of the concept for acceptance and delivery, they most often described discussions in division meetings led by their Division Chair. The division meetings provided an ongoing platform for open and informal discussion about the QEP. Several faculty described their divisions as “close-knit,” which led to a trusting atmosphere to openly and honestly discuss their feelings or frustrations with the initiative. One faculty explained that the division meetings were not so much professional development opportunities, but rather, a continual dialogue about what everyone hoped the QEP would become. One faculty expressed the support he felt from Division Chairs by stating:

> I have worked at other institutions, so my answer may be different. This is one of the best institutions I have worked for as far as people who are hard working and willing to do new things. My Division Chairs, I have always felt, support my efforts and work as hard as I work, and even if we don’t agree on certain things, I believe employability skills are modeled by them every day for students here.

Another faculty described similar experiences in the division meetings for implementing employability skills in her program:

> We have a division meeting once a month. Everyone coming together to discuss various issues has been a huge help to me. Being the new kid on the block, I have those people to turn to. The whole institution is very conducive to information sharing. If there is something I don't know or need help with--it is not hard to find someone who can get me what I need.

The Division Chair meetings provided a consistent and comfortable environment for building acceptance for specific practices and implementations of the QEP, and allowed for ongoing sharing of best practices among colleagues. As noted by one participant, "I don't remember not talking about employability skills and I have been in this department 11 years." Once the QEP was in the actual implementation stage, on-going communication and involvement at the Division Chair level was imperative, and quite possibly, the most important level for the continued momentum of the initiative.

Professional Development

The Division Chairs maintained the momentum for the QEP within various departments, and provided an environment for discussion and sharing of resources. In an interesting discussion, one participant described the QEP, and illustrated the importance of ongoing mentoring and professional development, and the human factor present in strategic change:

> It [QEP] is really about something more than just an initiative. It is about taking a holistic approach. Just like the other day my daughter said, 'Dad, you spend more time at work than you do at home and I spend more time at school than I do at home.' And I said, 'Yes--isn't

> that sad--I mean we do spend most of our lives at work.' So these initiatives are human endeavors, and organizations have to realize if they want folks to improve on simple human activities, they have to have someone who is willing to mentor them and show them how to do better.

Additional resources were developed utilizing technology which included dashboards and blogs for faculty to share assignments and best practices with others. One faculty participant discussed the important use of technology for ongoing implementation of the QEP:

> We have a Blackboard site and a Moodle site where faculty can add to a discussion board or blog, or update new assignments they have created for the QEP. Since some of my colleagues are not as familiar with these technology platforms, they email me copies and each year, I develop and update a CD of new and exciting things that are going on so other can benefit from that and create a little library for their use.

A large number of participants in the study discussed the importance of Dr. Skip Downing's *On Course* professional development and materials in their efforts to implement employability skills. The *On Course* model was built on eight principles designed to engage learners in the active construction of knowledge. The workshops and materials provided innovative instructional methods to faculty for addressing various learning styles and to assist students in becoming responsible and empowered partners in learning. Evident in interviews and email correspondence with GTCCs Organizational

Development Director, college administration strongly supported the *On Course* professional development opportunities with faculty release time and financial resources.

One faculty participant indicated the *On Course* materials may have been the single resource most helpful with the implementation of the QEP, “One of the best tools I have ever had to help me is the *On Course* materials.” Universally within the organization, this professional development activity was noted as the one that had most enhanced faculty efforts to successfully implement employability skills in their courses.

Other professional development opportunities such as the Great College Retreat occurred as well, and faculty in the study were frequently complimentary of the help received from GTCCs Organizational Development Division. One participant shared other informal, yet valuable, professional development opportunities: “We had Lunch & Learns where we would take one employability skill, like a panel thing, and share what everyone was doing or how everyone was assessing various skills.” In order to accomplish the goals outlined in GTCCs QEP, it was important for faculty to have access to helpful resources to assist with implementation.

Business and Industry Connections

The partnerships described by participants were equally important in their current efforts. The commitment to providing a trained workforce was discussed and understood as noted in comments from one faculty: “I think the primary reason people come to school here is to improve their employability, and the chief objective of the community college is to work closely with business and industry.” Another faculty discussed the importance of employer feedback and the impact on students from area employers in this way: “The majority of our employers know the reputation of our program and the

emphasis we place on employability skills, so the feedback we get from employers (we also do an employer survey) are that our students are very well prepared in every area."

Use of program advisory committees in the development of the QEP was widely utilized by faculty. GTCC required three mandatory meetings each year with program advisory committees. As an indicator of the value of program advisory committees, one faculty participant described meeting with her program advisory committee five times during one year. When common connections exist between industry partners and education, successes are more likely to be achieved as expressed by one faculty participant in the following dialogue:

> Oh yes--advisory committees are very important. Last year we met five times with them. We are required to meet three times with them, but that can include the big opening one, which was part of our five. We sometimes do working advisory committee meetings where we cater lunch for them and we have them at tables with an agenda. We have several curriculum programs, but we try to split out the programs with different objectives. Besides giving us input on the curriculum--what we should be teaching in courses, they are adamant about--well--one clinic may have one software and one clinic another--so the industry expects to have to train new employees on things such as software and they don't worry too much about that. But it is the soft skills they expect us to teach, and that is what they tell us. Our advisory committee has lots of input within our department, and just what I have seen from the large group meetings, quite a few departments at GTCC have very active committees.

Another faculty discussed extensive use of the program advisory committee and the extended utilization of individual committee members to serve on panels, mock interviews, and other activities related to program and student success:

> I use my advisory committee an awfully lot. The business we [students] visited yesterday belonged to one of my advisory committee members. At the beginning of each year, we have a student orientation, and I bring my advisory committee members in to speak to the students on what it takes to be successful in this industry. Advisory committee members come in to give students pep talks throughout the year, and they also come in as mystery clients to critique the service of the student. Advisory committees come in and do panel discussions with our students. I network with program heads at other schools, because the problems I am having here, other schools are having the same problems. I listen to their advice and to the advice of my advisory committee to improve the program. It is integral and I rely on them greatly.

Most recently at GTCC, the 50th Anniversary Business Symposium held in April, 2008, brought more than 180 business and industry representatives to GTCCs campus to collectively discuss challenges and concerns facing the business community, and to provide framework for GTCC to address future business and industry concerns. The challenges and concerns noted by the business representatives highlighted many of the employability skills that GTCC committed to addressing in the institution's QEP. GTCCs

consistent partnerships with business and industry have been vital to the successful implementation of the QEP.

Summary

Internal documents and interviews provided a detailed description of how GTCC's administration facilitated the campus-wide implementation of the QEP. Professional development activities were described, and efforts between educators and business and industry were ongoing to collaborate needs and share best practices for success. Findings by faculty participants were summarized and listed in Table 2.

Research Question #4

What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?

The QEP document developed for SACS stated GTCCs initiative was an ambitious undertaking for the entire institution. As campus-wide strategic innovations are planned and implemented, most are typically accompanied by obstacles (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Because GTCCs SACS review depended upon successful planning of the QEP, it was especially critical to recognize and understand barriers that accompanied the project. The barriers described in this section included difficulties with assessment, inadequate communications with adjunct faculty and new employees, terminology, academic and technical faculty differences, student expectations, multiple initiatives, time constraints, campus inconsistencies, and the need for additional professional development. Barriers addressed in this section were listed in order of frequency of themes, and were conveyed through the viewpoints and opinions of GTCCs faculty.

Difficulty with Assessment Methods

The difficulty of properly assessing employability skills was extensively documented in many national and international studies. Grubb (1999) declared while faculty and employers acknowledge the importance of employability skills, formal implementation has been hindered by lack of appropriate assessment tools to measure student competencies. As the testimonies from GTCC faculty revealed, employability skills made sense to them, and they believed it was absolutely necessary to teach students these skills to students in order for them to gain and retain employment opportunities. Yet, as it became apparent at GTCC that employability skills was the focus of the QEP, faculty concerns of how they would properly assess employability increased. As noted by one faculty participant, "I think we have always incorporated them [employability skills], the issue was – how were we going to report out on them."

GTCC faculty participants expressed concern with comprehensive implementation and assessment of employability skills, and as one faculty stated, "GTCC feels this is important, but I guess there are opportunities for genuine disagreement on the path forward about how to emphasize and assess employability skills, even after years of wrestling with these issues." Another faculty shared thoughts on assessment:

> If there are barriers to this, the toughest thing is you are teaching a real, but intangible skill set. Take responsibility for example-- finding unique ways to document and assess it, and creating class projects that really show particular employability skills that the QEP states--that is the difficulty.

As the assessment piece of implementing employability skills was troubling, one faculty indicated little had been done to corroborate or validate the process of assessment.

> The assessment piece is very difficult. It is one thing to incorporate these things in your courses, but it is another to see if you are really achieving these. In the unit tests we give, we are asking students or organize materials, present facts, and do some of these language skills, so we are equating assessments with employability skills. Well, to be honest, we have never really done a study to see how what we are doing is the most effective.

In 2008, an electronic survey was distributed to full-time faculty at GTCC to assess the institutional progress of the QEP. The survey was provided to approximately 260 faculty, with a return response rate of 38%. The inquiry solicited faculty feedback on how departments emphasized employability skills for students, how employability skills were emphasized in courses, which employability skills were included as a portion of the course grade, and the assessment method used for each of the six employability skills. Responsibility was noted as the primary employability skill related to a portion of the course grade, with adaptability as the least applied employability skill related to a portion of the course grade (see Appendix F for QEP Survey Summary).

In an interesting twist to the problem of assessment, one faculty proposed that not only was assessing employability difficult, but that faculty, throughout their years of formal education and preparation for the classroom, were not expected or taught to be good “teachers of life skills.” The participant rationalized it this way:

> Faculty are not taught how to be counselors and teachers of life skills very well. Sometimes I don't even think we are taught to be teachers well. We are experts in subject matter, but not very good at the social piece of it. And the whole teaching part of it is as much an art as it is a science, and my opinion, we are not trained very well to talk to students about…here is what you need to do…this is how you should change…this is an employability skill you should improve. It is a risk, it is outside math, writing, reading, and much more of a risk, (1) because we are not trained well for this, and (2) people [students] take it differently when you say here is how you need to get the solution to this math problem. That is easier to listen to than when an instructor says to you, 'Your dress or your time management skills aren't where they need to be.' Some students will listen, others may say, 'Hey--it is your job to teach me math.'

Another interesting reflection emerged from this research. As businesses and industries reported their dissatisfaction with employability skills students brought to the workplace through surveys and advisory committee meetings, one faculty was of the opinion educators could do a better job with preparing and providing students with these skills if employers were more open and communicative of their specific employment needs. As one faculty participant commented:

> We have to be real. I think businesses and industries have to be honest about what they really want. It would be helpful when they advertise a position, and when people apply, if businesses would include specific

> expectations and skills required to be employed in a particular job. It would be helpful for them to be more upfront with these things and it would help us reinforce our efforts with employability skills. It would also help our students understand it is not arbitrary--one lunatic--one college--one teacher--who says this is what you have to do. I have students that say when I get in the real world--I will do this. And I say--you are in the real world--practice now!

Academic faculty at GTCC commented more frequently than technical faculty on the difficulties of building relationships with businesses and industries. The difficulty of establishing these relationships was affirmed by one academic faculty, "I am happy to work with business and industry, but some of our business and industry is 4-year schools. Those partnerships are much more tenuous." Technical faculty regularly spoke of feedback received and the benefits of their relationships with business and industries related to developing and assessing skills competencies in their particular fields of study. One technical faculty provided insight on the advantage of employer relationships: "The majority of the clinical sites I work with indicate they are satisfied with our students, and many of the sites hire our students once they graduate." Certainly when processes for implementation and assessment of employability skills were informed and supported by partnerships with business and industry, optimal results were more likely to be achieved.

The implementation of the QEP resulted in the need for faculty to properly assess employability skills taught to students. Existing research underscored the long-standing difficulties of institutions and organizations to effectively assess employability skills.

Throughout the interviews with GTCC faculty, participants cited assessment as a primary barrier to the successful implementation of the QEP.

Adjunct Faculty Schedules

Community colleges regularly utilize adjunct faculty for teaching. According to statistics provided by GTCCs Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the number of adjunct faculty teaching in GTCCs classrooms exceeded the number of full-time faculty teaching at the institution. While full-time faculty expressed they were expected to be available to attend campus-wide meetings and participate in college committees and various activities and events at the college, adjunct faculty typically arrived at the campus just before classes began, and left shortly thereafter. Many adjunct faculty did not have a permanent office or scheduled office hours. Further, the majority of adjunct faculty were compensated only for teaching, and did not have professional development hours routinely added to their contracts. All full-time faculty interviewed stated they utilized adjunct faculty in their programs, and all full-time faculty interviewed pointed out the difficulties of adequate communication and understanding of strategic initiatives by adjunct faculty that would lead to commitment for large-scale institutional strategies.

With the implementation of the QEP, employability skills were expected to be taught to students and included on all course syllabi, but, as previously noted, there were inconsistencies and obstacles in effectively communicating with adjuncts. One faculty spoke of the inconsistency in conveying the message to adjuncts:

> We try to emphasize to them [adjuncts] these employability skills by asking them to talk to other faculty, and asking other

> faculty to share some of the practices that have worked well.
>
> But it is more just a case of hit and miss.

Some departments utilized adjunct faculty in greater numbers than others, with one faculty noting over 50 adjunct faculty were teaching in her department. This participant described difficulties with communication and institutional strategies in utilizing such large numbers of adjunct faculty:

> This is probably the hardest piece for me because we have 50 adjuncts. I do mandatory face-to-face orientations with these folks and we also burn a CD that has files and information for their use. Up until this year, we have paid adjuncts a courtesy $20. There was new language this past year that says mandatory meetings are covered with your course rate. I think this is absolutely unfair to expect this for no money--but if you miss a class--we take part of your pay. I think this is a real problem.

Another faculty discussed the compelling need to communicate institutional goals and procedures to adjunct faculty, and the need to adequately compensate them for time and professional development opportunities if the expectation was for them to have this knowledge:

> This is a gap. The Department Chairs hire adjuncts, and they are given a brief orientation and additional information is provided in their packets. The ones [adjuncts] that teach regularly have gotten exposure it [employability skills] over time. The new ones, however, coming in this fall have gotten very little on employability, and we

> cannot expect them to be emphasizing it a lot in the classroom this fall. So it is only through mentoring and continued work that adjuncts understand it. I have been thinking of this recently, and it may not be a bad time to implement this, but to require new adjuncts to spend a day with us--possibly on Saturday, without pay, as a condition of their employment. I hate to do that because they are paid so little anyway. They need to be vested in what they are doing, but this is a tough problem.

GTCC is a large institution, and reliance on large numbers of adjunct faculty to deliver instruction, as noted in institutional statistical data obtained, was common as well. However, because expectations and availability of adjuncts to participate in meetings and other campus activities outside the classroom was different than full-time faculty, adequate involvement and communications with adjunct faculty was challenging. Consequently, participants in the study routinely described the difficulties of adequately communicating institutional initiatives to adjunct faculty as a barrier to successful implementation of the QEP.

Difficulty Relating to the Terminology

Worthy of note, the QEP at GTCC was most commonly defined in terms of employability skills. The QEP submitted to SACS addressed how internal communication of the QEP was often phrased in terms of employability skills. Frequently during faculty interviews, when presented the question regarding faculty knowledge of the QEP, the result would often be a blank stare from the participant, or scrambling through papers on the desk in an attempt to find the

answer to the question. This was especially true of faculty who were not employed at GTCC during the initial planning of the QEP. When the same question was rephrased in terms of employability skills knowledge, all faculty participants were eager to speak about employability skills in their classes and expressed a detailed understanding. Two faculty participants interviewed and employed at the college for approximately two years, candidly laughed when asked about their knowledge of the QEP, however, during both interviews, each of the participants expressed in detail how they went about implementing employability skills in their classes:

> I have a problem and I get this confused with some other initiatives. The Quality Enhancement Plan is…. [pause]…no…it is just not there.

Another participant described lack of knowledge of the QEP, yet, expressed support of employability skills:

> I have to be honest with you. When you emailed me requesting an interview, I stepped out in the hall and said to my colleagues – what is the QEP? Everyone was like--you know--I remember that being mentione--but we could not remember exactly what it was. So I cheated a little and went out on the website to see what it was--but prior to you mentioning it--I had not the faintest idea. But that is not to say I am not including employability skills in my coursework, because I need to be teaching them [students] skills that will translate into the real world. But in terms of thinking about it or framing it as a QEP, this was more covert than overt to me.

As previously noted in Chapter Two, the terminology surrounding employability skills continued to be problematic for many. One participant shared an interpretation of the term in the following dialogue:

> I need to have the vocabulary simplified in such a way that even if someone was not familiar with the term, QEP, or even the term, employability, a vocabulary would exist we all can share and understand. We have jobs--faculty that is--we think we are employable--and since we study issues for long period of time, we often think we have all the answers and not too much we need to improve. But perhaps if these skills were shown as life skills as opposed to employability skills--to improve one's human life--then I think people already employed may find it more important.

Along similar lines, another faculty candidly described feelings about the terminology of employability:

> I see that these skills are important, but I don't particularly like to tell students that we are training them to be good employees. I would prefer for them to think we are training them to be whole, good people, who can make good, critical thinking decisions. Although I know we are training people for employment, the terminology makes me feel like I am training minions to go out and behave in a way hierarchy can accept.

As revealed during faculty interviews, some participants in the study were perplexed with terms such as QEP and employability skills. The documentation of the

QEP provided to SACS noted at GTCC, the implementation of the QEP had been couched in terms of implementing employability skills. This explained why some participants were unfamiliar with the term, QEP, but could justify and describe in great detail the significance of providing students with employability skills in their classes. Other participants believed the term, employability, implied a limited focus for entry-level employability, and instead, preferred to broaden the terminology of employability skills by describing them life skills.

Academic and Technical Faculty Differences

The implementation of employability skills in the classroom came with noted differences between academic faculty, those teaching general education and college transfer courses, and technical faculty teaching in curriculums such as Health Sciences, or Hospitality. In general, technical faculty described that their programs were more directly connected to business and industry in the region, and were more narrowly focused on training for a specific discipline or skill over a long period of time. Academic faculty typically taught students from a variety of programs, and expressed they were less likely to teach the same student more than one or two semesters. In many cases, the nature of the content and instructional materials in academic courses was less likely to link to a specific job than those of technical courses. As one participant from the technical area commented, “I am guessing the implementation of the QEP for something like college transfer is more difficult, because you don’t have a goal at the end for specific employment.” One faculty conveyed the differences between academic and technical faculty and the partners they serve:

> We [academic faculty] do not have the same relationship with business and industry as those in Tech programs. We have tried to start relationships with four-year institutions where we say--what are your expectations for juniors and seniors who may be transferring to your institution? But I am not likely to get a call from UNCG [the local university] telling me one of our transfer students does not have necessary employability skills.

This is not to say academic faculty at GTCC did not utilize the DACUM and adapt their courses to incorporate project-based learning concepts, and evaluate many aspects of employability skills in the classroom. Though academic faculty were not as closely connected to business and industry, there was strong evidence from syllabi and interviews that many connections were forged between academic and technical faculty to form learning communities and develop specific content in an academic course to more closely match the needs of a technical program. As noted by one academic faculty, "We are looking at math courses, and concentrating on a new math course more specifically designed for technical students." Another academic faculty indicated a general awareness of employer desires as conveyed in the following remarks:

> I think the majority of us [academic faculty] come at this covertly. I don't teach students auto mechanics, but I have to teach them white collar skills. We are finding that employers like students who understand diverse populations, who tend to be broad minded, and those who are creative types of thinkers. I do my best to give

> them [students] these types of skills. That is how I see my discipline interfacing with employability skills.

Across the campus, technical and academic faculty contributed to the identification of a central theme. Both academic and technical faculty agreed teaching employability skills to students were an important institutional priority. However, during the interviews, technical faculty frequently described relationships and commitments with business and industry partners specific to their disciplines, while academic faculty expressed their commitment to business and industry in broader, more generic terms.

Student Expectations

GTCCs students arrived to class with a variety of differences such as gender, age, and ethnic backgrounds; however, all students embarked upon educational opportunities with particular expectations of what would take place in the classroom. Faculty participants described that many students were previously exposed only to traditional instructional deliveries, primarily involving face-to-face instruction with the teacher solely in charge of imparting the knowledge.

At the same time GTCCs QEP was being implemented in the classrooms, the college was also moving from a teaching-centered to a learning-centered college. Described in the SACS QEP document, the learning-centered college engaged students as full partners in the learning process, and placed the primary responsibility of learning in the hands of the students. Both the learning-centered college and the incorporation of employability skills required students to think differently about their own accountability for learning, and entailed an advanced level of responsibility for critically thinking.

This departure from the traditional, patterned way of thinking was difficult for some students to embrace. One faculty participant explained students have very clear expectations from past exposures and habits about what the teacher was supposed to do, and that when students were challenged to think beyond task oriented assignments, the transition for some was overwhelming and difficult. According to one participant in the study, some students described the delivery of learning-centered instruction as a weakness on the part of the instructor in not knowing how or what to teach. As noted by one participant, "You hear students say, the instructor doesn't do anything, but they want me to do everything." Other faculty described incidents with students and their reactions surrounding this barrier:

> In class, we talk about employability skills and the learning college, and I tell them what that means, and that they can have an impact on what and how they learn. The most common reaction from students is, 'Are you serious?' They don't think they can take it and run with it--they have to see it to believe it. I think they are optimistically waiting it out to see--'Oh, he says we can have influence over this…so can we have extra credit for this test…can we turn the assignment in late…or can you give us only three questions rather than five on the test?' This is their [students] way of chipping away at this, but in the end, I do think they hear and respond. I am training people and leaders to think--not just training rote tasks.

Another faculty described student expectations in these terms:

> Implementing employability skills in the classroom is inconsistent with many courses where terms are memorized--classes with more task oriented things--and the transition is very difficult for some students. And some don't overcome it for whatever reason--so this is a challenge--just the expectation--this patterned way of thinking by students. On several occasions I would say to the class, 'What is the correct answer to the question?' And they abruptly say, 'Well, that is your job to tell us the answer.' Like students aren't supposed to think. So you have to overcome those kinds of barriers and mindset. You know, every experience they have had in education along the way has been more about memorization. They really do not respond the first time around sometimes to thinking critically.

Faculty who participated in the study frequently commented on the expectations students brought to class. As described by faculty participants, for many students, their former educational experiences utilized only traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods. Successful delivery of employability skills in a learning-centered environment required active class participation, and the reluctance of many students to take responsibility for their own learning and participate in a learning-centered environment was noted by faculty as a barrier.

Faculty Assumptions of Students

Some faculty in the study expressed discrepancies in how they perceived students to be, and the reality of how students actually arrived to class. Repeatedly, faculty discussed the unpreparedness of many students, and questioned the reasons students

arrived ill-equipped to be successful in class. As one faculty participant commented, "Work ethic for our generation was so engrained, but it doesn't seem to be engrained with many students we now see."

Other faculty offered the explanation that many students had experienced extraordinarily difficult life situations that faculty at GTCC would have never dreamed of experiencing. As a result, one faculty member believed proper understanding of social issues was an obligation of the faculty. One participant expressed the importance and need for faculty to recognize the widening gap of social class status evident in today's students:

> We get a broad spectrum of students here and social class has a huge impact on people's life experiences. But so many of us--I mean faculty here--come from middle class backgrounds, and we can't even begin to fathom what it is like to be from less, which many of our students are. We need to understand this and be more receptive to their [students] needs.

Another faculty vividly described her reaction to learning the personal crisis of one student:

> Some of the situations they [students] are experiencing and going through, never in my wildest dreams would I have thought it would happen. One of my students who came to take her final exam in my class stayed afterwards and told me all her belongings were in her car and that she had been living out of her car for the past few weeks. But she still came to class and passed the exam. There are certain factors

> that occur in the personal lives of students, and it is hard to be rigid and maintain some of the employability skills when you see these extenuating circumstances…but students come to GTCC so ill-prepared, both academically and socially.

Student statistical data obtained from GTCCs Office of Institutional Research revealed in fall 2008, minority student populations comprised almost one-half of all curriculum students enrolled at GTCC. The research also indicated retention and graduation rates were significantly less for lower-income students. Such illustrations suggested a need for community college faculty to comprehensively understand the struggles students experience, and impact of social class status on student success.

Multiple Initiatives

Some employees observed that "Don Cameron never saw an initiative he didn't like" (Kinard, 2008, p. 342). GTCC participants who were interviewed often spoke of the many initiatives simultaneously occurring at the college. As employees of the institution, faculty understood Dr. Cameron's cutting-edge determination to advance the institution, and as Dr. Cameron candidly pointed out, "You are either going forwards or backwards, and I am not going backwards." His uncompromising nature led to exponential growth of the institution throughout his presidency, and many initiatives led to national and international recognitions for partnerships and grant opportunities. Economic and workforce development had consistently been his focus, and as recounted by Kinard (2008), Dr. Cameron has been intently studying the industrial climate of Guilford County since he arrived at GTCC in 1981. During a recent interview, Dr. Cameron shared one of his lingering questions, "Has GTCC done everything possible to provide a properly

trained workforce to the region?" The question would be difficult to answer, but Dr. Cameron's long-standing commitment for GTCC to become a national model for workforce development left few stones unturned, and led to many college-wide initiatives.

From the viewpoints of some faculty participants, initiatives from the third floor Medlin Administration building, where Dr. Cameron's office was located, came and went over the years. For some employees, the magnitude of initiatives issued by Dr. Cameron and administrators sometimes left a sense of frustration and distrust among those trying to implement the initiatives. As a result, the announcement of new college initiatives would occasionally be coined by the term, *Medlin-isms.* This viewpoint was strongly articulated in the following dialogues:

> The first thing we were concerned about was this [QEP] was not another flavor de jour. Very often at community colleges, and GTCC is not unique to this--Dr. Cameron likes to be cutting edge--on the cusp. But so many times, many initiatives get started and they don't reach closure. And when people put out a lot of energy on things--they feel betrayed. So the first thing people asked when they heard about the QEP--is this a keeper?

Another participant illustrated her experience this way:

> My first thought was this [QEP] is just another thing we are going to have to do--another burden--another Medlin-ism--another responsibility. But the biggest question from my immediate faculty colleagues was, 'how are we going to do this?'

Acknowledging the many initiatives, one faculty talked about her confusion:

> The QEP--well, I have a big file on it. The reason I am not so clear on this is because we have so many things focusing on student success factors, and the things start to blur together for me.

Opposite opinions on the new initiatives were apparent as well. Some faculty believed the topic of the QEP had been the focus in many divisions for years, and felt the formal implementation of the QEP served to validate existing efforts across the campus. One faculty revealed an appreciation of the campus-wide initiative:

> I think we [the department] felt validated and felt we had better grounds for argument for implementation. When it [QEP] became a college initiative, it gave extra oomph to us saying it.

As a requirement of SACS, the QEP was a bottom-up initiative that involved all constituencies in the planning process. As evidenced in meetings, documents, and interviews, campus-wide procedures designed to involve everyone in the process was taken seriously by the administration and planning team, and the result was broader faculty buy-in and acceptance. The institutional involvement by all meant the perception of the QEP as another *Medlin-ism* would be reduced as captured in the dialogue below:

> If someone from the third floor Medlin had come to us and said--this is our QEP for you to implement--I think there would have been resistance. Faculty probably would have said--come here--when is the last time you have been in a classroom--come back when you can talk

> to us. But because it was a simmering up--bubbling up issue--the employability skills--then this was something everyone could say--this is something we are all behind.

GTCCs partnerships and grant opportunities led to the establishment of numerous institutional initiatives. As expressed by several faculty participants, the accumulation of simultaneous institutional initiatives placed arduous demands on faculty and staff who felt they were already overburdened by heavy workloads. As the participants often described, it was not that they disagreed the initiatives, in particular, but the implementation of so many initiatives at once created barriers for executing and maintaining proper momentum for each of them.

Time Constraints

Strategic innovations expected to be implemented campus-wide took time and energy to execute. Notably, academic and technical faculty commented that many of the required texts included little to assist with implementation of employability skills, and that successful delivery and achievement of these skills in the classroom was possible only through creative activities, assignments, and projects relevant to employability outside of what was available in traditional classroom materials. The implication time as a barrier to implementation was proposed in the following response below:

> If there is a negative to it, it is having people try to rethink how to effectively and efficiently embed them [employability skills]. Our loads are heavy, and you have to use time efficiently. For example, what can we evaluate not only academically, but what can we evaluate as part of employability skills? We try to

> maximize our time, but there are only 24 hours in a day--so some things will give according to what institutional priorities are. In terms of North Carolina, I think we are a little ahead of the curve for implementing employability skills. We get in the day to day, but could we do better? I could do five things better, if there was more time.

Another faculty commented on the time constraints to include employability skills in the classroom:

> To some extent, getting across to students both content and some employability skills, the issue is we race every semester to get in the content because students come so unprepared. We have to back track so much, so if you have to add another layer about employability skills--that is tough.

According to Conner (1992), the greater the commitment to a project, the more resources such as time, endurance, and ingenuity a person must invest to achieve the desired outcome. Most broad-scale institutional initiatives interrupt the standard operating patterns of an organization. For some GTCC faculty interviewed the impact of the formal implementation and assessment of employability skills outlined in the QEP required additional time and energy to execute and was noted as a barrier.

Inconsistencies Across Campus

Employability skills were subjective, and as expressed by faculty, divisions at GTCC had very different concerns and needs to address as the QEP was implemented. In fact, the QEP document noted the strategic design to allow for modifications in how

various divisions put the plan into practice. However, Conner's Stages of Change Commitment theory (1992) suggested new initiatives were more widely accepted when concrete expectations were presented. While inconsistencies existed across divisions, the point was made by one participant that consistency within divisions was extremely important. As noted by the faculty member, "One of the things I am thankful for in this department is consistency--which is what it takes for this to work." The inconsistencies among departments were shared by participants this way:

> In talking just one-on-one with other faculty across campus, sometimes the things we are getting positive results on in our division may not be well received in other divisions. I have heard, well, that may work in your department, but not in ours. So although we need consistency for buy-in and for students, it is necessary to have flexibility within our departments as well.

Another faculty spoke not only of consistency, but the need to link classroom policies to the real-world:

> One thing is consistency in the classrooms. The other thing is not to make these employability skills seem like a barrier to students. These are not--I am asking you to jump through hoops, rather, I am facilitating expectations you have as an adult. Such as I explain to students--I want you to tell me--if you are at work--would this be an unreasonable expectation? If not--then it is not unreasonable for me to ask you to do these things.

Because college divisions adopted various policies and procedures, some participants felt students were being sent mixed messages as they took part in classes across divisions. One faculty described student reactions to the inconsistencies:

> Yes--I assumed when I took this job students would arrive with employability skills--and I assumed incorrectly. But students look for that weak link and the smallest amount of inconsistency. So we have to adhere to our policies and rules--communicate our expectations well, and enforce them. Students sometimes come to me and say, 'The other instructor was not as strict with the attendance policy as you.' And I say, 'Well I have been in this business for 28 years and I know what you need to be successful. You can't come to class when you want to, just like you can't just show up at a job when you want to.'

Another faculty expressed experiences with students as they commented on inconsistencies across the institution:

> We wish, as a division, the rest of the college would truly adhere to it [QEP], because we hear so often from our students, well, it did not matter in _____ class, this instructor did not care if I did it this way in _____ class. This makes us out to be bad guys so many times.

Participants in the study discussed varying policies and procedures across divisions, and believed flexibility was needed to provide each of the divisions' latitude for implementation. Within departments, the freedom allowed faculty to tailor the

implementation of the QEP to fit specific needs of the division. Yet, between departments, the impact of the inconsistencies was noted as a barrier to students when contrasting policies were enforced.

Need for Additional Professional Development

The original DACUM chart developed in 1998 was utilized during the early start-up of the QEP in 2004. The majority of participants in the study expressed they felt specific bands or competencies as outlined in the original DACUM provided the necessary framework to successfully move forward with the implementation of employability skills. In 2008, the DACUM chart was revised. While the specific skills remained the same, the rankings of the employability skills changed. The bands reflecting competencies were also revised. One faculty spoke of the revision:

> It [DACUM chart] was already in place when I got here. So the way I learned about it was a list of things on the syllabus I was giving out. I read about it and asked some questions about it, and it made sense, so I was very impressed with the DACUM and how it was created, and then very excited to see some ten years later that we revised it to reflect more contemporary issues. Every semester we have a dept. chair meeting where all the department chairs come together, and probably one of the most helpful things is when we revised the DACUM last year and we were able to compare the two wide by side. It really helped all of us see how our emphasis has changed, and how the community emphasis has changed. It forced us all to think more about employability in more current terms.

Others believed simply having the DACUM skills and competencies identified was not enough, and that additional resources should have been placed at the institutional level to more adequately support faculty execution of the QEP. One faculty participant who felt additional resources were needed at the grassroots level stated her opinion this way:

> We could have done better. We could have worked with some pilot groups, given some people reassign time by saying, you aren't going to teach your load this year, but instead, you can roll out the new program. So those kinds of resources would have been helpful. Then I would have taken some pilot departments that were very different and worked through a pilot process with each so they could be models. Then I would have taken the stuff they had developed and run with it in other departments that were similar. I would have said--here are your arrays of things, now do you want us to meet again to help you facilitate and get where you need to go with this?

The skills and competencies outlined in the original DACUM chart provided the definition and framework for incorporating employability skills in the classrooms. Still, some faculty participants believed the implementation of the QEP would have been more successful if additional resources had been in place to help faculty with early execution. Providing specific models for implementation in the early stages may have resulted in less anxiety and an increased desire by faculty to support and implement the QEP.

Communicating with Adjuncts/New Hires

With the exception of new hires and adjuncts, faculty participants positively described the efforts of GTCCs administration and planning team to effectively communicate the QEP. Despite reported efforts by administration to adequately communicate the QEP to all faculty and staff, two new faculty remembered hearing about the initiative during their new employee orientations, and both expressed they were much more focused on other things that day to truly comprehend the initiative. As illustrated by one new faculty participant:

> I know we heard about it in an orientation, but when you are brand new on campus, you are much more concerned, at least I was, with the more practical things such as, where do I find my whiteboard markers, than listening to talk about the QEP. I was so focused on that, so perhaps the QEP information should have come at me later.

Another faculty described a similar experience:

> As a new employee, we had to go through an orientation for new faculty and the QEP was mentioned. But did it resonate? Well, I think the first day, it was hard for any of that stuff to hold on. Maybe benefits, etc. was in the forefront of my mind. And I was distracted, by God knows … I was here in North Carolina and my family was still in another state, so I was trying to orient myself to a new state and all of that.

In spite of well-intended efforts of GTCCs administration to include the QEP in orientation information for new faculty, in statements from new faculty, they

remembered hearing about the QEP, but were too distracted on their first day to grasp the meaning of the initiative or what it would mean to them.

Budget Issues

In 2008 in North Carolina, only 9 cents of the educational dollar was going to the state's 58 community colleges (Kinard, 2008, p. 22). As community colleges have played a huge role in economic and workforce development, the North Carolina General Assembly allocations have not kept pace with the increased student enrollments in the state. Many well-intentioned new initiatives often took second place to established initiatives across the campus, citing budget shortfalls as the cause. Noted by one faculty in the study, "It is funny, in the last year or so, most of our conversations from administrators, in general, have been about money/budgets, and not as much about employability."

Educational institutions across North Carolina felt the pinch of budget shortfalls. At the same time, faculty and staff were working harder to teach more classes and serve more students as community colleges experienced unprecedented growth. Many participants in the study cited time as a factor in executing daily duties, and as one participant frankly expressed, "We are bare bones as it is." Faculty commitment for the work community colleges gallantly performed, and discouragement, was heard in the words of one participant:

> Community colleges are expected to save the world, and with no money. We take in anyone who comes through the doors, and I do think community colleges still have a respect issue that has never gone away from when they were the old technical institutes. I don't know when that

> is going to change, 20-30 years down the road when maybe more people in the workforce have been through community colleges? I hope the mindset that you can go to the community college when you can't go anywhere else will change. There is huge potential with the community college, but it doesn't seem to be recognized at the state level like it should be. I mean, look at the paperwork we are required to do in the community college system such as 10% rosters. What do the four-year schools do? They don't even have to think about dealing with such things as a 10% roster for funding. And right now is when change should take place with budget issues. Everybody knows that the community colleges are going to feel the bulk of everything to fix what has happened with the economy. So why not take this opportunity to change the funding, and say, 'We know the numbers for community colleges are going to be there, and we are going to fund them adequately.'

Concerns over state budget issues were conveyed in news releases, documents, and interviews, and increased student enrollments presented challenges to North Carolina's community colleges and its faculty. Strong sentiments regarding how community colleges were perceived by policymakers, and budget shortfalls were noted also as barriers.

Summary

In conclusion, overall institutional communications did not arise as a barrier to the implementation of the QEP in this study. As anticipated, proper assessment of employability skills remained one of the most difficult barriers to overcome, and was

noted as such by participants during interviews. Additional institutional barriers to implementing the QEP at GTCC were documented and articulated in interviews with faculty participants as follows: insufficient communications with adjunct faculty, terminology, differences in technical and academic goals and outcomes, student expectations, faculty assumptions, simultaneous initiatives, time, budget, inconsistencies, and the need for additional professional development. Themes identified as barriers for implementation of the QEP were summarized and listed in Table 2.

Research Question #5

How did Guilford Technical Community College Overcome Barriers to Implementation of the QEP?

Adequate Communication

GTCC administrators avoided barriers to implementing the QEP by successfully communicating the campus-wide initiative in the early stages. Further, GTCCs history and ten-year campus-wide involvement on projects and studies with businesses and industries in Guilford County provided a foundation on which the new initiative could develop. Many of the participants in this study described internal correspondence sharing the details of SACS and the QEP, and one faculty noted: “The college has done an excellent job in getting everyone on board and to understand why we are doing it [QEP].”

Not only was the QEP adequately communicated to faculty and staff located on the Jamestown Campus, faculty participating in the study from satellite campuses also believed they were adequately notified and informed of campus-wide initiatives and changes. When one faculty from a satellite campus was asked about interactions with the main campus, the participant stated, “Well, I just get positive reinforcement, because

although I am not on the Jamestown Campus, we are all on the same page, at least I hope."

Faculty belief in the importance of teaching employability skills to students was repeatedly noted in this research. The participants believed employability skills were necessary, teaching them to students made sense, and they believed their efforts in the classroom would serve to better prepare students for the classroom and the workplace. All faculty participants were asked what would happen to employability skills if the QEP disappeared. All 15 participants emphatically stated employability skills were so important to the success of their students, they would simply continue integrating the skills in their classes. One participant shared his views of the importance of teaching employability skills to students with this comment, "I don't think much would change if the QEP went away, because I think our faculty believe in it." The commitment of one faculty participant to teaching employability skills to students was undeniable by this statement, "Would I do away with employability skills if the QEP no longer existed? Absolutely not!"

Sufficient communication and involvement in the early stages of the implementation of the QEP led to widespread acceptance by GTCCs faculty. Acceptance to the initiative was also expressed by the many years faculty and staff at GTCC had been exposed to county-wide initiatives and campus activities related to economic and workforce development. The long-term exposure of faculty to economic and workforce development over time resulted in an institutional paradigm shift, meaning the beliefs, attitudes, and way of operating by the majority had been altered so that commitment to

the QEP was present. All faculty participants in this study described their commitment to deliver high-level employability skills to students.

Successful Implementation

While the majority of faculty interviewed conveyed positive feelings about how the QEP was communicated and implemented, there were those in the study who felt additional efforts at the grassroots level would have been helpful to assist faculty with initial implementation. As noted by one participant:

> If I had been responsible for the implementation of the QEP, I would have put more specific resources at the institutional level to support the implementation of it. It needed to be monitored and it needed to have staff in place to work with departments who were not as committed.

The research indicated efforts were made to assist faculty with early implementation. The efforts were described and shared by participants this way:

> We first looked at policies that would support good pedagogical practices and realized that if we could rename them according to the employability skills chart--guess what--it was a no brainer. We actually went out and did workshops to help faculty work through effective ways to embed employability skills in their courses.

Another faculty participant explained that the manual had helped with campus-wide implementation of employability skills:

> There was a manual including employability skills that was actually developed in the late 1990s. This manual helped people get organized as to how to incorporate all three cores into their syllabi, planning units and into their long-range departmental goals. We did lots with that, then when the QEP came about, we connected it all to that. I remember meetings with all department chairs, evaluating objectives to ensure they were measurable. So we are working together, and trying to remove the single silos.

The existence of a familiar DACUM chart that had been in place since the late 1990s was helpful to faculty for the implementation of the QEP as well. The DACUM process to develop the chart involved area businesses and industries in the identification of employability skills, which provided credence to the DACUM. One participant in the study offered this comment on the DACUM, "I think they [administration] did well with the whole process, and it was especially good that specific employability skills were already identified for us."

Importance of Division Chair Support

Participants frequently discussed how the ongoing focus of the QEP in Division Chair meetings helped them center their attention on the initiative. Many participants spoke of the unwavering support from Division Chairs, and many discussed how informal discussions and sharing of best practices in Division Chair meetings became the backbone to their own efforts to implement employability skills in their classes. One participant simply stated, "We have weekly Division meetings and the QEP is always a topic of subject." Another participant was forthright in stating, "Since I have been here

and attended Division meetings, we always talk about the QEP and employability skills. They [Division Chairs] pound this into us." Other faculty participants described the benefits derived from informal sharing and department meetings with these expressions:

> Some departments have gone more in depth, but everybody has to focus on at least one employability skill. I will speak directly for our department, but we work closely together to try to develop competencies on all syllabi to address the QEP objectives. We are working together to remove the silos, so incorporating employability skills just makes sense because this is something that affects everyone.

Another participant described the advantage of collaboration among faculty as follows:

> We had early training, and we had some lunch and learns where we would take one employability skill, kind of a panel thing, where we all shared what everyone was doing or how everyone was assessing various skills. These were more discussions of tips and activities from one another.

Another faculty participant described the use of technology to assist with the implementation and assessment of employability skills:

> We had Division retreats, and basically, each of us was given a portion of the QEP to focus on. And now, a Dashboard has been created. This is software that allows us to go in and enter certain statistics on student progress, and we have used this as well to define

our own departmental progress regarding the implementation of employability skills.

One consistent comment arising from the research was the value Division Chairs brought to the initiative. This study revealed GTCCs administration had done well with ongoing communication of the QEP on both the main campus and the satellite campuses. For the faculty participants interviewed, administrative support and commitment to implementing employability skills in the classroom was evident. Of the 15 faculty interviewed for this study, all felt the collegial support by their Division Chairs had lessened their anxiety and helped them focus on getting the individual pieces in place.

Professional Development Provided

When asked if participants felt they had been adequately exposed to professional development opportunities to aid the implementation of the QEP, one specific professional development activity continually arose and was extensively discussed among participants. *On Course* workshops and materials, developed by Dr. Skip Downing, were uniformly praised by GTCC faculty as professional development that had most enhanced their efforts to successfully implement employability skills.

The administration at GTCC placed a high priority on the *On Course* professional development opportunity by hiring consultants to come to GTCC on several occasions to train faculty. In personal communications with GTCCs Director of Organizational Development, sandwiched between 2007-2009, 123 GTCC faculty and staff completed the program. Also noted in the conversation, *On Course* came with a hefty price to administer, and funding was provided by GTCC administration as well. The Director of Organizational Development explained that the *On Course* program emphasized self-

development for students, with examples of assignments and activities to help students develop life skills by exploring personal responsibility, self-motivation, interdependence, and self-esteem. According to faculty descriptions, the benefits of *On Course* for GTCC faculty was two-fold in that it helped faculty simultaneously address both the concept of the learning college and employability skills in their classes. Faculty participants described satisfaction with the *On Course* program as follows:

> I will say this. One of the best tools I have ever had to help me is the *On Course* materials. There are textbooks and workshops, but there are all kinds of great things to help students in relation to self-management and creativity. We could pick and choose from these materials what we felt would work in our classrooms specifically.

Another faculty described success with *On Course* workshops:

> I don't know if you are familiar with the *On Course* philosophy, but I am going to tell you, it was a mandatory Division Chair meeting three years ago – on our first day back – and I was just totally 100% sold. Because I did a lot of this already, and it mirrored my own philosophy so much, but he [*On Course* Consultant] just redefined it. We have groups of ambassadors where we share ideas, and I have seen personally the difference this has made in my students.

Great College Retreats were described by GTCC administrators, and another faculty participant spoke of a beneficial three-day professional development workshop at Valencia Community College in Florida. When asked if the workshop in Florida focused

on employability skills, the participant noted, “Not so much employability as coming to the realization there is a wealth of knowledge within our own faculty, and the need for opportunities to have round-table discussions within the institution.”

Though some faculty believed efforts in the initial stages of the QEP should have been strengthened to assist with implementation, interviews with administrators indicated workshops and meetings were held with that goal in mind. College administration both financially and otherwise, supported professional development opportunities for faculty and staff across the campus. The significance of continued support from Division Chairs was mentioned repeatedly by faculty participants, and professional development opportunities were described as helpful to the implementation process.

Accountability

As a result of the SACS QEP, evidence-based data was required to assess the progress of the initiative. The DACUM provided competencies for implementing employability skills, and linked the initiative to GTCCs strategic plan. A blank copy of the annual employee performance appraisal was obtained from GTCC, and each of the six employability skills were listed for evaluation. Individual achievements for employability skills critical to the function of the position were tied to an employee’s annual performance appraisal. The evaluation process was discussed with each of the faculty participants.

Of the 15 faculty interviewed, 14 of the faculty interviewed believed incorporating employability skills in the annual performance appraisal was positive and expressed no concern about the inclusion. However, one faculty distinctly described the

procedure to evaluate employability skills for faculty and staff as perfunctory. This participant believed there were few consequences to those that chose to ignore the QEP. As stated during the interview:

> I don't think everyone views it [QEP] as a big deal. They [faculty] were supposed to do it, but so what if you don't? There are no consequences for not doing it that I know of.

An implied understanding existed among faculty interviewed that there were individuals on campus who were simply averse to change, and would never commit to new initiatives. Faculty participants also indicated the pockets of resistance did not represent the views and actions of the majority. As described by one participant:

> I would have tried to get buy-in from the entire college community. But some have done things the same way for so long and they are resistant to change. How can you expect students to react to change when they see that some of the faculty and staff are not?

Hiring Practices

In an interesting twist to the question of how GTCC overcame barriers to implementation of the QEP, some faculty participants noted the culture of the institution now demanded a keener look at hiring practices within divisions. One faculty described the essential task of indentifying new hires that fit environmental norms of the institution:

> We have a big department, but it is familial. Not that we don't have our own quirks, but it is important to us that there is no one in the department that we are embarrassed to have in the department. We have been grooming our expectations as we hire people. I mean new hires

> have to fit our environmental norms. We do a lot of team approaches and share responsibilities, and you cannot come in this department and be a complete introvert because you are not going to fit well with us.

Another faculty participant recently employed at the college described the interview process at length. The description below illustrated the emphasis of employability skills in GTCCs hiring process, and perpetuated the importance of employability skills at the institution.

> Like I said, it [employability skills] is so engrained, even if it is piece by piece, it is engrained from the moment you step through the door for your interview. They [interview panel] bring up things in the interview, and you don't even know it at the time, but they are related to employability skills. For example, they present scenarios and ask how you would handle these things in the classroom, and it all falls back on employability skills. They are assessing in the interview how you would be as an employee handling situations with regard to employability skills. It is really subtle, and you don't know what they are talking about at the time, but how you answer gives them an idea of how you will relate to situations with employability skills at GTCC.

GTCCs informal focus on employability skills spanned more than ten years; however, the QEP formalized the process for evidence-based data collection and reporting. As an emphasis to this, documents and interviews illustrated how employability skills were linked to institutional plans and tied to each individual's annual performance appraisal. Faculty opinions differed slightly over this application to include

employability skills in the performance appraisal, with the belief by one participant that few consequences resulted if performance by faculty or staff was inadequate. On the contrary, some participants felt the implementation of the QEP had served to strengthen efforts by creating a campus-wide awareness of the importance of hiring individuals more suited to GTCC's culture and environment. Hiring practices exemplified the value of employability skills to GTCC, and provided further evidence for the institutionalization of employability skills.

Impact of QEP on Student Behaviors

As described in the QEP document, the intent of the QEP was to bring about long-term improvement on student learning. The QEP defined student learning as the process of acquiring skills or knowledge, and that learning would result in changed behavior. Ultimately, the teaching and learning of employability skills and the application of these skills (and changed behavior) in an academic setting would result in enhanced student learning in their courses and programs (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 3).

Faculty participants discussed how they felt the implementation of the QEP had, indeed, changed student learning and behaviors. The focus on employability skills emphasizing responsibility, problem solving, and adaptability were recognized as improved by faculty through continued emphasis on the competencies. One participant described improvements noticed in students, and further described how student complaints had decreased with the implementation of the QEP:

> I have seen differences, in fact. A big difference is the number of students I have coming to my office with complaints, which has lessened substantially. I said I had wished I had kept documentation on numbers

> of students coming to me with complains and what they were about and how this has lessened. Students have really begun to understand this and they are taking it more seriously. And even if they do come to me with a complaint, I will say, 'Now let's reflect on what you are saying here.' And they will say, 'I know--it was my responsibility--or I know--I am being a victim.' I remember another student saying, 'Well, I am not going to complain because I just have to be adaptable.' So they are getting it, and we repeat this in every class and we build on it.

Another faculty talked about student interactions and the peer pressure the implementation of the QEP had created among students for taking responsibility for their own actions. The following dialogue from one faculty participant captured the belief that peer-pressure among students created positive outcomes for taking responsibility:

> Among my students--I have seen a lot of peer pressure--a lot! I have actually had one student pull out a syllabus and say to another student, 'Look--she taught you this right here.' I also used to have trouble with students calling in sick for clinicals, because students are very quick to figure out what is allowed, so I said, 'I don't care why the absence, I am deducting points for any reason you are late or absent from clinical.' And this has helped them take responsibility for that as well.

One faculty discussed how students ultimately arrived at the same conclusions as faculty when asked to brainstorm about how employability skills may help them. The comments were noted as follows:

> Engaging student in activities related to employability skills has been very helpful. I have seen this work very well. For example, when an instructor asked students, 'Let's brainstorm for a moment, and you students tell me what responsibility means to you regarding this class.' Interestingly, the students come up with the same things we do. They say, 'Well, we need to be on time, we need to attend class, we need to do our homework and pay attention.' But I think in this kind of discussion, there is a buy-in from the student and they are more vested in the success of the outcome.

While identifying the central theme for the QEP, focus group responses revealed the college-wide perception that student learning was often impeded by inappropriate student behaviors. The same behaviors that faculty determined would help improve student success in the classroom were the same behaviors identified by faculty that would also improve success in the workplace. The QEP was very specific in its expectation that students would be required to learn employability skills in their classes. The previous comments from faculty participants acknowledged an increase in student awareness of employability skills and an improvement in student behaviors as well. Noted improvements in student behaviors were significant to faculty as they witnessed the success of their efforts.

Learning to Assess Employability Skills

As described in the QEP and faculty interviews, GTCC faculty had been exposed to the notion of employability skills since the late 1990s. During interviews, faculty believed they could successfully incorporate employability skills in their classes, but the

most common concern among faculty was how they would effectively assess and report employability skills. Following the campus-wide introduction of the QEP, small pockets of additional workshops were conducted to help people work through ways to effectively assess employability skills in courses. The momentum for these workshops appeared strong at the beginning, but ongoing efforts to sustain the assistance to others was short-lived and explained this way:

> We started doing meetings with different groups, but we just didn't have time to continue doing these meetings. We needed to help people go through the process so they were not trying to reinvent the wheel. If you could bring them the spoke and ask them to put the rubber on it--that would have been good. It is hard to develop new procedures and assessment methods when people have so many demands. To some, I think, it became an additional burden.

Internal documents and interviews revealed the first steps taken by GTCC faculty to assess employability skills included activities that were easily measured, such as attendance or showing up to class on time. These activities were described frequently by faculty participants as their first attempts to track and report the employability skill of responsibility. Over the years, the focus narrowed across the institution so that each division concentrated on one employability skill over a period of time. For example, one faculty focused on the employability skill of adaptability in classes over a semester. In addition to emphasizing adaptability through scenarios and role-play, the faculty explained other activities such as disconnecting all student computers before they arrived to class to observe adaptability in each student. The use of rubrics for assessment was

mentioned frequently during the interviews, and incrementally, faculty expressed they were making progress with the assessment of employability skills.

As noted in the QEP document submitted to SACS in 2004, GTCC did not enter into the process of incorporating and assessing employability skills blindly:

> If one defines dilemma as a situation with 'equally unsatisfactory alternatives,' then this paucity of literature on best practices is indeed a dilemma. On the one hand, one hates to venture out alone without good research, good models, and supporting experiences of others. On the other hand, there is the challenge of being in the forefront of assessing these skills. We choose to view this as an opportunity. Nationally, these skills are recognized to be the ones that employers want taught, and locally, these skills are in demand by employers in Guilford County. As an institution, we took the lead and committed ten years ago to their teaching, so it is fitting that we take the lead in employability skills assessment. (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 18)

Participants expressed acceptance of the early implementation of the QEP, but were somewhat divided on whether the direction and support received at the actual implementation level was adequate. Insomuch as faculty participants agreed with the content and implementation of the QEP, they also understood inconsistencies in campus-wide commitment, and they feared the ability to sufficiently measure and assess employability skills in their classes. This section addressed the efforts of GTCC administrators to overcome institutional barriers for implementation of the QEP.

Table 2

Summary of Themes for Research Questions 3, 4, 5

Primary Themes	Research Question #3 Sub-themes	Research Question #4 Sub-themes	Research Question #5 Sub-themes
Role of Administrators	Presidential vision Identification of planning team Importance of Division Chairs Performance appraisals		Presidential vision Importance of Division Chairs Narrowed focus on QEP
Communications	SACS & new QEP Comprehensive internal communications	Communicating to adjuncts Terminology Faculty orientations (1st time communication)	Internal Communications
Implementing Employability Skills	Identification of central theme Utilizing existing DACUM Implementation in the classroom Developing measurable outcomes Assessment Connecting to strategic plan	Assessment	Assessment (incremental success) Informal sharing
Industry Connections	Long -term focus on workforce development (building on) Implications of teaching employability skills (on students)	Academic/Technical (varying goals/outcomes)	Long-term focus on workforce development Impact on industry and students
Professional Development	On Course Informal sharing	Need for additional professional development in early stages	Resources/On Course DACUM revisited ACA Class
Barriers		Student behaviors and expectations Time Inconsistency Faculty assumptions and behaviors	Student expectations (less complaints) Faculty understanding of impact of QEP on students and behaviors
Advisory Committee	Building on advisory committee connections		Positive response from advisory committees
Commitment	Building on existing initiatives	Getting everyone involved	
Other Findings	Building on existing culture	Concurrent initiatives Budgets	Hiring practices Performance appraisal Noticed improvement in student behaviors

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills. Additionally, the study described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC. A qualitative case study approach was used to gather information about GTCCs QEP as a large-scale strategic initiative, and commitment and impact of faculty to economic and workforce development. The intent of the research was to add to the greater body of knowledge by examining the implementation of employability skills in the classroom, and how the strategic initiative was executed to obtain college-wide commitment. The results of this study have institutional implications for 57 additional North Carolina community colleges, business and industry, policymakers, economic developers, and students. The findings lend support for examining large-scale curriculum change initiatives to improve student learning and workplace success.

Summary of the Study

Characteristics of a knowledge economy have been extensively documented in the literature (Fahy, 2006; Gordon, 2000; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). Rapid change resulting from increased technologies and globalization has triggered an unprecedented urgency for all citizens to possess high-level workplace employability skills in order for the U.S. to maintain economic vitality and global competitiveness. Community colleges are primary providers of workplace skills, therefore, faculty are expected to teach high-level workplace skills to students. The purpose of this research was to examine the QEP as a large-scale strategic initiative at GTCC, and commitment and impact of full-time

curriculum faculty to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills.

A thorough review of the literature confirmed the significance of the need to examine institutional implementation of employability skills, and faculty involvement and commitment to economic and workforce development. The study was conducted at GTCC utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. The dynamics of naturalistic inquiry provided rich insight of the implications for faculty commitment to economic and workforce development and institutional changes surrounding the implementation. Data were amassed by the researcher through interviews, documents, studies, surveys, and other relevant texts obtained from GTCC. Themes and patterns that emerged during the data collection produced findings that were used to address the following research questions:

1. What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?
2. What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?
3. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?
4. What were barriers to implementation of the QEP?
5. How did Guilford Technical Community College overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

The research was rooted in Conner's theory of the Stages of Change Commitment, and existing literature related to the topic. The study revealed that teaching

employability skills to students was institutionalized by GTCC faculty participants, and hence, was a significant part of the college's philosophy and culture. The findings of the study further examined how GTCC administrators implemented the campus-wide strategic initiative.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question #1

What has been the impact of GTCCs QEP on commitment of faculty to incorporating high-level workplace employability skills in the curriculum?

The QEP was a SACS-mandated requirement, however, the QEP served as a catalyst for the institutional initiative at GTCC that was more than 10 years in the making. As a result of the invitation for everyone at GTCC to be involved in the planning process, campus-wide awareness of the initiative was successful. Administrators adequately prepared faculty and staff for the implementation of the QEP through successful campus-wide communications and focus groups. Faculty understood their significant roles, and as a result, committed to implementing employability skills in their classes.

While employability skills had been informally implemented at GTCC, the QEP brought a new focus and formality to faculty incorporating high-level workplace skills in the curriculum. Within the institution, the QEP had an impact on institutional behaviors and culture. The QEP increased awareness and need for faculty and staff at the institution to model employability skills behaviors for students, such as faculty arriving to class on time, or providing feedback to students in a timely manner. Collaborative efforts between technical and academic faculty increased, and through these collaborations, technical and

efforts to develop learning communities in various divisions across the campus. The QEP provided awareness of the need for evidence-based outcomes and adequate assessment, and increased awareness of the learning-college and project-based learning. As many campus-wide initiatives were underway when the QEP was developed, the goal of the QEP was to combine disparate initiatives under one umbrella, with one primary goal of increasing student learning and providing high-level workplace skills to students.

Another impact of the implementation of the QEP was that it brought about increased awareness by faculty to understand and respond to workforce needs of local employers. The recognized improvement in the success of students provided GTCC faculty encouragement and momentum to continue to find new and creative ways to deliver and assess high-level workplace skills. The impact of the QEP on commitment of faculty was that workplace skills became institutionalized--faculty understood and supported the initiative--and teaching workplace skills became a part of the daily culture at GTCC.

Research Question #2

What has been the impact of Guilford Technical Community College's (GTCCs) QEP on commitment of faculty to economic development?

Economic development had long been a priority of the president and the institution. Many local, national, and international awards had been received by the GTCC for its efforts to support business and industry in Guilford County. While the QEP focused on teaching high-level workplace skills, at the same time, faculty understood that these skills were an important part of economic development.

The QEP, centered on faculty delivery of employability skills to students, supported the institutional mission, and led to enhanced faculty awareness of the skills needs of employers in Guilford County. As one technical faculty participant described, “I am very aware of economic development and the needs of employers here. If I don’t produce skilled works for them, I am the one that has to look them in the eye and answer for that.” The QEP provided a platform for campus-wide commitment to the initiative faculty had identified and deemed important to improve student performance in the classroom and the workplace. Because GTCCs technical and academic faculty were connected to program advisory committees, community groups, and involved in other workforce development interests, they understood and committed to the preparation of a highly trained workforce to aid the success of economic development efforts in Guilford County.

GTCCs long-term institutional focus on economic and workforce development resulted in faculty understanding that the public image of the college rested upon its involvement in economic development. GTCC faculty understood commitment to teaching high-level employability skills to students would lead to a better trained workforce for employers in Guilford County. Successful businesses and industries in the county would positively impact economic development efforts and enhance the quality of life for citizens in Guilford County. GTCCs large group of faculty understood and committed to concentrating their teaching efforts and the college’s future on economic development.

Research Question #3

How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP?

Conner's theoretical model stated individuals must pass through stages of preparation and acceptance, to arrive at commitment. Based on Conner's Stages of Change Commitment, the expectation by the researcher was some faculty would be unaware of the QEP, some would be grudging compliant, and some would be totally committed to the QEP. However, findings from all 15 faculty participants described commitment and institutionalization of the QEP for teaching employability skills to students. The theoretical framework of this study had held true. How did GTCCs administration facilitate the implementation of the QEP in order for this to occur?

Implementing large-scale strategic change in a higher education institution is a long-term process (Kezal & Eckel, 2002). An examination of literature on organizational change revealed most of the research on large-scale strategic change had been written from a business perspective. However, GTCCs President was nationally known and distinguished for his efforts in developing vital partnerships and implementing long-term strategic change within the institution and the county. While the campus-wide implementation of the QEP was a huge undertaking, GTCC administrators had prior experience for implementing large-scale strategic initiatives.

Over a decade of institutional focus on economic and workforce development provided GTCC employees with a clear appreciation of the college's mission. When SACS added a QEP to its reaccreditation process, college administrators understood the grassroots nature of identifying a central theme and provided a campus-wide platform for everyone to be involved. The identification of "employability skills" as the central theme

for the QEP, though grassroots, was likely not surprising or disappointing for Dr. Cameron. Within the institution, Dr. Cameron had consciously made economic and workforce development one of his top key initiatives, and as many faculty expressed, they had been hearing about the importance of teaching employability skills to students for more than 10 years.

The Presidential Vision

Dr. Cameron had been orchestrating the arrival of the QEP in Guilford County for the past 25 years. In 1991, with nine years of vice presidential experience behind him, Dr. Cameron became the sixth President at GTCC. Through the years, he developed key characteristics and successfully perfected the art of leadership. Persistence and patience have been the core values of his leadership. Building significant relationships and earning the trust of college and community members has taken time, but the rewards for the college's commitment have been enormous for the college, students, and the community (Roueche, et al., 2008, p. 28).

Through Dr. Cameron's efforts as GTCCs President, the economic and workforce development models established with education, industry, and political entities helped secure a range of major industries and jobs for Guilford County. Dr. Cameron understood the advantages of partnerships with business and industry, and had forged many successful, long-term relationships with Guilford County business and industry representatives. Long before the development of the QEP, Dr. Cameron tirelessly worked to conduct environmental scans of the county, survey employers of their needs, develop partnerships, and convey the message and the mission to GTCCs faculty and staff that Guilford County's future rested on the college's ability to successfully train a workforce.

Workforce Preparedness and the QEP

All faculty participants described a high level of commitment to successfully teaching and assessing high-level employability skills to students. The QEP described the identification of the central theme as a grassroots effort. As one faculty participant previously described, “We would teach employability skills without the existence of the QEP. I think this college is completely about employability skills. Dr. Cameron talks about it, we all talk about it.” The resonating mission and goal for the president and the institution was to successfully provide business and industry with employees that were successfully trained and highly-skilled, and this comment provided a strong indication of campus-wide institutionalization.

Equally important was the understanding that too often training a skilled workforce meant taking below entry-level students and helping them succeed. In response, GTCC sought many grant opportunities to assist students with developmental education. Accordingly, the focus on workforce development equally represented a focus on student success. Many initiatives that were underway when the QEP was developed were focused on student success. Existing initiatives included the learning-centered college and the Achieving the Dream grant. Years of efforts focused on economic and workforce development by Dr. Cameron laid the foundation for GTCCs QEP, and as remarked by Kezar & Eckel (2002), a willing president was key to successful transformational change.

In a recent publication, Dr. Cameron highlighted lessons learned from a 25 year partnership between GTCC and Guilford County Schools (Cameron, 2008). Accordingly, the partnership forged, even then, was done so with the goal of adequately preparing a

workforce for Guilford County in mind. First, he stated, “See the issues from the other perspective” (Cameron, 2008, p. 37). Not only had Dr. Cameron and his administration worked directly with businesses and industries in Guilford County for a number of years, the college had been involved in several studies on the preparedness of the workforce. Dr. Cameron understood the economic prosperity of the county and region depended on GTCCs teaching and delivery of a highly-skilled workforce.

A second lesson was to help others understand the advantages of engaging in a strategic initiative. Businesses and industries understood the advantages of a highly-skilled workforce, but he still needed to convince them at that times GTCC needed their partnership and support to successfully achieve initiatives, and he needed to help faculty, those who would actually be teaching workplace employability skills to students, recognize the benefits of their commitment to the QEP. This was achieved by utilizing all means of communication to consistently convey the mission and the message to everyone across the campus. As Dr. Cameron noted, during the development stage of an initiative, often there was a need to inspire others to believe in an idea they had doubts about, and to move beyond their skepticism to give something a try. “Sometimes, he added, we needed to remember that one important aspect of the community college mission was to assist the community in solving problems, even if there was no obvious benefit to the college” (Cameron, 2008, p. 38). Sometimes, as noted in previous chapters, “The ability to execute a strategy was more important than the strategy itself” (Kaplan & Norton, 2001, p. 1). Dr. Cameron’s leadership style was consistently about purpose, persistence, and patience for long-term success.

The Role of Administrators

The QEP Planning Team and other administrators were key in the development and execution of the QEP as well. Dr. Cameron had built a strong platform for employability skills to prosper, and he purposefully identified champions within the institution to help build upon the strategic initiative. Faculty participants repeatedly discussed the broad support received by campus Division Chairs for implementing the QEP. As collaboration and teamwork was an important element in the success of the QEP, Division Chairs reinforced cooperation among colleagues, and provided a trusting environment for faculty to openly discuss issues and concerns and search for solutions. The meetings assisted faculty with linking employability skills competencies to existing initiatives and the institution's strategic plan. Kaplan & Norton (2001) discussed the importance of leaders in consistently scheduling meetings to confer and review strategies, and to align the organization to a strategy by linking the initiative to common organizational goals and objectives. The formal and informal dialogue regularly encouraged by these "instructional worker-bees" was quite possibly, the most important administrative level at GTCC for establishing continued momentum and support for the QEP.

Professional Development

In order to accomplish the goals established in the institution's QEP, faculty needed training and access to resources to assist with the implementation of employability skills. GTCC utilized several platforms to deliver professional development activities and provide helpful resources to faculty. The importance of *On Course* workshops and materials was repeatedly discussed by faculty participants as the

single most valuable tool received for successfully implementing employability skills in their classes. *On Course* workshops and materials were described as relevant to faculty in their quest to produce a learner-centered environment, where students could cultivate employability skills such as responsibility, adaptability, or successfully working in teams. As the Director of Organizational Development indicated, though costly for the institution, *On Course* was unanimously supported by administration, and faculty and staff were encouraged to participate.

Other forms of professional development were described by participants such as retreats, informal meetings, and the use of technology to share best practices. In the qualitative study spanning over a four-year period by Kezar & Eckel (2001), one consistent theme was the importance of providing faculty with professional development opportunities conveying information and language for faculty to understand and bring about desired change. An internal website was created to share SACS and QEP documents and information, and additional technological applications such as blogs and dashboards were supported by administrators to assist faculty.

Business and Industry Connections

Many external and internal surveys and studies were conducted by GTCC to assess needs of local businesses and industries in Guilford County. GTCC administrators encouraged faculty to become involved with business and industry projects, and to build trusting, and long-lasting relationships with program advisory committees. As stated by Zeiss (1997) college-wide cooperation and response to business and industry is developed and advanced by administrator support.

While three annual advisory meetings were mandatory, several faculty participants discussed close relationships with advisory committee members and specifically described five or more annual meetings with their advisory committee members. Other participants described valuable, less formal, meetings with advisory committee members such as having lunch or partnering on a specific event. Many technical faculty expressed constant contact with committee members for involvement in program activities and arising issues. According to faculty, ongoing committee activities were encouraged by college administration and college-wide events inviting large numbers of business and industry representatives to the campus was initiated by administrators and included many faculty in the process.

All faculty participants in the study described an adequate understanding of SACS and the process for the QEP. Further, all participants believed the campus-wide invitation of all faculty and staff to participate in the initiative had been successful. The stage had successfully been set by the president and administration for implementing the QEP. Faculty and staff at GTCC genuinely believed if they could successfully teach and measure employability skills, the result would be increased student success, both in the classroom and the workplace. Faculty also saw improvements in student behaviors following implementation of the QEP that solidified their belief in the importance of the initiative. This idea of supporting local business and industry had also been present for a long time and GTCC, and through the words and beliefs of faculty participants, there was strong evidence of their commitment which led to the institutionalization of the QEP.

Research Question #4

What were barriers to implementing the QEP?

As was described in the QEP document, many unfulfilled initiatives were underway at the institution, unprecedented growth was taking place at GTCC, and financial resources were shrinking. Stress for doing "more with less" was noted by faculty, and best practices for the assessment of employability skills was limited (GTCC QEP, 2004). Though faculty expressed solid commitment for teaching employability skills at GTCC, participants discussed barriers to implementation as well.

Assessment Methods

The dilemma of proper assessment is ongoing with few solutions in higher education (Grubb, 2004). In spite of their commitment to teaching employability skills, the issue of adequate assessment of these skills was consistently noted by faculty participants as a barrier. The QEP Planning team understood and addressed lack of existing literature assessing employability skills in the QEP document. Dr. Ann Frye, Associate Director of the Office of Educational Development, commented:

> It's extremely uncommon to find well-developed instruments or processes that are appropriately validated for the kinds of employment-related behavioral categories that we increasingly find important to assess. I haven't found any 'best practice' literature, and I've looked, oh how I have looked (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 16).

The literature identified in this research and the QEP described reports related to employability skills, such as *SCANS*, or *A Nation at Risk*, but noted these reports seemed to have generated more ideas about what should be taught than how to go about assessing

skills. Findings from local studies conducted by GTCC consistently revealed the need to teach employability skills, but offered little or no assistance with assessment. In 2008, GTCCs Institutional Research and Planning Division distributed an internal employability skills survey to 260 faculty. Each of the faculty surveyed were asked to describe assessment methods for the six employability skills. While the survey produced broad information and talking points for the practice of assessment, detailed information specifically addressing assessment of skills competencies was not present (see Appendix F).

Professional development activities related to proper assessment of employability skills were not described by participants. Moreover, with the lack of existing literature and best practices for assessment, the likelihood of finding experts truly helpful in the process would likely have been difficult to identify. The next SACS reaffirmation date for GTCC is 2015. Consequently, unless groundbreaking research addressing employability skills assessment appears in the next six years, GTCC, quite possibly, will be best positioned by their ten-year experiences to be the front leader in adding to the body of knowledge for teaching and assessing employability skills.

Adjunct Faculty

Inasmuch as part-time faculty increasingly contributed to instructional delivery in the nation's community colleges, the same was true at GTCC. Part-time faculty teaching at GTCC far outnumbered full-time faculty. Grubb, et al. (1999) noted that not only were interests of adjunct faculty underrepresented, they were also underrepresented in teaching that required collaboration with other faculty, such as learning communities. Part-time faculty schedules and roles were frequently cited as barriers to adequately

communicating with adjuncts by full-time faculty participants at GTCC. Participants described relevance adjuncts brought to the classroom through real-world experience from their respective professions, but consistent college-wide communications about strategic initiatives was problematic based on the limited hours they were paid or expected to be involved in aspects of the college outside of the classroom. Little evidence was present in this study to indicate adjunct faculty participated or received professional development opportunities. However, listed in the President's Critical Issues for 2009-2010 Planning [Internal document] one strategic institutional goal identified by Dr. Cameron was to create and implement a part-time faculty training program. Additionally, several full-time faculty participants suggested developing online orientations and implementing other online professional development opportunities to assist in communicating new procedures or strategic initiatives to adjunct faculty.

Terminology

As noted in the document submitted to SACS (GTCC QEP, 2004), "employability skills" became institutionalized as the term to describe GTCCs QEP. Faculty participants could explain in detail institutional efforts describing employability skills, but often were not as familiar with employability skills expressed as the QEP. Stanistreet (2008) wrote extensively about the misconception of the term as denoting entry-level, less rigorous skills. Packer (1991) indicated there was no universally accepted definition of employability skills, yet noted employability skills were applicable to all jobs from the shop floor to the executive suite. Academic faculty in the study, more so than technical faculty, expressed discomfort with the term, and preferred to think of their roles in

teaching employability skills less about training for employment, and more about training students with good life skills in general.

Academic and Technical Faculty

With globalization and technological advances, the roles and expectations for faculty have changed. They are now expected to behave with an entrepreneurial edge, experimenting with technologies, interacting with businesses, and becoming the human connection between the college and the market (Levin, Kater & Wagoner, 2006). Through advisory minutes, clinical visits, and interviews, it was apparent business and industry relationships with technical faculty varied greatly from business and industry relationships of academic faculty. Nonetheless, academic faculty articulated the need to adequately prepare students with skills required to be successful in the workforce, and described specific activities incorporated in their general education classes to provide workplace skills to students.

However, another factor arose for academic faculty that presented a barrier. Academic and technical faculty understood and described that academic faculty typically taught the same student for no more than two semesters, while technical faculty often taught the same student for a period of two years. This led to different faculty-student relationships between the two groups, and to differences in academic faculty abilities to assess improvements in student behaviors over a long period of time.

Student and Faculty Expectations

The two-fold nature of delivering employability skills to students in a learner-centered environment was noted by faculty participants as difficult for many students. Historically, students had been taught to expect the teacher to be responsible for learning.

The learner-centered environment placed the responsibility on the student. Grubb (1999) reflected students and teachers spend endless amounts of time quibbling about class requirements such as how long the test was going to be, or exactly how many questions would be on a test, rather than placing the responsibility for such minutia on the student. Faculty frequently cited student unpreparedness to accept responsibility for their own learning as a barrier. This finding further emphasized the continued need to provide students with workplace skills described in GTCCs DACUM.

Multiple Initiatives

A lengthy section of the QEP outlined existing initiatives at GTCC, and faculty expressed weariness with the many initiatives underway when the QEP was developed. Many participants discussed heavy teaching schedules, and believed they lacked the time they needed to successfully implement additional initiatives. Because the president and many college administrators were housed in the Medlin Building, a common slang term for college initiatives was often described by faculty as Medlin-isms. Dr. Cameron discussed the multiple initiatives underway at GTCC, and provided insight from his perspective on the initiatives.

> Sometimes circumstances come into play beyond your control, and I will give an example. We were in the Achieving the Dream effort and the funding for that came to a close. The Gates Foundation and MDC decided they were going to choose 15 colleges nationwide to continue this effort with funding for developmental education. GTCC was the only school chosen in North Carolina. We had a meeting with our public school superintendent this morning to go over how public schools can

> play into this. So what would you do? Would you go forward with the new $750,000 initiative to improve developmental studies, or would you say—look--we have already identified three or four key things and we just don't have time for any more?

Although faculty described feeling overwhelmed by another initiative when the QEP was introduced, one goal of the QEP was to place the multiple institutional initiatives under one umbrella. As noted during many of the faculty interviews, it was difficult for them to gain a big picture understanding of how the disparate initiatives could be merged.

Summary

The barriers for institutional implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic initiative were described and analyzed. The major barrier cited by faculty was the lack of existing literature and best practices for a proper method to assess employability skills. Adjunct faculty, who were large in numbers at GTCC, needed to have access to email in order for full-time faculty and staff to effectively communicate on strategic change and other relevant processes, and they needed resources and professional development opportunities available to them. Other barriers such as terminology, academic and technical faculty differences, and student and faculty expectations were analyzed.

Research Question #5

How did GTCC overcome barriers to implementation of the QEP?

GTCC had a history of implementing large-scale institutional initiatives long before the QEP. While each initiative was different, previous experiences for integrating large-scale strategic change such as the GTCC - Guilford County School system

partnership by the president, administration, and many faculty helped smooth the way for the implementation of the QEP. Dr. Cameron also understood that identifying individuals who could successfully champion the strategic initiatives would potentially lead to successful accomplishment. Anyone affiliated with the college for any length of time understood the QEP was connected to GTCCs SACS reaccreditation, and that successful reaccreditation was important to everyone involved.

Adequate Communication

Dr. Cameron's steadfast dedication to student learning and successfully preparing a workforce was consistently communicated across the institution and to the community as GTCCs primary mission. Utilizing all available platforms, Dr. Cameron communicated institutional successes that had occurred, both internally, and to Guilford County citizens in order to gain support. Dr. Cameron understood the power of partnerships, encouraged faculty and staff involvement in business and community projects, and encouraged extended involvement of program advisory committee members. Participants believed GTCC administrators had done a very good job in adequately communicating the SACs requirements and the new QEP to individuals, and communication was not cited as a concern for the overall implementation of the QEP. However, communication issues were apparent in effectively sharing information and new strategic initiatives or processes with adjunct faculty. Professional development for adjunct faculty was included on the President's 2009-2010 Critical Issues list to implement future professional development programs for adjunct faculty.

Additionally, communicating the strategic initiative to a new full-time faculty during orientation was described by new faculty as ineffective. New faculty expressed the

chaotic nature surrounding the first day on the job, suggesting the need to ensure further communications occurred with new faculty. While strategic change initiatives may not have resonated with new faculty during orientation, Division Chairs met often with faculty, and as described by many, best practices for implementing employability skills in the classroom were consistently discussed during those meetings.

Successful Implementation

As noted in the QEP document, the institutional implementation of employability skills was ambitious. Long-term exposure to economic and workforce development efforts, and sufficient campus-wide communications by administrators, helped with the successful implementation of the QEP. The DACUM, outlining employability skills and competencies, had been developed and utilized at GTCC since 1997, so it was familiar to faculty and staff. Faculty had been long introduced to the concept of implementing employability skills in their classes; many with much recognized success. One faculty participant had an article published in *Innovation Abstracts,* describing successful classroom implementation of responsibility and accountability. Faculty achievements were celebrated and recognized through postings on GTCCs website. Administrators also streamlined the implementation process by utilizing existing institutional policies to address the QEP. To signify their importance, employability skills were added to the annual performance appraisal of all employees. Consequently, throughout the study, faculty never discussed compensation as a barrier to implementing a new initiative.

Positive Impact on Student Behaviors

One resonating theme from faculty was that successfully teaching employability skills would benefit students. Faculty participants demonstrated genuine concern for

students, not just academically, but socially as well, and frequently shared concerns about students who were facing difficult situations. More importantly, they described how teaching employability skills had helped students, and in many cases, positively altered behaviors. One faculty noted, “We get comments from our students that they were glad we stressed employability skills that it has benefitted them, and to keep doing what we are doing.” Other faculty participants commented that students were learning to take more responsibility for their own actions, and that the amount of complaints faculty received from students had decreased substantially since the implementation of the QEP. Faculty described comments students made in class or on surveys about how their lives were positively affected by their experiences at GTCC, and there was sufficient evidence in the findings to indicate improvements had occurred in the behaviors of many students through successful delivery of employability skills. Student success stories were often shared among faculty at Division Chair meetings, which faculty described as pure encouragement and momentum for continuing their efforts to provide employability skills to students.

Summary

As described in the QEP, an examination of the literature regarding the identification and importance of adding employability skills to college curricula was extremely reaffirming that GTCC was doing the right thing (GTCC QEP, 2004, p. 16). At the same time, it was a common assumption among administrators and faculty that barriers for the institution-wide initiative were certain to exist. But as the QEP indicated, on one hand, one hated to venture out alone without good research, good models, and supporting experiences of others. On the other hand, there was the challenge of being in

the forefront of implementing and assessing employability skills, and GTCC those to view it as an opportunity (GTCC QEP 2004, p. 18).

Barriers were described by faculty participants in the study, however, proper foundation for the QEP had been properly laid by the administration and faculty were committed to the success of the initiative. Because college administrators and faculty demonstrated support and were dedicated in their efforts for wanting the campus-wide initiative to work, findings indicated administration and faculty were working together to improve upon existing efforts, and to find new and creative ways to overcome barriers. The initiative, though five years old, was still in a formative stage at the time of this study.

Limitations of Findings

The focus of this study was limited to one purposefully selected North Carolina community college, and purposefully selected full-time curriculum faculty at that institution. Guilford Technical Community College, the selected institution for this study, had placed extensive focus and time on the institutional implementation of workplace employability skills. Findings of this study may be generalizable only to other institutions with similar characteristics or commitments.

This research was conducted during the time period of December 2008 through October 2009. As this case study research examined a phenomenon over a specific period of time, in some cases, participants who were identified early in the study for interviewing were no longer employed at the institution or were no longer in the same roles at the time the interviews were conducted. Because of the volatility of key

administrator positions, the role of senior administrators for the implementation of the QEP was not closely examined in this study.

The primary sampling method for identifying faculty participants consisted of reviewing faculty syllabi. There is the possibility that many faculty could be committed to economic development and incorporating high-level workplace skills in their classes that were not apparent through review of the syllabi. Additionally, a total of 15 GTCC faculty were interviewed for this study. As qualitative findings can be subject to varied interpretations, other faculty at the institution may have differing viewpoints from the participants who were interviewed, and findings could be subject to various other interpretations.

The term “employability skills” is defined by the researcher and used extensively throughout this study. However, there is no universally accepted definition for the term. According to Packer (1992) employability skills are applicable to all jobs from the shop floor to the executive suite. However, Packer noted there is often a misconception associated with the term in academia, characterizing employability skills as an entry-level workplace skill requirement lacking academic rigor. For the purposes of this study, the term was defined by GTCC as abilities, skills, and knowledge essential for long-term career success. Six employability skills, including responsibility, communication, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving, and information processing were identified in GTCCs Quality Enhancement Plan (GTCC QEP, 2004).

Fieldwork for case studies sought to utilize multiple sources of information to provide a comprehensive perspective. Sources included documents, meetings, and interviews, and each included potential limitations. While careful measures were taken to

protect against personal bias, interview data were potentially distorted due to complexity of the human element. Data collected through interviews could also be subject to recall or interpretation error by the researcher. Document analysis provided a well-defined look at an issue, but there may have been limitations to documentation as well. Documents were routinely known to vary in quality and completeness.

Implications for Practice

North Carolina's community college system is guided by successful economic and workforce development efforts. While GTCC made great strides in the institutional implementation of employability skills, a comprehensive state-wide effort to implement and assess employability skills in North Carolina's 58 community colleges would have a far greater impact on economic and workforce development. System-wide implementation would also send a powerful message to business and industry that North Carolina is serious about developing a qualified workforce for the 21st century economy. The NCCCS should endorse the implementation and assessment of employability skills as a system-wide priority, and reward institutions for efforts to prioritize implementation and assessment of these skills.

The quality of education greatly impacts future U.S. economic competitiveness and long-term success. Partnerships between educational institutions and business and industry are crucial in the effort to provide training and skills necessary in a knowledge economy. Community college faculty in all disciplines should understand the needs of their local workforce, serve on workforce development committees, and actively share with faculty across divisions and the business community to identify and achieve

common goals aimed at improving workforce development and the economic competitiveness of their communities.

Administrators desiring to implement large-scale institutional change must comprehensively understand the change process and continually saturate the organization with the concept or initiative. For GTCCs QEP, faculty were the individuals on the front-line responsible for implementing the initiative, so faculty commitment to the large-scale curriculum change was critical in order for it to be successful. Faculty participants repeatedly described their commitment to the QEP. Conner's theoretical framework for the implications of practice held true in this study. This occurred because GTCCs President and administration had successfully guided faculty through Conner's stages of preparation and acceptance, ultimately leading to commitment.

Implementing large-scale institutional change is a long process. Studies examining large-scale strategic change in higher education institutions determined that successful implementation of a change leading to institutionalization can take up to ten years to accomplish. In the same way, faculty commitment to teaching high-level workplace employability skills to students at GTCC was a ten-year process leading to institutionalization. One implication for practice to other institutions contemplating the implementation of large-scale strategic change is that institutions must understand and commit to the initiative over a long period of time in order for it to be successful.

Successful change strategies begins with the leader and Dr. Cameron's vision for economic and workforce development at GTCC provided the framework for the strategic change to occur. Indicating the importance of the community college mission, large-scale change strategies were grounded in the vision, mission, and values of the organization.

Moreover, as frequently described by faculty participants, the change strategies needed to be relevant to the specific culture, values, and beliefs of the organization in order for buy-in to occur. Delivering high-level employability skills, as faculty described, simply made sense to them, and they believed their efforts to incorporate high-level employability skills would lead to increased student success in the classroom and the workplace. For GTCC, the institutionalization of developing and delivering high-level workplace skills to students had become a normal part of the culture. Many faculty participants described that their commitment to teach employability skills to students was much greater than SACS or the QEP. Through stages developed over a long period of time, teaching employability skills became indoctrinated and institutionalized as a normality of the culture at GTCC.

Strategic change seldom occurs haphazardly. Successful strategic change is planned and deliberate. In order for change to occur, institutional leaders must continually communicate the initiative. The on-going campus-wide communications for student success and workforce preparedness illustrated the consistent vision of the president. Within the structure of the organization, many partnerships with business and industry, and activities such as the development of the DACUM, were designed to complement college priorities. When SACS added the QEP, one requirement was that the initiative was to be bottom-up, rather than top-down. All faculty and staff were invited to identify the central theme for the QEP, and they determined employability skills would become the central theme. Because of years of exposure to the idea of teaching employability skills, and involvement with area businesses and industries stating their need to hire individuals who possessed high-level skills, faculty could understand and

relate to the importance of the initiative. As faculty are on the front-lines for implementing large-scale curricular changes, campus-wide communications and activities must be consistently aligned with strategic change in order for faculty to understand, develop, and implement the initiative.

The implementation of the QEP at GTCC had an impact on institutional behaviors and cultural norms. Faculty described the importance of sharing and teamwork within the organization to accomplish goals, and one implication for success of the strategic initiative was that individuals needed to be willing to submit to a culture of collaboration. Faculty awareness for identifying individuals that would fit the cultural norms of the institution was more deliberate as a result. For strategic initiatives requiring an atmosphere of collaboration, institutions must consider hiring individuals who can fit the cultural norms.

Community college administrators must possess a comprehensive view of a change initiative. While most leaders may have a broad vision of a change initiative and what the final results should be, leaders must also understand a strategic change initiative from the viewpoints of others. While GTCCs President possessed a big-picture view of the initiative, faculty charged with implementation viewed the change process in greater detail and less broad terms. Faculty were specifically concerned about what an initiative would mean to their daily routines, workloads, and to their divisions. For a strategic initiative to be successful, administrators must understand that individuals within various levels of the organization may view change from different perspectives.

Community college administrators must understand that often the most influential individuals within the organization who can champion and promote successful change

initiatives may not be in formal senior administrative positions. At GTCC, faculty participants continually described the importance of the division chair level to assist with successful implementation of employability skills. It is important for college administrators to identify champions for an initiative who can effectively collaborate and communicate across all divisions and organizational levels.

Implications for Further Study

Rapid advances in technology, globalization, expanded government mandates, changing demographics, and other forces, created an environment in which today's community colleges are continuously being challenged to change. How are changes planned in North Carolina's community colleges? A study on the knowledge and preparedness of community college administrators to implement strategic change would be helpful in understanding the success or failure of institutional change strategies.

An assessment movement in the U.S. has increased awareness and obligation to demonstrate that student learning has occurred (Grubb, et al, 1999). Research related to employability skills has described the employer's necessity for individuals to possess employability skills, and much has been written about the need to teach employability skills. However, the findings revealed a gap exists in the research for a method effectively assessing employability skills. A need exists for additional research specifically related to addressing the assessment of employability skills.

Only full-time curriculum faculty were identified to participate in this study. Further studies including non-curriculum faculty would be beneficial in determining motivations and differences in the two areas, and potentially forging understanding and closer working relationships between curriculum and non-curriculum faculty.

At the time of this study, GTCC had completed nearly five years of a ten year phase of time for institutional implementation of the QEP. SACS will review a Fifth Year Interim Report for the GTCC in 2010. What impact will result from an additional five-year focus on the institutional implementation of employability skills at GTCC? A follow-up to this study at the end of the ten-year implementation of the QEP at GTCC could reveal additional efforts and accomplishments achieved by the institution upon completion of the SACS initiative.

One issue that arose from faculty during this study was that employers were quick to point out deficiencies in our education systems, but are employers really engaged enough in the education process to promote and support success in students? A future study more closely examining attitudes, involvement, and financial support by employers for community college workforce development activities would be beneficial in the quest to increase a qualified pipeline of skilled workers to employers.

The importance of adjunct faculty in North Carolina's community colleges cannot be underestimated. For GTCC, the number of adjunct faculty teaching far outnumbered full-time faculty. A study of the institutional commitment and impact of strategic initiatives on part-time faculty would be important in gaining understanding of this sizeable and important group of community college faculty.

GTCC is widely known and successful in its workforce and economic development efforts. As successful delivery of employability skills to students is critical to providing North Carolina with an adequately trained workforce, the initiatives at GTCC could serve as a model for implementing employability skills in the curriculum, and findings from this study could assist the remaining 57 community colleges in North

Carolina for implementation of employability skills and commitment to institutional curriculum change strategies related to workforce development.

Research by Kezal & Eckel (2002), and findings in this research revealed large-scale institutional change initiatives in higher education institutions can as long as ten years to successfully implement. Technology and globalization have brought about rapid change in the workplace. Businesses understand the competitive environment in which they operate and the necessity to respond quickly to the needs of customers to remain in business. How can higher education institutions respond more rapidly to change, and how can institutions accelerate the process of large-scale curriculum change in the future?

Lastly, are current definitions and implications of employability skills generational, and will they be altered as baby boomers retire and the millennial generation assumes leadership roles in the workplace? Findings in this study suggested a younger generation of professionals were more technology savvy and less bound by tradition. Such research would contribute to a deeper understanding of varying generational viewpoints for implementing employability skills, and would help to inform community college faculty and administrators of future implications, actions and directions.

Conclusions

Previous research and reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), *SCANS* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) and research collected through employer perspectives (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006) noted the importance of educational institutions to teach high-level skills needed for 21st century jobs. Indeed, the prosperity of our nation rests on a highly-trained workforce. The research has

described the importance of community college faculty in building connections with businesses and industries to promote economic development and workforce training.

Economic and workforce development has been a priority of Guilford Technical Community College since its early inception as one of North Carolina's first IECs. GTCC was chosen as the site for the case study based on long-standing efforts to successfully meet the needs of businesses and industries in Guilford County. Institutional efforts have led to nationally recognized workforce development models, and awards for long-term partnerships to successfully provide the county with an adequately skilled workforce.

This research examined the impact of the QEP on faculty commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills, and described the implementation of the QEP as a large-scale strategic change at GTCC. Faculty discussed commitment leading to institutionalization for teaching high-level workplace skills to students, how GTCCs administration facilitated the implementation of the QEP, barriers surrounding the implementation, and measures taken to overcome barriers to implementation.

Further, this study utilized Conner's Stages of Change Commitment, and findings revealed that the theoretical framework held true in this study for faculty commitment. GTCCs administrators had taken the necessary steps to ensure that faculty progressed through Conner's stages of preparation, acceptance, and commitment. Faculty understood the importance of successfully delivering high-level workplace skills to students to enhance success in the classroom and the workplace. Through this belief, faculty were committed to teaching high-level employability skills to students, leading to institutionalization of the strategic initiative.

Concluding Remarks

North Carolina is characterized by large, vibrant urban areas, contrasted by very disadvantaged rural areas. Often those in the poor rural areas feel that life and change occurs slowly, and that “globalization” is a foreign term unrelated to their world. I believe globalization has affected the lives of people in the rural South more than could ever had been imagined during the peak of manufacturing. The idea for this study began, really, as a labor of love, to better understand how to improve the lives and livelihoods of so many displaced workers in my own rural mill town of Albemarle. My relatives had experienced loss of manufacturing jobs where they had worked in weave rooms and spinning rooms for 30 or 40 years, only one day to find themselves without a job--without formal education and necessary skills--and extreme fear for what their future would hold.

Far greater than the many recognitions and awards received by GTCC for their workforce development efforts, through this study, I came to better understand and admire the man behind the many recognitions at GTCC. Born in rural Robbins, North Carolina, Dr. Cameron, too, understood the on-going devastation left for individuals in small mill villages across North Carolina. In my last interview with him, we discussed his unwavering loyalty and support to Guilford County businesses and citizens. In his own words, he painted the picture:

> Let me tell you why I drive this, he said. You are either going forwards or you are going backwards, and if you don’t believe my hometown has gone backwards, go down there and visit. There is nothing there. There is no industry there, and I don’t even know how the stores stay open that are

> there. Yes, I am going to drive, and I am not going backwards. If anything drove me more than anything else, it was working in that textile mill. The mill was good to us, those of us that were in college. They would give us third shift jobs during the summer. But it was going in and looking those people in the eyes that had been there for 30 or more years, and I would ask myself, 'My God--how do they do this?'

The mill whistles no longer blow in mill towns such as Albemarle or Robbins. Crumbling plants remain as reminders of the many individuals who toiled a lifetime in spinning rooms, weave rooms, and sewing rooms. For those of us fortunate enough to have escaped such fate, it is our obligation to preserve the legacy of the thousands of mill workers in North Carolina by ensuring future generations possess the necessary skills and knowledge to make a living, and redesign the vibrancy our mill towns once knew.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent

Consent Form

1. Study title:	Examining Commitment of One North Carolina Community College to Economic Development and High-Level Workplace Employability Skills
2. Performance site:	Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), Jamestown, North Carolina
3. Investigator:	Tanya H. Davis (704) 991-0249 tdavis5131@stanly.edu
4. Purpose of study:	To examine commitment of one North Carolina community college to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills in the classroom
5. Participant inclusion:	This study will include at least 16 GTCC curriculum faculty, 3 GTCC administrators, and one GTCC President
6. Participant exclusions	Anyone who does not wish to participate
7. Description of study:	The purpose of this case study research is to examine institutional commitment to economic development and teaching high-level workplace employability skills in classes at Guilford Technical Community College. For the purpose of this study, high-level workplace employability skills are defined as teamwork, responsibility, communication, problem solving, information processing, and adaptability. Willing participants from GTCC will be interviewed face-to-face, utilizing semi-structured interview questions. I will take notes during the interview process, and with participant permission, an audio recorder will be utilized during the interview. _____ The researcher may audio record this interview. _____ The researcher may not audio record this interview.
8. Benefits:	The results of the study will provide feedback to GTCC on the implementation of their SACS Quality Enhancement Plan, and will be significant to other community college administrators and faculty in North Carolina for identifying factors of organizational change readiness and implementation of employability skills.
9. Risks:	No potential risks are associated with this study.

10. Removal: At the end of the interview and upon voluntary review of interview transcript, each participant will have fulfilled requirements for this study.

11. Right to refuse: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time with no negative consequences.

_____ I choose to participate in the study.
_____ I choose not to participate in the study.

12. Privacy: Your identity will not be published with the results of this study unless written permission is granted.

_____ Permission is granted to use my identity for the purposes of this study.
_____ I do not grant permission to use my identity for the purposes of this study.

13. Signatures:
The study has been discussed with me and my questions have been answered. I understand additional questions regarding the study should be directed to the investigator listed above. I understand that the data collected will be used only for purposes approved by the IRB. I understand that I may direct questions about participant's rights to the WCU IRB Chair at (828) 227-3323. I agree with the terms above and acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Faculty Interview Protocol

Faculty Interview Protocol

Researcher: TANYA DAVIS

Interviewee: GTCC FACULTY (Name _____)

PARTICIPANT # _____

Date of Interview: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Location of Interview:_____

Additional
Notes_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Introduction

- Greetings
- Brief summary of the research project and why the particular interest in an interview

For GTCC Faculty: You have been identified as a faculty member willing to speak with me about "employability skills" at GTCC. As the research topic is GTCCs QEP, I am interested in your opinions and experiences regarding successes and barriers to implementation of the college's QEP.

Consent

- Full disclosure of purpose of study and permission to use of an audio recorder
- Permission for researcher to use information gained through the interview with assurance information gained will be utilized only for the purposes of this study
- Statement that participant may decline participation in the study
- Statement that participant may decline answering or elaborating on questions without negative consequence
- Participant assurance of opportunity to ask questions or receive clarification at any time during the interview process
- Assurance of protection and confidentiality of information – no personally identifiable participant information will be disclosed without written consent.

Interview Format

We have planned this interview to last no longer than _____ . During this time, I have questions I would like to ask. Please feel free to ask for clarification at any point during the interview process.

Demographic Information

How long have you taught at GTCC? _____

Is your office located at GTCCs Jamestown Campus or at a satellite campus?

_____ Jamestown Campus _____ Satellite Campus

What is your primary discipline area? _____

What is your highest degree earned? _____

Do you teach primarily ___ online ___ hybrid classes ___ seated/face-to-face classes

Age Range 50-60+ _____ 40-49 _____ 30-39 _____ 20-29 _____

Would you like to receive a copy of final research project? __Yes __No

Central Interview Questions on Employability Skills/Economic Development

The QEP

1. Please describe GTCCs Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).

2. How did you first learn about the QEP?

3. Please describe how the QEP was communicated campus-wide.

4. In what ways were you involved in the planning of the QEP?

5. What did the QEP initially mean to you?

6. How have you observed differences in internal and external customer service by your colleagues since the implementation of the QEP?

7. What was your first reaction when you learned you were going to be expected to teach employability skills?

8. How would you describe the implementation of the QEP on student behaviors?

9. Please describe the overall impact the implementation of the QEP has had on the college. Probe – the community?

10. If the QEP went away tomorrow, what would you do about teaching employability skills? Probe – would they go away?

11. If you were responsible for the implementation of the QEP – would you have done anything differently?

Employability Skills

12. When did you begin to incorporate employability skills in your classes? May probe for specific timing.

13. Please give examples of how you went about incorporating employability skills in your classes? If not yet implemented – what are future plans for implementation?

14. What role do you think employability skills have in your discipline?

15. Is there a limit to how you see employability skills fitting in your courses? If so – what is that limit?

16. Why do you think GTCCs faculty chose employability skills for the QEP?

17. What are some of the barriers you encountered with implementing employability skills in your classes?

18. What does your department head say about employability skills?

19. How are you communicating with part-time faculty about implementing employability skills in their classes?

20. Describe the institutional support you received for implementing employability skills in your classes.

21. Please describe GTCCs professional development opportunities or experiences most helpful to you with implementation of employability skills in your classes.

22. Please describe your current feelings regarding employability skills in your classes.

23. Describe some of the positive aspects of incorporating employability skills in your classes.

24. Describe comments from your colleagues regarding employability skills.

25. Describe some of the negative aspects of incorporating employability skills in your classes. Probe to negative

26. How did you overcome the negative aspects?

27. Please describe how you know (assess) students have learned employability skills in your classes.

28. What is the reaction from students to learning workplace employability skills in their classes?

29. Describe how implementation of employability skills at GTCC has altered your own behaviors in the workplace.

30. How is your annual evaluation tied to your implementation of employability skills?

31. Describe your observations of how implementation of employability skills at GTCC has altered the workplace behavior of colleagues.

32. Imagine you are an employer hiring a student from your class. What would you say are indicators your student is successfully prepared for the 21st century workplace?

33. What advice would you give faculty at another institution wanting to implement employability skills in their classes?

<u>Economic Development</u>

34. How are you, as a community college faculty member, involved in local economic development efforts?

35. How has your involvement in economic development efforts changed since the implementation of the QEP? Probe – specific activities?

36. How would you differentiate/define the terms, economic development and workforce development?

37. How do you know businesses and industries are satisfied with the employability skills you teach your students?

38. Are there additional comments you would like to share on anything we have discussed today?

CONCLUSION
Now that you are familiar with the topic of this study, are there other GTCC faculty members you would recommend to me for an interview? Criteria

QUESTIONS
This concludes my questions for you. Do you have questions or further comments for me?

Thank you for your time.

Documents Obtained:

Post-interview Comments:

APPENDIX C

Themes and Codes Defined

Themes and Codes Defined

Code Level		
1	**2**	**Theme**
1.00		**Level of Commitment to QEP ((Theoretical Framework of Commitment)** *Defined by Conner's theoretical framework as degree of GTCC faculty support for commitment to change regarding institutional initiative (QEP)*
2.00		**Understanding Employability Skills** *Awareness, comprehension, and acceptance of GTCC faculty to teaching employability skills(abilities, knowledge, and skills essential to career entry and success) to students*
3.00		**Changing/Altering a Culture** *Impact of QEP on modifying institutional culture for implementation of employability skills*
4.00		**Implementing Employability Skills** *Understanding of and methods utilized by faculty and administration for implementing employability skills in classes*
5.00		**Barriers to Implementation** *Impediments to faculty and the institution for successfully implementing employability skills in the classroom*
6.00		**Assessing Employability** *Faculty evaluation of successful execution and mastery of employability skills by students*
7.00		**Institutional Communications** *When and what contacts, exchanges of ideas, and interactions occurred across the institution to cause faculty to accept and implement employability skills*
8.00		**Real World Applications** *Faculty and administration utilization of employability skills for application to real-life and real-world circumstances – a move from theoretical to practical application*
9.00		**Industry Connections** *Level of partnerships and involvement of local business and industry with GTCC to assist with carrying out employability skills in the classroom*
10.00		**Advisory Committee Connections** *Utilization and impact on the success of GTCCs QEP through the use of program advisory committees*
11.00		**Role of Administrators** *Function of GTCC administrators for all facets of institutional implementation of employability skills in the classroom*
12.00		**Behaviors from Students** *How and if the incorporation of employability skills in the classroom has altered student understanding and behaviors regarding the importance and need for successful mastery of employability skills*
13.00		**Institutional Impact of the QEP** *Cumulative influence on the institution by faculty incorporating employability skills in the classroom*
14.00		**Economic Development** *Impact of institutional efforts of incorporating employability skills leading to job creation or job expansion in GTCCs service region*
15.00		**Technical versus Academic** *Noted institutional differences in implementing employability skills in academic and technical programs*
16.00		**Overcoming Barriers** *Practices or procedures implemented by administration and faculty to overcome impediments to successfully incorporating employability skills in the classroom*
17.00		**Unexpected Findings** *Findings through dialogue with faculty and administrators not apparent through review of the literature that have positively or negatively impacted implementation or transfer of employability skills to students*
18.00		**Professional Development** *Activities, methods, communications (both formally and informally) that have impacted the institutional implementation of the QEP and employability skills*

APPENDIX D

GTCC 1998 DACUM

GTCC 1998 DACUM

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

A		A - 1	A - 2	A - 3	A - 4	A - 5	A - 6	A - 7	A - 8	A - 9	A - 10	A - 11	A - 12
Teamwork (Working with others to analyze a situation, establish priorities, and apply resources for solving a problem or accomplishing a task)		Participate in defining team expectations	Proactively identify opportunities to support team members.	Be proactive in carrying out team assignments.	Support other team members' ideas.	Respect ideas and opinions of internal and external customers.	Implement team decisions	Process information to determine the best possible solution.	Participate in cross-training and continuing education activities	Assume leadership for mediating differences between team members	Think outside the guidelines, incorporate creativity	Value individual differences (get along with others)	Maintain team records
B		**B-1**	**B-2**	**B-3**	**B-4**	**B-5**	**B-6**	**B-7**	**B-8**	**B-9**	**B-10**	**B-11**	**B-12**
Responsibility (Exhibiting individual behaviors that support the official goals and objectives of the organization and its members)		Support the organization's mission, goals and objectives	Demonstrate personal and business integrity and ethics	Think cost effectively	Ensure that team goals are met, even with absence of a team member	Come to work on time/regular attendance	Follow assigned schedules	Perform job to best of your abilities	Maintain a safe and clean work environment	Meet deadlines	Keep accurate records	Make decisions in best interest of the company and team	Admit mistakes
		B-13	**B-14**	**B-15**	**B-16**	**B-17**							
		Maintain professional appearance	Follow procedures	Accept authority	Inform others of developments affecting their work functions	Understand and utilize chain of command							
C		**C.1.A.**	**C.1.B.**	**C.1.C.**	**C.1.D**	**C.1.E**	**C.1.F.**	**C.1.G.**	**C.1.H.**	**C.1.I.**	**C.1.J.**	**C.1.K.**	**C.1.L.**
Communication (Exchanging ideas and information in oral, written, or visual form with peers, supervisors, and internal and external customers)	ORAL	Practice good telephone etiquette	Ask open ended questions	Use correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary	Maintain two-way communi-cation	Give and receive constructive feedback	Negotiate win-win resolutions	Practice active listening	Demonstrate understanding through paraphrasing	Use effective tone, pace, and inflection in verbal exchanges	Interact with difficult people rationally	Deliver effective oral presentation	Participate in interviews
		C.2.A	**C.2.B**	**C.2.C.**	**C.2.D.**	**C.2.E.**	**C.2.F.**	**C.2.G.**	**C.2.H.**	**C.2.I.**	**C.2.J.**		
	WRITTEN	Apply basic mechanics to written documents (spelling, punctuation, etc.)	Summarize and write in a brief and concise manner	Select appropriate format and style for written communi-cations	Select relevant and pertinent information	Complete and/or interpret reports	Read and follow standard operating and safety procedures	Organize and present facts	Operate basic communication equipment	Write legibly	Write orders, letters, notes, minutes, memos and/or newsletters		
		C.3.A.	**C.3.B.**	**C.3.C.**	**C.3.D.**	**C.3.E.**	**C.3.F.**	**C.3.G.**	**C.3.H.**	**C.3.I.**			
	VISUAL	Read and interpret graphs	Identify and interpret body language	Construct job aids	Construct procedures chart	Read manuals	Plot chart information	Interpret visual repre-sentations (posters, diagrams, etc)	Read spreadsheets	Recognize standard symbols			

w:\home\irpfiles\QEP\Employability Skills.xls

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

D	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D-8	D-9	D-10	D-11	D-12
Problem-solving (Identifying problems and potential causes while developing and implementing action plans for solutions)	Approach problem as a learning opportunity	Recognize and overcome organizational and personal barriers	Be proactive in preventing problem occurances	Define characteristics of situation or problem	Keep appropriate personnel informed	Determine root cause	Construct and utilize Pareto chart for decising-making	Gather new and review prior essential information	Brainstorm possible solutions	Review or establish decision criteria	Weigh alternative solutions	Test and evaluate the outcomes of possible solutions
	D-13	D-14	D-15	D-16	D-17							
	Select and prioritize best solutions	Implement best solution	Monitor results	Share results with appropriate individuals	Ensure proper follow-up with internal and external customers							

E	E-1	E-2	E-3	E-4	E-5	E-6	E-7	E-8	E-9	E-10	E-11	E-12
Information Processing Finding and using information (Acquiring, evaluating, organizing, managing, interpreting and communicating information)	Identify information required	Determine information sources (people, print, electronic)	Gather required information	Modify search as required	Select, synthesize and organize information	Get appropriate authorization for action taken	Evaluate and document sources	Communicate with appropriate people	Document and file action taken	Analyze and follow flow chart	Demonstrate basic keyboard and mouse skills	Demonstrate basic word processing skills
	E-13	E-14	E-15									
	Locate and navigate on-line help systems	Demonstrate basic data base skills by accessing, searching and retrieving information	Demonstrate basic spreadsheet skills									

F	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4	F-5	F-6	F-7	F-8	F-9	F-10	F-11
Adaptability (Exhibiting flexibility and receptivity to changing technologies, methods, processes, work environments, and organizational structures and practices)	Identify and embrace opportunities brought on by change	Learn new knowledge, skills and jargon	Actively understand and seek career pathing opportunities	Market and integrate skills across the organization	Accept changes in schedules, deadlines and procedures	Willingly accept and prioritize multiple assignments	Pilot new processes	Openly support new team members	Know own strengths and weaknesses	Adjust to changes in work flow	Adjust to physical changes in workplace

APPENDIX E

GTCC 2008 DACUM

GTCC 2008 DACUM

DACUM CHART

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

The abilities, skills, and knowledge essential for long-term career success

GTCC
Guilford Technical Community College
Where Futures Are Created!

A	A-1	A-2	A-3	A-4	A-5	A-6	A-7	A-8	A-9	A-10	A-11
Responsibility (Exhibiting individual behaviors that support the goals and objectives of the organization)	Support the organization's mission, goals and objectives	Perform job to best of your abilities	Demonstrate initiative	Behave ethically	Make decisions ethically	Follow procedures	Maintain a safe and clean work environment	Adhere to company attendance policy/work hours	Maintain professional appearance	Accept accountability for actions and decisions	Admit mistakes
	A-12	A-13	A-14	A-15	A-16						
	Utilize chain of command	Challenge authority professionally	Think cost effectively	Meet deadlines	Keep accurate records						
B		B.1.A	B.1.B	B.1.C	B.1.D	B.1.E	B.1.F	B.1.G	B.1.H	B.1.I	B.1.J
Communication (Exchanging ideas and information in oral, written, or visual form)	ORAL	Use correct grammar, appropriate vocabulary and proper etiquette face-to-face or on the telephone	Use effective tone, pace and inflection in verbal exchanges	Practice active listening	Question effectively	Maintain open communication	Give and receive constructive feedback	Negotiate win-win resolutions	Deliver effective oral presentation(s)	Understand body language	Interact rationally with difficult people
	WRITTEN	B.2.A	B.2.B	B.2.C	B.2.D	B.2.E	B.2.F	B.2.G	B.2.H	B.2.I	
		Demonstrate literacy	Select appropriate format and style for written communications	Use correct grammar, spelling, mechanics	Organize written presentations effectively	Summarize relevant and pertinent information	Present information in visually appealing, understandable format	Understand legal issues related to written communication	Write business-appropriate correspondence (e-mails, letters, memos, etc.)	Write legibly	
C	C-1	C-2	C-3	C-4	C-5	C-6	C-7	C-8	C-9	C-10	
Adaptability (Exhibiting flexibility and receptivity to changing technologies, methods, processes, work environments, and organizational structures and practices)	Embrace change	Seek learning and growth opportunities	Adjust to physical changes in workplace	Adjust to changes in work flow	Manage multiple assignments	Adapt to the environment	Support new ideas openly	Complete a periodic self-assessment	Adapt to changing technologies	Be aware of global impact on the workplace	

Continued on back

D	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6	D-7	D-8	D-9		
Teamwork (Working cooperatively with others to analyze a situation, establish priorities, and apply resources for solving a problem or accomplishing a task)	Understand value of teamwork	Commit to team cohesion	Understand individual differences, including generational and global	Incorporate creativity	Participate in team planning activities	Evaluate objectively the ideas of team members to determine option(s)	Carry out team assignments in a timely manner	Communicate team results to appropriate people	Evaluate team results		
E	E-1	E-2	E-3	E-4	E-5	E-6	E-7	E-8	E-9	E-10	E-11
Problem-Solving (Identifying problems, potential causes, and continuous improvement opportunities)	Be proactive in preventing problem occurrences	Define characteristics of situation or problem	Gather essential information	Determine root cause	Recognize organizational and personal barriers	Brainstorm possible solutions	Utilize problem-solving methods	Use appropriate technology	Establish decision criteria	Interpret data	Evaluate potential outcomes
	E-12	E-13	E-14	E-15	E-16	E-17	E-18	E-19			
	Prioritize best solutions	Implement best solution(s)	Monitor results	Evaluate results	Share results with appropriate individuals	Ensure proper follow up with internal and external customers	Know when to seek help	Approach problem as a learning opportunity			
F	F-1	F-2	F-3	F-4	F-5	F-6	F-7	F-8	F-9	F-10	F-11
Information Processing (Finding and using information)	Determine information required	Identify information resources	Gather required information	Modify search as required	Compile information into appropriate format	Understand sensitivity of data	Ensure accuracy of sources	Communicate with appropriate people	Document action(s) taken	Demonstrate math skills appropriate to workplace	Demonstrate basic computer and associated application skills

DACUM PROJECT **July 29, 2008**
SPONSORED BY **Guilford Technical Community College**

DACUM Facilitator/Recorder – Jane Pendry
DACUM Recorder/Facilitator – Carolyn Schneider

DACUM PANELISTS;

Michael Quinlivan, Pension Planning Solutions, Inc.
Dwayne Young, Guilford County Emergency Services
Merle Green, Guilford Country Health Department
Chastity Glover, High Point Regional Health System
John Huff, TIMCO Aviation Services, Inc.
Keith Volz, JST Electronics
Joyce Penn, A Bold Impression Salon
Bonnie Zeinert, Fastenal
Pam Smith, Call Pointe, Inc.
Doug Parkes, Huntsman

Employability Skills DACUM:

La plus ca change, la plus c'est la meme chose.

- The order of the "BANDS"---duties in priority order—has changed. Responsibility is first.

Duty/Band	Added	Changed	Deleted
Responsibility	Demonstrate Initiative Behave ethically Make decisions ethically	Challenge authority effectively	Inform others . . .
Communication	Question effectively Understand body language Demonstrate literacy Understand legal issues . . .	Condensing grammar/etiquette	All of Visual Communication band
Adaptability	Complete periodic self-assess. Adapt to changing technologies Be aware of global impact . . .	More direct: Embrace change Seek learning and growth opps.	
Teamwork	Understand value of teamwork Commit to team cohesion Communicate team decisions Evaluate team results		Understand individual diffs— cultural/generational . . . (some of the problem/process stuff)
Problem-solving	Be proactive in preventing . . . Utilize prob. solving methods Use appropriate technology Establish decision criteria Interpret data Interpret data Evaluate potential outcomes	(changed the process steps somewhat)	Construct and utilize Pareto chart Share results . . . .
Information processing	Compile info into appr format Understand sensitivity of data Ensure accuracy of sources Demonstrate math skills . . . Demonstrate computer skills	(less focus on specific search skills)	Synthesize data

APPENDIX F

QEP Survey – Summary of Responses

QEP Survey – Summary of Responses
Guilford Technical Community College – Spring 2009

Went out via email (Survey Monkey) to 260 faculty. Got back 100 responses for a return rate of 38%.

QUESTIONS AND ABBREVIATED RESPONSES

1. How does your dept. emphasize the ES for students?

- Handbook/policy agreements
- Support for communication
- Modeling behaviors
- Require students to be on time for class and assignment deadlines
- Professional dress code
- Attendance policy
- Teach customer service skills
- Built into course outcomes
- Syllabi inclusion
- Assignments/projects/activities include
- Rubrics include
- Focus on responsibility, teamwork, and problem solving
- Online instructions include
- Part of student's grades
- Use real life examples, guest speakers
- Part of student's self evaluation
- Hands on training, clinics, part of technical training

2. Describe how you emphasize ES in the courses you teach?

- Model behaviors
- Assignments/role plays/activities
- Verbalizing employer expectations
- Teamwork/group work
- Take role, adhere to attendance policy, deadlines
- Worked into grading
- Writing intensive, critical thinking
- Real life work place tactics (docked pay, probation, firing)
- Journaling activity
- Emphasis on proper English, writing and speaking skills
- Professionalism as graded part of course
- Good bit of duplication to #1

3. How would you rate the importance? (Listed in order of percentage by rank)

- Responsibility
- Problem Solving
- Information Processing
- Adaptability
- Written Communications
- Teamwork
- Oral Communications
- Visual Communications

4. Which ES are included as a portion of the course grade?

- Responsibility 90.8%
- Written Communication 82.8%
- Problem Solving 81.6%
- Information Processing 72.4%
- Teamwork 71.3%
- Oral Communication 58.6%
- Adaptability 39.1%
- Visual Communication 37.9%

5. For each skill marked above, explain your assessment method:

- <u>Responsibility</u>
- Timeliness of assignments completed
- Tardiness penalty
- Portfolios
- Professionalism criteria is part of a grade
- Graded criteria for clinical competence
- Homework grade
- Missed assignments that they can't make up
- Participation/Preparedness grade

<u>Information Processing</u>

- Working through projects step-by-step
- Seeking out resources of info, and applying
- Critiquing own work and the work of others
- Applying theory learned in class to clinic
- Test questions that require info processing
- Case studies/scenarios/role plays
- Research papers/projects
- Read and apply
- Have to process to pass test
- Interview assignments
- Follow rubrics

- Implement a process of care
- Lab exercises graded
- Gathering and processing of diagnostic info
- Ability to follow instructions
- Data analysis and graph interpretation
- Assignment or duties analysis

Adaptability

- Ability to handle changes in schedule/scope of project
- Receptiveness to critiques part of grade
- Seeing various sides to issues
- Rovers in clinic must adapt to unforeseen requests
- Moving to an alternate plan
- Concept of learning new skills, jargon, etc.
- Assignments/demands change midstream
- Assessed in lab and clinic by how they respond to new events
- New software
- Measured by how well they solve cases in different ways
- Handling non-traditional forms of learning opportunities
- Getting along with different personality types

Teamwork

- Group projects/tests/presentations/case studies
- Peer critiques
- Lab groups
- Graded group participation/team work in clinic
- Cooperative learning/teams
- Graded role plays/scenarios
- Collaborative testing
- Part of overall participation grade

Problem Solving

- Graded role plays/case studies/lab exercises
- Graded projects/designs
- Graded assignments that ask them to problem solve
- Practical tasks/exams/exercises
- Question/observe the student on the clinic floor
- Argument based writing assignments
- Real world dilemmas in service learning (clinic/culinary)
- Ethics exercises
- Included in rubrics
- Personal growth grade
- Self Analysis
- Diagnostics and trouble shooting

- Conflict resolution
- Capstone project

Oral Communication

- Verbalization of orders for meds, etc.
- Groups work and class discussion
- Presentations
- Communication with patients, faculty and staff is evaluated
- Rubric for speeches
- Defend your position
- Back brief and question
- Personal growth grade
- Communication with customers
- Graded as part of scenarios
- Class readings
- Critiques

Written Communication

- Documentation in patient charts
- Lab reports
- Interpreting data in written form
- Tests/papers/projects
- Rubrics
- Assignments/reports
- Discussion boards/postings online
- Case study write ups
- Creation of charts/graphs
- Journaling
- Outlines and organization of material

Visual Communication

- Part of clinical assessment
- Graphic design projects
- Body language role plays
- Demonstrating in lab
- Flash cards and verb charts
- Power Point Presentations/other visual aids
- Projects/assignments/presentations
- Finished product (culinary/auto body)
- Interpreting visual data/tasks assessment
- Presenting data in graphs/charts
- Hand signals that surgeons use

6. Rate the importance of ES for college-wide emphasis (listed in order of percentages by rank)

- Responsibility
- Problem Solving
- Written Communication
- Oral Communication
- Teamwork
- Information Processing
- Adaptability
- Visual Communication

Describe how you use data gleaned from CCSSE:

<u>As a Department (lots of null responses)</u>

- Importance of engaging students
- Gives direction to overall goals
- Gives student perspective
- Working retention strategies
- Makes dept. more effective
- Helps set practical, obtainable standards for students
- Develop new practices
- Focused in on lack of student responsibility
- Benchmarks in how we are doing
- Analyzed items pertaining to their students
- Data directly correlates to ES and life skills
- Put more emphasis on community involvement

<u>As an Instructor (lots of null responses)</u>

- Do more with written communication
- Gives some personal guidance
- Getting students better prepared for job placement
- Enhances teaching skills/course improvement
- Gauge as to how well we're incorporating ES in daily practice
- Analyzed items that pertained to my students
- Importance of modeling ES as the instructor
- Best practices from other depts. surveyed
- Make more personal contact with students now