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THE ROLE OF MISSION IN STRATEGIC PLANNING DEVELOPMENT AND
EXECUTION AT A LASALLIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Seton Hall University
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators at a Lasallian sponsored Catholic university remain committed to institutional mission in its undergraduate education program at a time when external pressures require the institution to consider operational strategies that may run counter to its institutional ideals. To effectively investigate how key administrators balance institutional priorities within a specific context, I conducted a qualitative case study at Rheims University (pseudonym). Because the major focus of my study was to examine how administrators in senior level positions at this institution develop strategies designed to accomplish goals prioritized by the university and succinctly articulated the institution's current strategic plan, I analyzed the way in which senior administrators worked with one another, both formally and informally, on a day-to-day, semester-to-semester, and year-to-year basis in an effort to achieve specific mission-related goals outlined in the university's Strategic Plan. I also analyzed how these administrators navigated through tensions that arose with other senior level administrators throughout the university as they worked individually and collaboratively to accomplish common mission-related goals.

Based on analysis of data after coding, three major themes emerged as having the greatest impact on the Rheims' administration's ability to remain mission-centered while executing strategic-planning initiatives. The influence of finances on strategic decision making, philosophical differences between vice presidents and their managers on how to

properly maintain institutional mission while executing strategic-planning initiatives, and divergence across campus when balancing mission and strategic-planning goals.

The major focus of this study was also to examine whether these administrators consciously used their awareness and knowledge of the university's mission while attempting to accomplish departmental, divisional, and institutional goals.

The study offered insight into the influence of mission and its impact on strategic decision making at the university's most senior administrative levels. The study also offered understanding into how the board of trustees assisted in the establishment of strategic-planning goals and how board members perceived a connection between mission and strategic planning.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and my best friend, Kathleen, who is the sole reason I am where I am today and to my boys, Brendan and Charlie. Your collective, loving support and unselfish sacrifice provided me with time to complete my research, and your encouragement was the motivation I needed to persist through this journey.

For always believing in me, I am forever grateful.

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To my family and friends, who always expressed interest in my research when it seemed nobody else really cared, thanks for keeping me going when I really wanted to stop.

To my parents, the ultimate catalysts in the pursuit of this terminal degree, you instilled in me the importance of education at a young age and have supported my endeavors at every turn.

To Kathleen, Brendan and Charlie, you always build me up but find a way to keep me grounded. You have been my inspiration in so many ways and make sharing this accomplishment that much sweeter.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities in the United States make up a vast network of institutional classifications and types. No single feature of American higher education is more distinctive than its diversity of institutions. Research institutions, multi-branch state university systems, undergraduate liberal arts colleges, technical institutes, two-year community colleges, junior colleges, and for-profit proprietary institutions comprise this large, diverse network of schools (Calhoun, 2000). American higher education institutions are classified according to the highest degree authorized to award, the range of subjects offered, and the extent to which these institutions engage in research activities.

Curriculum and culture of American colleges and universities are designed intentionally to foster moral and intellectual growth in their students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991); and some colleges and universities, over time, have developed very specific notions about what constitutes a worthwhile education by creating distinctive missions (Townsend, Newell, & Wiese, 1992). The primary purpose of an institution's rationale for existence, the goals individual colleges and universities attempt to pursue, and the self-imposed obligations schools have made to society are at the core of every American college or university's mission.

Most colleges and universities in the United States embrace their mission in some capacity but find embracing this mission can create conflict with other more immediate needs of the institution, particularly the need of the institution to remain financially viable. Revenue-generating tuition policies are prime examples of strategies that elicit tension between a college's mission and its operating goals; for instance, discounting tuition in the form of need based financial aid may be a goal that contributes to the enrollment of

low-income students (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008). Over the past decade, however, the awarding of non-need based merit scholarships to undergraduates in the United States without consideration of family need represents a fundamental shift (Heller, 2008). More low-need students, requiring less of a financial commitment from an institution, enroll in colleges and universities than do high-need students who drain financial aid budgets and negatively impact institutional revenue goals. Thus, opportunities for lower-income students can be diminished when strategic financial aid policies such as these are implemented, resulting in an unintended consequence and contradiction of mission.

Ultimately, educational policies, programs, and practices emerge from the mission of an institution (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991). However, competition among colleges and universities and the growing influence of market values have compelled universities to become entrepreneurial to survive and prosper in a constantly changing environment (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Eliminating disciplines because they are currently not in demand contrasts with the mission of a university; yet, to some degree, all campuses must consider student preferences for applied education and the larger labor market to remain relevant (Lerner, 1999).

Institutional culture and a school's connection to its history and tradition strongly impact the priority mission plays in daily and long-term decision making. Analysis of university culture also provides important insight into how a particular university functions and offers a glimpse into the potential that exists in forwarding the school's mission (Wilcox, 2012). Institutions that place a high priority on mission in formal and informal organizational decision making practices (mission-driven institutions) can be distinguished from those that vaguely refer to mission when absolutely necessary to

appease various external and internal interest groups (Lagemann & Lewis, 2012). Examples of higher educational institutions continuously focused on their missions are women's colleges, founded to serve the needs of women in higher education with predominantly female student bodies (Harwarth, Maline, & DeBra, 1997); historically Black colleges and universities that came into existence after the Civil War, originally providing education for freed slaves in the United States (Redd, 2000); and tribal colleges, which focused on individual student development to preserve, enhance, promote, and teach American Indian culture and language (Krumm, 1997).

Distinctions of Mission-Driven Colleges and Universities

One subset of this type of mission-driven institutions includes religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Cultural identities, as well as values and practices at mission-driven institutions, emerge from their religious identities and consequently commit these schools to providing an education for the whole student based on intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and ethical components. Mission-driven institutions intentionally blend mission into organizational decision-making policies and institutional planning at all levels (Van Zanten, 2011). At mission-driven institutions, mission becomes the background of understanding for everything the institution does. In a mission-driven environment, mission is constantly communicated and reinforced by all individual actions throughout the organization; and every problem and action is first connected to it (Christopher, 1980).

Van Zanten (2011) characterized such colleges as mission-driven and identified three characteristics that stand mission-driven institutions apart from other colleges and universities. First, mission-driven institutions are private and thus may hire faculty and

staff without outside governmental influence. These schools also define objectives and practices and create programs and curricula in ways unheard of at public institutions. Service to society has traditionally been at the core of public university missions. According to Duderstadt and Womack (2003), the public university provides a model of how social institutions, created by public policy and supported through public tax dollars, evolve in response to changing societal needs. Public universities exist to serve public interest. As the needs and aspirations of society change, so too do public university curriculums and programs.

Second, administrators at mission-driven institution are expected to understand that mission is integrally related to religious beliefs. Third, mission-driven institutions purposefully keep their missions at the forefront of their efforts by initiating new members into the mission's importance, exploring innovative and improved ways to implement the mission, and testing and revisiting the mission to meet new challenges and circumstances. Institutions committed to maintaining their missions risk failure or underperformance as they stray from their fundamental values, either through an inability to adapt to changing environments or through *mission creep*, a phenomenon that occurs when mission is gradually expanded to include institutional goals and objectives beyond the scope of a school's original mission (Hartley, 2002). College and universities test this commitment to institutional mission, especially when faced with financial pressures. Of the 114 private nonprofit institutions of higher education placed on warning in 2009 for failing the U.S. Department of Education financial responsibility test, for example, the majority are religiously affiliated schools from various faith traditions: Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish.

Vulnerabilities of Mission-Driven Colleges and Universities

Small, enrollment-driven institutions such as faith-based colleges and universities are particularly vulnerable when adverse circumstances arise, such as economic pressures, market demands, and competition for scarce resources from government and private donors that threaten institutional priorities and derail strategic planning initiatives. Economic survival is a very real issue for many small colleges and universities across the United States, with some religiously affiliated schools being in particularly precarious financial standing (Henck, 2011).

For the last four decades since Pope John XXIII's successful attempt to modernize the Catholic Church worldwide by launching the ecumenical council known as Vatican II, American Catholic colleges and universities have prospered. Vatican II provided an opportunity for Catholic college and university presidents to modernize their governance structures, finances, and administrations and to reform relations with church authorities in order to achieve academic respect and influence (O'Brien, 1995). However, this period of growth and modernization raised concerns about a weakening of Catholic identity and mission among the Church and Catholic institutions. Catholic historian Philip Gleason (1995) observed that during this period, Catholic educators intended for their institutions to remain Catholic but leaders of these schools were no longer sure as to what was meant to remain Catholic. This uncertainty led Catholic colleges and universities to begin to deliberately spend time examining the role of institutional mission at their schools.

Today's tumultuous economic and political conditions require these universities to make decisions on the fly and adapt quickly. Financial uncertainty, in turn, places

tremendous strain on university leaders and their operating budgets. Current economic trends indicate that the present fiscal stress on higher education institutions is not a short-term problem. A recent analysis of 1,700 public and private nonprofit colleges and universities conducted by Bain and Company, a private equity firm, found that one third of these institutions are on an unsustainable financial path and that an additional 28% are at risk of slipping into an unsustainable financial condition (Blumenstyk, 2012).

Although today's recession will pass, the financial problems affecting higher education are long term and structural (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). Breneman (2002) predicts that many private colleges and universities that are already struggling financially will likely continue to do so, due to the probability that future fundraising might be flat or will only increase modestly for the more than 90% of non-wealthy institutions, suggesting that costs are continuing to escalate beyond an institution's ability to generate tuition and fundraising revenues to cover those costs. Zemsky's (2009) analysis of the current financial climate in the United States indicates that U.S. institutions of higher learning will need to individually and collectively rethink how schools establish tuition prices and whether alternative ways of doing business will allow a substantial reduction in the prices they charge their students.

Balancing Mission and Strategic-Planning Goals

Although prior research has illuminated tensions that exist between institutional adherence to mission and current operating pressures that many mission-driven colleges and universities face, this research has not adequately investigated ways in which mission-driven colleges and universities have prioritized the establishment of mission-related goals when developing strategic planning policies that impact the educational

experience of undergraduate students. In recent years, resource management has become the focus of discussion at many higher education institutions in the United States as demand on limited resources increased and organizations were forced to find ways to say “no” (Pecht, 2008) to budgetary requests from various campus constituents. Massy (2003) contends that responsible management of resources allows a college or university to develop a quality structure that balances both cost and spending. Universities are currently stretched in many different directions, resulting in a heavier focus on one specific area, causing an institution to lose focus on their ultimate goal: educating students (Massy, 2003).

Dickerson and Ikenberry (2010) examined the impact of mission on institutional operations in a unique manner; they asked whether mission-driven institutions of higher learning can afford to endure in their present framework and whether mission should summon an institution to its future, not its past. In other words, mission should not be rigid and inflexible but instead should be responsive to external factors that influence an institution’s ability to prosper. James, Lehman, and Mayorga’s (2010) study of administrative structures at 220 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, for example, documented the increasing presence of mission officers on Catholic college and university campuses, indicating that Catholic college boards and presidents see the need to maintain a constant voice, focused on mission in institutional planning and decision making. However, the James et al. (2010) research falls short of evaluating how mission officers actually influence policy at Catholic colleges and universities and failed to provide a clear understanding of how mission officers work with other administrative officers within these organizations.

Surveying the 105 institutional members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, Woodrow (2006) found that the role of institutional mission at these institutions focused too much on the value of *mission statements* in an organizational context, while overlooking other crucial aspects of institutional missions: who participates in the process of developing institutional goals, how these goals are related to institutional mission, and what challenges Christian college leaders face as they work to balance both these mission-related goals and the daily operating needs of their institutions. Woodrow did not analyze how this process functions, requiring additional investigation.

Research on mission statements demonstrated that the process of developing and following mission statements is flawed (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Colleges focus too rigidly on the mission statement itself rather than enacting the mission in practice. Velcoff and Ferrari's (2006) study at Depaul University, a large urban Catholic university sponsored by the Order of St. Vincent, attempted to ascertain how Depaul's administrative staff understood the school's mission, vision, and values, and also how staff incorporated the role of mission into their daily work-related responsibilities. Those administrators who felt a strong sense of community at the university also tended to rate the university's mission and the importance of activities used to express the mission more highly (Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006). Specific sponsoring Catholic orders have begun to analyze the way they develop mission-related objectives on their campuses and what this means to their Catholic identities in the future. In particular, Jesuit (the Order of the Society of Jesus) researchers studied the connectedness of mission and planning at their colleges (*Jesuits and Jesuit Education: A Primer*, 1994) and universities, but no other order in the Catholic Church appears to have followed suit. Thus, a specific group of

mission-driven institutions realized the need to look deeper into apparent breakdowns between mission and the execution of overall institutional operating goals, failing to analyze ways senior administrators at these institutions could execute both mission-related goals and operating needs of their schools on a consistent basis.

A final issue with some of the extant research on inconsistencies between mission and operating goals of religiously affiliated colleges and universities is that some of my ideological underpinnings may have limited the design of the study. Ideology is those aspects of idea systems that obscure interests and facilitate the establishment and maintenance of domination (Shrivastava, 1986). For example, socially conservative Catholic researchers such as Morey and Piderit (2006) and Wilcox and King (2000) examined the relationship of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, an apostolic constitution issued by Pope John Paul II in 1991 that defined and refined Catholicism of Catholic institutions of higher education and mission at American Catholic colleges and universities. These researchers took strong, one-sided religious views of whether American Catholic colleges truly operate in a manner consistent with their missions (Weaver & Appleby, 1995) and evaluated the issue from a dichotomous perspective, refusing to explore the dilemma from varying perspectives. Therefore, the focus of my research was more extensive than current research, extending beyond simply identifying inconsistencies between mission and operating goals at a Catholic institution. By evaluating this dilemma from the perspective of senior-level administrators charged with developing and executing strategic planning initiatives intended to accord mission-related goals, I was able to gain a better understanding of how these administrators prioritized mission in their daily work lives, formally and informally.

Connection between Financial Stability and Strategic Planning

Financial stability of an institution is commonly a key driver in planning. Many higher education experts argued that the most problematic aspect facing higher education in the United States is finances and that the current economic model of higher education is unsustainable (Goodman, 2009). Currently, one third of all colleges and universities in the United States face financial statements that are significantly weaker than in past years, placing them on an unsustainable path due to outdated pricing models, increased dependency on tuition dollars, and diminishing endowments (Selingo, 2012).

Operating pressures influenced by the nation's recent financial circumstances have created challenges, especially for university leaders at tuition-driven, religiously affiliated colleges and universities in the United States. Religiously affiliated institutions with mission-driven goals and objectives are deeply embedded and accountable to two worlds: the secular world of higher education and the religious or church world. Higher education accrediting bodies place clearly defined expectations on their member institutions for academic and administrative performance and provide related periodic assessment. In contrast, the religious world—comprised of sponsoring religious orders, local dioceses, parents, students, alumni, and donors—have their own unique standards for performance with concurrent expectations for the overall operation of the school.

Tension between Mission and Strategic Planning

Inevitable tensions arise between mission and the development and execution of planning on a strategic level at any higher education institution due to the complex organizational nature of modern American colleges and universities. Most pronounced at mission-driven institutions, these tensions create a series of challenges for administrators

charged with developing planning goals that meet the current operating needs of the institution while remaining conscious of an institution's mission-related objectives. Longstanding commitment to mission, however, makes change in higher education infrequent; and when change does occur, it likely comes from extensive debate among stakeholders (Kezar, 2001) and commonly focuses on the strategic distribution of institutional resources. Since the early 1980s organizational theorists have focused on the way strategies in higher education have changed and have often attempted to identify how institutional culture impacts many aspects of organizational life on college campuses (Peterson & Spencer, 1991). Although empirical studies examined how institutional culture affects higher education change and the strategic planning process, notable organizational theories and research in higher education can be closely connected to the development of strategic planning and its relevance to mission in Catholic higher education.

The Strategic Planning Process in American Higher Education

The establishment of strategic planning goals at American colleges and universities over the past three decades has become standard operating procedure due to forces that influenced the ability for some of these institutions to survive. Organizational leaders, boards, major administrators, and faculty representatives are the only members of a college community capable of modifying organizations through time, as environments change (Kotler & Murphy, 1981). The strategic planning procedure is hierarchical in the context that overall goals are set at the top, with presidents beginning the strategic planning process by setting parameters and stating organizational assumptions. In its simplest form, a strategic plan is a plan of action drawn from an institution's mission or

position in comparison to its peer group to a desired or future position (Mashhadi, Mohajeri, & Nayeri, 2008). In many ways defining institutional mission or purpose is one of the most important considerations when a college or university develops or adds to an existing a strategic plan (Hunt, Oosting, Stevens, Loudon, & Migliore, 1997). Strategic planning, when done well, provides colleges and universities with tools to manage the process of change, whether expected or unexpected. In its ideal form, leaders can use strategic planning as a mechanism to comprehensively analyze the institution's missions, goals, and programs (Swenk, 1999).

Strategic Planning Development and Institutional Survival

Many institutions today, facing financial challenges which are tied to the original history and mission of their school, struggle with ways to adopt business paradigms that require continuous change and market response (Burrell & Grizzell, 2008) when financial challenges occur. While change is constant in higher education and because change at any higher education institution does not come without resistance at both the individual and organizational levels (Kegan & Lahey, 2001), strong visionary leadership is an important organizational requirement in the implementation and execution of new ideas. In particular the lack of a holistic vision in strategic planning can have a significant negative impact on an institution's future financial and academic plans. To expand on an institution's mission, an institution must have a strategic plan in place, meeting market and budgetary demands while remaining focused on mission-related goals (Cress, 2005).

The concept of strategic planning originated in the business community in the 1960s and combined short-term and long-term planning. Organizations typically conduct strategic planning by committing to a formal process by which a group of planners

articulate a company's mission, set goals and objectives, audit the organization for opportunities and threats, evaluate strategic options, and then select methods as to how these goals will be executed and operationalized. The basic aim of strategic planning is to link daily organizational decisions with a vision of how the organization wants to function at some defined point in the future (Miech, 1995).

Keller's pioneering research (1983) prompted a national discussion on the need for strategic planning at American colleges and universities, making the case that due to the "specter" of decline and bankruptcy haunting higher education in the early 1980s, strategic planning in a formalized sense was a necessary tool for many of the nation's 3,100 higher education institutions. Experts during this period predicted that between 10% and 30% of America's colleges and universities were on a path to either close their doors or merge with other institutions by 1995, due to unprecedented demographic shifts (Keller, 2008). In response to these emerging challenges, including decreased financial support, rapid technological advances, changing demographics, and outdated academic programs, many universities began to engage in strategic planning as a means to make beneficial strategic changes to their institutions and to use strategic planning initiatives to adapt to a rapidly changing environment (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997).

Higher education is currently caught in the middle of conflicting political pressures that increasingly rely on colleges and universities to solve national economic and social problems. For instance, societal pressure calls on colleges and universities to expand their already broad missions and make education available not only to all recent high school graduates but also older adults trying to adjust to changing labor markets (Weisbrod et al., 2008). In order to maintain a sensitivity toward these types of market

changes that allow an institution to remain relevant, decisions regarding the best way to spend institutional dollars that bring the highest return on investment play a key role in the design of strategic planning objectives that do not always correspond with an institution's best interest as it relates to mission.

As colleges and universities look to position themselves in an ever-changing marketplace and make strategic decisions that allow a school to prosper, or in some cases simply survive, contradictions will undoubtedly challenge institutions to balance new courses of action with the traditional values and norms of an institution. Strategic decisions such as a schools' choice to expand its recruiting activity beyond traditional student markets to seek out more full-paying students or decisions to pursue programs that could bring prestige and revenue generation to campus (Knapp & Siegel, 2009) raises question about whether mission fits into institutional decision making models and whether a college or university's priorities are more concerned with making money or in serving its students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators at a Lasallian sponsored Catholic university remain committed to institutional mission in its undergraduate education program at a time when external pressures require the institution to consider operational strategies that may run counter to its institutional ideals. To effectively investigate how key administrators balance institutional priorities within a specific context, I conducted a qualitative case study at one Catholic university. Because the major focus of my study was to examine how administrators in senior level positions at this institution develop strategies designed to accomplish goals prioritized by the

university and succinctly articulate the institution's current strategic plan, I studied the way in which senior administrators worked with one another, both formally and informally, on a day-to-day, semester-to-semester, and year-to-year basis in an effort to achieve specific mission-related goals outlined in the university's Strategic Plan. I also analyzed how these administrators navigated through tensions that arose with other senior level administrators throughout the university as they worked individually and collaboratively to accomplish common mission-related goals.

Theoretical Influence

The theoretical perspectives that undergird this study draw on three organizational theories: (a) rational decision making, (b) loose coupling, and (c) chaos theory. It is important to note that this was a study of connectedness between mission and strategic planning development at a religiously affiliated university. This is not a study of mission statements and the impact vision has on strategic planning success. Although institutional theorists concede that mission statements may inform a university's strategic plans, they would argue that the primary purpose of a mission statement is to serve normative rather than utilitarian purposes (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Applebaum and Chambliss (1997) distinguished normative and utilitarian organizations in the following manner: utilitarian organizations see individuals conforming to organizational standards simply because organizations pay them to be part of that organization. Normative organizations base conformity on a shared moral commitment. People ultimately conform to organizational standards out of a positive sense of obligation.

Organizations are systems of interrelated behaviors of people who are performing tasks comprising several distinct subsystems, each subsystem performing a portion of the

task; and the efforts of each are integrated to achieve effective performance of the system (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Universities are distinct in that people's behavior is often hard to understand and predict, partly because universities consist of coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups that compete for scarce resources—who gets what—making conflict central to organizational dynamics and underlying power as an important institutional asset (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Colleges and universities are highly specialized organizations including the areas of academic affairs, student affairs, administration, and finance. Specialization of this magnitude in an organization can have its benefits but can also make coordination of discrete units more difficult in that uncoordinated units may lose touch with one another and potentially drift from institutional mission (Bess & Dee, 2008).

The theory of normative processes of decision making explains that decision makers employ a particular set of alternatives to solve problems (Hoch, Kunreuther, & Gunther, 2001) When external pressures require institutions to consider operational strategies that potentially run counter to institutional ideals, rational decision making can be useful in analyzing various alternatives from different scenarios before selecting a “best” choice. These scenarios are weighted by probability, and rational decision making allows decision makers to predict an expected scenario for each alternative (Olivera, 2007). However, people rarely adhere to logical models of choice, suggesting that variations in human behavior might not be accounted for by normative models (Hoch et al., 2001); therefore, universities can, and frequently do, suffer when planners overly rely on linear, mechanistic thinking (Presley & Leslie, 1999).

Strategic planning in higher education is often more complex than in a corporation; colleges and universities represent classic examples of what organizational theorists refer to as loosely coupled systems (Gilmore, Hirschorn, & Kelly, 1999). In a loosely coupled system, individual elements have high autonomy relative to the larger system in which they are imbedded. In a loosely coupled system, actions in one part of the system or organization have little to no effect on another part of the system (Orton & Weick, 1988). Loose coupling is a cognitive response to an environment of constant change in that an institution's norms are tied to the identities of their constituent human members (Kezar, 2001). Ultimately, organizations have their own belief systems and internally conflicting goals, which are subject to interpretation and expression at the individual level. In a loosely coupled system, during the execution stage of strategic planning, tension between institutional mission and overall planning goals can lead to unproductive collaboration between department heads who may disagree with specific aspects of institutional mission in overall planning. Ultimately, this lack of productive collaboration may lead to individual manipulation of strategic planning initiatives that are inconsistent with the personal views of senior administrators. In loosely coupled systems, subsystems have a tendency to develop innovative solutions to problems that adapt to local pressures without greatly affecting the whole system (Innes, 2008). The concept of loosely coupled systems is helpful in examining how individual administrators develop strategies consistent with short-term goals of their departments and long-term mission-related objectives of the university.

In chaos theory, Cutright (2001) posited that strategic planning in higher education begins with a distillation of the institution's key values and purposes (mission)

and the creation of ideas or philosophies. The main tenets of chaos theory involve self-similarity, strange attractors, and self-organization. These tenets are highly applicable to planning for higher education (Swenk, 2001) in a mission-driven environment. Chaos theory is useful in examining how dissent and conflict arise in the strategic planning process in order to make an institution stronger and healthier. According to Swenk (1999), chaos theory can be used to identify patterns in systems that initially appear chaotic and indiscernible. Unlike loosely coupled systems theory, however, chaos theory is predicated on the fact that administrative decisions and actions in one part of the system do impact other areas of the organizational structure and ultimately create patterns that affect overall strategic planning goals and objectives.

Senior administrators are responsible for developing strategic-planning goals and work in collaboration with peers and subordinates to establish objectives that are consistent with institutional values, norms, and needs. However, beyond noting that senior administrators take responsibility for achieving strategic planning goals through coordination, cooperation, and reinforcement, little has been known about what exactly it takes to execute these goals on an individual basis. With this in mind, my research questions focused on the level to which cabinet members at a Catholic university communicate vision with one another as it relates to the role of mission in the execution of strategic-planning goals, and how they deal with tension that arises during this process.

Research Question

The primary question that guided this study was: How did mid- and senior-level administrators maintain consistency between strategic-planning goals and mission-related initiatives at Rheims University?

Additional Research Questions

1. How do administrators navigate mission and strategic-planning goals and objectives at Rheims University?
2. How do administrators at Rheims University steer through inconsistencies that exist between mission and strategic-planning goals?
3. How does the conflict(s) between mission and strategic planning manifest differently across departments/divisions in the university?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests with the fact that Lasallian colleges and universities are wrestling to maintain focus on maintaining their mission during a period when economic and market influences have influenced strategic planning goals that may contradict the ability to remain mission-centered. Discussion relating to this challenge has not occurred on a national basis, and it appears as if each of the six Lasallian colleges and universities in the United States are dealing with organizational challenges independently. This study discovered areas of consistency that Lasallian institutions of higher learning share in their attempt to remain mission-centered, serving as a conduit that may lead to discussion among key decision makers at these institutions.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter II provides context of the current study with existing literature on the relationship between strategic planning and mission at American Catholic colleges and universities. Chapter III provides detail to the research and design methodology of this study and offers an overview of the rationale of selecting the study's research site. Chapter III concludes with an explanation of various data collection strategies as well as

the data analysis process. Chapter IV offers insight into the study's results and provides analysis of collected data. Chapter V provides a summarized conclusion of the study's findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Catholic colleges and universities throughout the United States have grown to represent academic institutions of higher learning that offer degrees in a wide array of academic disciplines on both the graduate and undergraduate levels. According to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), 201 Catholic colleges and universities currently operate in the United States; 28 of these institutions are freestanding Catholic seminaries that offer degrees to lay students, nine are Catholic universities and colleges with seminaries, and seven are single-purpose institutions such as freestanding law schools, medical schools, and nursing programs. (ACCU, 2010). During the 2006–2007 academic year, more than 900,000 students were enrolled in coursework at a Catholic college or university in the United States, representing a 55.75% enrollment increase since the 2000–2001 academic year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Georgetown College (now Georgetown University) was the first Catholic college in the United States, founded in 1789 by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Georgetown's primary objective in 1789 was to provide a major contribution to the political, cultural, and educational life of a nation that had just concluded the American Revolution and represented the emerging tradition of American religious tolerance. John Carroll, an American-born, European-educated Jesuit priest and first president of Georgetown College, thought Georgetown should be open to every class of citizen and to students of every religious profession (DeGioia, 2010). Carroll's articulated objective for

Georgetown University in 1789 essentially became the first mission statement at a Catholic institution of higher learning. In recent years mission statements at Catholic colleges and universities throughout the United States have been analyzed, enhanced, redesigned, and, in some cases, eliminated, to reflect institutional identity that typically is closely connected with modern Catholic doctrine. The reverse, however, has also come into play when mission statements at Catholic colleges and universities are inconsistent with the Catholic Church's philosophies. As American Catholic colleges moved into the 1980s and began to address mainstream societal issues such as government regulations about equal opportunity on hiring, changes in family structure, and diversity in the ethnic and religious backgrounds of students, Catholic colleges and universities in the United States became defensive about their basic missions as institutions of higher learning within the church. These institutions were forced to examine whether, in an attempt to adapt to American higher education over the past century, their relationship with the church changed (Gallin, 2000).

Since the 1960s a number of factors began to emerge on Catholic college campuses that started to shape and influence the structure of boards of trustees, faculty, and administrations. First, the Second Vatican Council decree set forth from Rome decentered the Church and proclaimed that the Church's life was meant to be within rather than apart from the life of the entire human family (O'Brien, 1994, p. 28). Religious orders of priests, brothers, and nuns who were predominant on Catholic college campuses and very much in control of the development of long- and short-term goals of the institution were also beginning to diminish in size during this period. The disappearance of nuns, brothers, and priests on American Catholic college campuses in

the 1960s created concerns about how effective these institutions would be in engaging Catholic tradition in the academic arena (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

Substantial shifts in the proportion of religious faculty to lay faculty have been traced back to the 1960s when diminishing numbers in religious orders that sponsored and essentially controlled Catholic colleges and universities required Catholic higher education institutions to fill many posts within their administrations, on boards and within the faculty, to not only consider lay people but instead to actively recruit qualified lay people to these posts. Gallin's (2000) work raised questions about continuing administrative control by members of religious communities, asking where these colleges would be had they not had the foresight to establish independent boards with dedicated laymen who understood and believed in the institutional mission? The inclusion of laymen in the governance of institutions seems to have contributed to the growth of Catholic colleges and universities as well as to their strengths. Catholicity of the typical Catholic college and university at this time could no longer remain dependent on the presence of religious community members; rather, partnerships were necessary to safeguard the mission and heritage of a college through shared responsibility (Gallin, 2000). Penzenstadler's (2001) candid analysis of faculty at Catholic colleges and universities, who may not be committed fully to institutional mission, provided a different perspective in comparison to Gallin by analyzing Catholic college and university mission statements, concluding faculty at Catholic institutions do not all share the college's faith stance. A significant number of faculty must embody the finest of the faith tradition, and the college community must create the culture in which serious conversation from varying perspectives constantly challenges and refines the articulation,

decisions, and behavior governing the life of the community as a whole (Penzenstadler, 2001, p. 304).

Laity and Catholic Identity

Morey and Piderit (2006) strongly supported the need for trustees at Catholic colleges and universities, especially those who do not represent the sponsoring religious order, to understand that their positions have the highest authority within the university, particularly in those matters of great importance such as maintaining Catholic culture at the university. Their research showed that trustees can significantly help the president by showing first that they support the president and second that they are concerned that the university's Catholic culture be strengthened or maintained (Morey & Piderit, 2006). This example of public support is of particular importance when a Catholic college's administration and faculty do not completely support decision making at the board level, which can influence policy, demonstrating a commitment to mission-related goals and objectives. Haughey (2009) responded directly to Morey and Piderit with a different approach to the indoctrination of faculty, staff, and trustees on issues relating to Catholic identity. In *Where is Knowing Going?* Haughey put forth that the Catholic church is in crisis, agreeing with Morey and Piderit. Although Morey and Piderit's data came from administrators, Haughey's data came from faculty. Haughey contended that Morey and Piderit's desires for Catholic higher education were inspired by "nostalgia" and referred to Morey and Piderit's suggestion intended to enhance Catholic identity and commitment to missions as impractical. According to Haughey, Morey and Piderit suggested faculty and pastoral people living in dormitories with students to help create learning environments where students could be mentored in Catholic traditions or enfranchising

trustees in their normal oversight activities with the ability to monitor religious performance and evaluate which programs hold the greatest promise for enhancing that performance for the future (Haughey, 2009).

In the 1980s, as laity at American Catholic colleges and universities were increasing and often replaced representatives of religious orders in boardrooms, classrooms, and administrative offices, a pastoral challenge began to unfold. Some Catholic scholars referred to this period in Catholic education as the beginning of the next phase of discussion of Catholic higher education that may require public attention. Attentiveness to the culture of pluralism, inviting persons from diverse communities to dialogue about important matters and commitment to a faith that is intellectually serious can allow Catholics to bring rich resources to contemporary culture (O'Brien, 1994). In the past decade the term "Catholic identity" has moved to the forefront of discussion at many Catholic colleges and universities. However, many Catholic college administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, and students are unsure what Catholic identity means and why it has become such an important issue (Wilcox & King, 2000). Velcoff and Ferrari's (2006) study of senior administrators ($N = 18$ Vice Presidents, $N = 17$ Deans) at an urban, Midwestern Roman Catholic university showed lay senior administrators were supportive of the mission and the mission-driven activities of the university. The study, a 39-item survey divided into two sections that asked for input on how institutional mission impacted the work of these administrators, was reflective of mission statements among contemporary urban Catholic higher education institutions. The survey results indicated that male and female vice presidents and deans reported relatively high perceptions on mission-driven activities at their university. However, these senior leaders also

demonstrated that there were mission-driven activities in which faculty could engage that did not reflect the university's identity (Velcoff & Ferrari, 2006).

Mission/Strategic Planning in Catholic Higher Education

Martin (1985) observed that colleges and universities should spend time on the statement of an idea, when in actuality many institutions fall short of meeting their overall goals because actual practice, procedures, arrangements, settings, and appearances must always be measured against an ideal. In other words, a statement of institutional mission, at its best, formally represents assumptions and purposes that will guide the planning as well as the activities of a college or university. In Martin's estimation, a good mission statement informs behavior and assists members of the community to decide when to confirm or repudiate (Martin, 1985, pp. 60–61).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, institutional mission statements were of great interest, usually in public postsecondary educational institutions. Lang and Lopers-Sweetman (1991) found that more recent interest in mission statements has become part of a broader interest in strategic planning at the institutional level in addition to the system level.

The statement of purpose or mission statement of an institution of higher education encapsulates its particular *raison d'être*: what it seeks to accomplish in the larger environment. It may be a statement of direction, of priorities, or of guidelines. It may be confined to a particular period or set of circumstances or it may be intended for an indefinite period. Because all colleges and universities have a mission, whether or not it is articulated, certain elements are often the same for each postsecondary institution (Martin, 1985, pp. 43–44). Although the development of mission statements at American

colleges and universities was clearly on the rise in the 1990s, the mission statements were not widely used in planning (Newsome & Hayes, 1991). Davies highlights the fact that there are contradictions between literature connected to the definition of mission and what is actually practiced on campus. The prevailing incentives avoid too-rigorous definitions; instead, however, schools remain flexible and alert to every opportunity (Davies, 1986, p. 88).

Mission-Centered Challenges

Today's Catholic colleges and universities are confronted with challenges that are not unique to private higher education institutions. Although private universities rely on tuition revenues, they do not exist to make money, nor can they operate without it. Models seeking to describe the behavior of a university must consider money by adding a financial constraint to the maximization of the mission. Over time, universities cannot spend more money than they take in without merging or going out of existence (Zemsky, Wegner, & Massey, 2005). Escalating costs, dependence on tuition dollars that directly influence operating expenditures, enrollment, building endowments, and other economic influences impact an institution's ability to either thrive or survive, forcing Catholic higher education leaders to make decisions about the long-term welfare of their institutions, which may not always be consistent with institutional mission. Planning in a strategic sense not only provides direction and focus for leaders and policy makers in higher education, but strategic planning initiatives in Catholic higher education can also be a source of protection that makes commitment to mission a campus-wide commitment which remains at the root of all institutional strategic planning objectives.

Strategic planning in American higher education is relatively new. In 1983, when Keller wrote *Academic Strategy, the Management Revolution in American Higher Education*, few of the nation's 3,100 postsecondary institutions had a strategic plan to guide college leaders as they developed policies and procedures for their institutions. Keller believed colleges and universities could no longer remain as "organized anarchies." To cope effectively with demographic changes, inevitable financial crises, and the need for structure and academic shifts, higher education must learn to manage itself (Keller, 1983, p. 43).

In the private economy, the fundamental goal or mission of a firm or corporation is to develop or to make a product. When the term *mission* is applied to higher education, however, it has become so commonly used that its meaning in many cases is assumed. Typically, mission in higher education embraces three social missions: training, research, and public service (Weisbrod et al., 2008). Although Catholic higher education aligns with these three missions, more emphasis is placed upon an institution's very reason for existence when compared to its secular counterparts.

Morphew and Hartley's analysis of mission statements at colleges and universities throughout the country discovered that according to the Association of American Colleges, 80% of colleges and universities throughout the United States were in the process of making substantial revisions to their mission statements, goals, curricula, and general education courses. After randomly selecting more than 300 mission statements from a sample of colleges and universities throughout the United States, Morphew and Hartley (2006) asked the following questions:

1. How do college and university mission statements differ in content?

2. Are there any differences reflective of recognized differences between institutional types?

Their conclusions indicated that higher education mission statements generally do not aggrandize their institutions and actually demonstrate few aspirational elements (Morphew & Hartley, 2006).

Mission statements at colleges and universities should carve out the competitive position of the organization in the educational market. Effective mission statements explain the purpose of the organization, its direction, and the ends to which it will function. This mission statement will indicate the values and philosophy of the school and the core competencies that will help it achieve its mission (Sidhu, 2003). A mission statement, or statement of purpose of an institution, encapsulates that school's very reason for existence and what it ultimately seeks to accomplish in the larger environment. It may be a statement of direction, of priorities, or of guidelines, or it may be confined to a particular period or set of circumstances (Lang & Lopers-Sweetman, 1991, p. 600).

Mission-driven strategy, a framework designed by nonprofit organizations, was developed to help meet the growing needs of higher education managers and board members refine strategy and make it more executable. Fulfilling the unmet needs of students and other constituents within a college community allows institutions to target strategic-planning goals with mission-related components (Frigo, 2003).

Catholic Identity

The American Catholic college landscape is changing, as Catholic colleges and universities must provide an educational experience to students that addresses the pragmatic needs of our society but also struggle to balance their commitment to offering

a moral foundation that in many instances is not negotiable when confronting changes in American society and culture. Morey and Piderit (2006) observed in their book, *Catholic Higher Education, A Culture in Crisis*, the concepts of distinguishability and inheritability in Catholic higher education. Distinguishability refers to the ability of students and other observers to see clear and significant differences between the Catholic college culture that exists at a Catholic university and the more general academic and social culture that exists at a nonsectarian college or university. When clear and significant differences are absent, outside observers see a general nonsectarian culture that is as prominent at the Catholic institution as it is at nonsectarian institutions. Inheritability however, not unlike distinguishability, is an ongoing issue in any culture and can be secured if the institution is willing to expend sufficient human financial capital to persuade prospective students that the type of religiously based education offered at a particular college or university provides them with important advantages for life (Morey & Piderit, 2006, pp. 69–70).

Komonchak's (1993) definition of a Catholic university is one which lives and realizes its role precisely as a university within a church with this distinctive identity and this integrating mission. Buckley (1993) offered descriptions of a Catholic university by using definitions referred to as descriptive and prescriptive. When using a descriptive definition, one finds out what is called a Catholic university and describes its operations. When referring to a prescriptive definition, one searches documents and decides what is a real Catholic university. Descriptive models can excise vision and challenge; prescriptive models can describe a university that never was and will never be (Buckley, 1993, p. 85). Gallin (2000) offered insight into the challenges that Catholic colleges face as they work

to protect and make known their distinctiveness as institutions of higher learning in the Catholic tradition and claim to provide a modern-world perspective. Today Catholic colleges and universities are negotiating, questioning, and defining their Catholic identity with four major constituencies that are rarely in harmony with one another: the Roman Catholic church, state and federal government, the broad American higher education community, and the internal constituencies of faculty, students, parents, and administrators (Gallin, 2000).

Dee, Henkin, and Holman's 2004 study examined conflict between senior administrators and faculty members at Catholic colleges and universities and connected external pressures such as efforts to strengthen Catholic identities. They pointed to the need for Catholic college presidents to resolve disagreements between faculty at their institutions, especially in matters relating to Catholic identity, in a collaborative manner. They found, interestingly, that lay presidents at Catholic colleges and universities used collaborative strategies more often than clergy presidents and that collaboration was most frequently employed in faculty and trustee conflicts (Dee et al., 2004, pp. 191-192).

Ex Corde Ecclesiae

Pope John Paul II's idea of a Catholic university was laid out in a clear, definitive manner in the official church document, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, written in 1990. The Vatican's description of identity and mission and the standard the church felt American Catholic colleges and universities should uphold in their commitment to those values, outlined in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, brought unprecedented levels of attention and discussion to mission and its prioritized role in the strategic-planning process on Catholic college campuses. The purpose of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was to determine the relationship

between the various Catholic colleges and universities in the United States and the church itself. Those institutions that identify with Catholic traditions should consider *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (Gallin, 2003).

Russo and Gregory's (2007) analysis of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* determined that the document is neither a tool to convert academicians to the Catholic faith nor an instrument designed to return Catholic colleges and universities to a pre-Vatican II intellectual ghetto. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, in their estimation, however, is rightfully concerned that all academicians who work in Catholic environments, regardless of personal values or faith systems, respect the church's teachings and traditions. Consequently, when faced with faculty members, particularly theologians who defy *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, officials at Catholic colleges and universities can take adverse employment actions such as poor-performance evaluations, denial of tenure, or even the revocation of tenure (Russo & Gregory, 2007, p. 152). Nilson (2001) believed *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* left the Catholic university with only two options: incorporate the mandate and become essentially sectarian and possibly ineligible for government funding or refuse to comply with the demand of the American Bishops and secularize itself (Nilson, 2001). Heft's (2003) exploration of Catholic identity as it relates to issues of scholarship focused on the following question: Is Catholic scholarship possible and important to sustain and strengthen the religious nature and mission of the university? The primary concerns that this question brought to the surface are whether non-Catholics at a Catholic university do scholarship that is consistent with an institution's outlined mission objectives, who has the responsibility within the university to carry on Catholic scholarship, and what would

Catholic scholarship look like in disciplines other than theology and philosophy (Heft, 2003, p. 50)?

Jencks and Reisman (1968) believed the important question is not whether a few Catholic universities prove capable of competing with Harvard and Berkeley but whether Catholicism can provide an ideology or personnel for developing alternatives to the Harvard/ Berkeley model of excellence (Jencks & Reisman, 1968).

Steinfel's (2003) opinion that Catholic colleges should unquestionably consider their Catholic mission when hiring faculty is what the author considered a moderate approach toward this subject. Steinfel developed four criteria suggested for Catholic colleges to follow in their employment practices: (a) be clear that the religious dimensions of the institution's mission do not imply proselytization and an embodied orthodoxy; (b) emphasize that what is primarily to be weighed in that dimension is the contribution of a scholar's research and teaching agenda rather than personal faith or practice; (c) integrate these considerations into the whole process of job definition, recruitment, interviews, and hiring; and (d) eschew mechanical rules or quotas for flexibility (Steinfel, 2003, p. 159).

Hellwig's (2004) analysis of mission assessment at Catholic colleges indicated that this process is a continual challenge because American Catholic colleges and universities have various purposes, programs, and student bodies; it is quite unlikely that a particular institution will match all of the same elements and indicators in comparison to their Catholic counterparts (Hellwig, 2004). In other words, even though Catholic colleges and universities share many core traits unique to Catholic higher education, institutional mission is influenced by a variety of variables that can differ from one

Catholic institution to the next, which consequently influences mission and possibly strategic-planning objectives. Arthur (2008) referred to the baseline of values in Catholic institutions as a barrier to consistency. The result is multiple and complex identities, resulting in varying degrees of intensity of religious affiliation (Arthur, 2008, p. 199).

Breslin's (2000) research on hiring practices adopted by Catholic institutions is important because Catholic colleges and universities, unwilling to incorporate mission into hiring decisions, run the risk of not merely infringing on institutional philosophy but also may lose their souls while climbing the ladder of success and prestige due to insufficient attention being paid to philosophical fit between employees and the articulated Catholic mission and philosophy (Breslin, 2000, p. 227).

Grennan-Gary's (2007) survey of college presidents at small tuition-dependent Catholic colleges and universities throughout the United States found that attracting Catholic faculty not only to philosophy and religion departments but to all academic fields is a major challenge. In past decades, when Catholic colleges were able to staff their faculties with qualified sisters, brothers, and priests, faculty comprised primarily of religious members were supportive of institutional Catholicity, and this level of support was taken for granted. Many presidents included in this national survey connected maintaining and attracting a faculty that was supportive of the college's religious identity and committed to achieving academic excellence in a manner consistent with the mission one of their most challenging obstacles when connecting strategic-planning goals to mission (Grennan-Gary, 2007).

The pressure to recruit lay people to administrative and faculty ranks has been a constant concern of Catholic scholars over the past two decades. Catholic higher

education faces the future with definite academic and religious strengths; but in order to continue serving and affecting modern society in the 21st century, Catholic colleges and universities must confront crucial challenges (Leahy, 1991). The primary challenge is that they need to devise ways of attracting and retaining personnel committed to the religious and academic goals of Catholic education. Today, changes in American culture, higher education, and the Catholic church have largely dissolved the former consensus on the nature, characteristics, and meaning of Catholic education (Leahy, 1991, p. 156). A college's Catholic identity exists significantly within the faculty, the president, and the board of trustees, and institutional priority must be concentrated on these three groups in order to protect the Catholic identity of the institution (Garrett, 2006).

Marketing Catholic Identity

The majority of Catholic postsecondary institutions in the United States have two sources of identity: a common source that reflects tradition and practices of the church and the distinctive charism of the sponsoring religious community (Nichols, 2009). Constantly at odds, however, are a Catholic college's ability to remain mission-centered while maintaining a consciousness of market forces that affect an institution's ability to attract and retain students capable of benefiting from the unique educational opportunities available from Catholic colleges and universities. Catholic college faculty, administrators, and even students with varying levels of cynicism and acceptance, met marketing Catholic higher education, or *branding*, a term that has become commonplace in higher education in recent years. Bourgeois (2004) wrote on the challenge of marketing Jesuit education that one must question the reduction of Jesuit education to a measurable quantity that can be promoted as a brand with equity. The nonquantifiable value of Jesuit

education is precisely its cultivation of critical reflection in students who are focused upon as whole persons and who are encouraged and helped to critically think through value orientations (Bourgeois, 2004, p. 18). Hollwitz (2004) went further, stating that branding is the problem, not the solution, and that branding of higher education is “anti-intellectual” as well as “morally vacuous and manipulative” (p. 15). Hollwitz observed that students and their parents are not and should not be treated as customers and that branding a Catholic institution of higher learning actually defiles mission (Hollwitz, 2004).

Morey and Piderit (2006) did not refer to developing awareness of Catholic higher education to a prospective student audience as branding. They did, however, provide a counter response to Bourgeois’ (2004) and Hollwitz’s (2004) opinions by encouraging Catholic higher education leaders to consider advertising campaigns that can help spread the word about the unique benefits of Catholic higher education to prospective students. The authors also pointed out that those who run Catholic colleges must be convinced that the costs associated with these initiatives are worth the added investment and will ultimately produce long-term results that are worthwhile and good. Even when advertising the benefits of Catholic higher education does not resonate well with prospective student audiences, a strong message can influence parents positively.

Catholic colleges and universities operate in an atmosphere of cultural antagonism and must compete successfully with all other higher education institutions in the United States in order to survive. Many of these schools feel under siege in one way or another. Some operate on the margin financially. These institutions try to juggle continuing pressures that include the need to keep pace with competitors in the quest for funding and

advancement dollars as well as the need to maintain a level of relevance and attractiveness that appeals to prospective students and their parents (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

Gray and Cidade's (2010) research showed today's Catholic undergraduates or "Millennial Catholics," regardless of their choice of college, generally hold attitudes that are in opposition to Catholic church teachings on several issues important to the Catholic church such as abortion and same-sex marriage. The authors indicated that, due to college life, distance from parents and childhood peers, and exposure to many new ideas in their college education, a widening of gaps in religious practice will continue to increase on Catholic college campuses with today's Catholic undergraduates (Gray & Cidade, 2010). This theory clearly creates challenges for colleges searching for ways to market their Catholic identity to prospective students who may possess attitudes and opinions directly counter to the Catholic church and its teachings.

The Zemsky et al. (2005) secular view on the marketing of higher education as it relates to institutional mission indicated that colleges and universities can be simultaneously mission-centered and market smart. Typically, presidents and provosts are quite comfortable with this juxtaposition because they spend considerable time linking academic and commercial pursuits. However, in some cases it is faculty, particularly those whose scholarly pursuits are centered in the humanities, who are most likely to see a future that can only undermine the traditional values of the academy in their institution's pursuit of market opportunity (Zemsky et al., 2005, p. 51).

Engagement

Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, especially those controlled and sponsored by religious orders, are at a crossroads. Institutional mission, once a solid foundation of most academic and administrative policies at American Catholic colleges is, in many ways, not the primary concern of Catholic college administrators as they develop strategic-planning objectives, especially as these objectives apply to an institution's financial bottom line.

Benne's (2001) description of critical mass identified three concentric circles showing how mission is connected to long- and short-term decision making at religiously affiliated colleges and universities in the United States. The first circle, which in his view is the most important, is comprised of intense communicants who not only identify strongly with the religious dimensions of the school's mission but also have a solid understanding of the school's sponsoring tradition. The next outward circle is made up of communicants and non-communicants who not only support but also participate in the religious dimensions of a school's life. The third concentric group, which brings a level of diversity to an institution, typically is tolerant of institutional religious identity and tradition but may also oppose overemphasis of mission and, in some cases, may even become hostile critics of the connection between religious mission and institutional decision making (Benne, 2001).

Macintyre (2001) described the American Catholic university as having two rival conceptions: one in which the university recognizes itself as Catholic, not only because of its religious practices but because of the philosophical and theological dimensions of its teaching and its enquiries, and the other in which a Catholic university is a standard

secular university to which Catholic religious practices, together with a set of individual Catholic academic concerns, have been superadded. The author went on that in the traditional sense, a Catholic university can only secure the Catholic identity of a university if there is a preponderance of Catholic faculty members (MacIntyre, 2001, p. 10).

Curran (1997) believed the discussion of Catholic identity and engagement should logically involve three distinct questions: (1) Is it possible for such institutions to be Catholic today? (2) Given existing priorities and parameters, should Catholic structures exist? (3) What does Catholic identity mean in these institutions today and what means should be taken to ensure Catholic identity? (Curran, 1997, p. 91).

Administrators have paid increased attention in recent years to the development and formalization of institutional mission at Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The Office of Mission has become a prevalent part of the administrative structure of many American Catholic colleges and universities. Mission officers also typically hold high senior-administrative positions at the Director or Vice Presidential levels and consequently influence policy and strategic-planning decisions on their campuses. A recent national study titled *Mission Matters* was conducted by James et al. (2010) at Boston College's Center for Catholic Education; the authors attempted to measure the increasing institutionalization of mission offices and operations in the United States. James et al. found that since the first mission unit was established in 1980, an impressive number of other institutions have followed suit in an attempt to integrate Catholic mission into their operating structures. Of the 220 Catholic colleges and universities that have participated in this study, 139 verified that senior-level mission

leaders have been appointed on their campuses and that most of these mission leaders were appointed in the last five years (James et al., 2010).

Enrollment Management/Strategic Planning

Administrators give tremendous attention and consideration to strategic-planning development and enrollment management at tuition-driven colleges and universities. Enrollment management strategies in Catholic higher education typically balance the operating needs of the institution and its commitment to its mission. For instance, market realities can force some institutions to brand themselves in ways that dilute Catholic distinctiveness and force some institutions to sacrifice some elements of mission for margin (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2009). In other words, tuition driven institutions with limited endowments that rely on tuition dollars from students may not be able to maintain or afford a full commitment to institutional mission without altering mission-related goals or objectives consistent with its Catholic identity. Hossler and Kalsbeek's (2009) market-centered definition of enrollment management is the systematic evaluation of an institution's competitive market position across multiple academic programs and market segments; the development of a research-based definition of the desired or preferred strategic market position relative to key competitors; and the marshaling and managing of institutional plans, priorities, and resources to either strategically strengthen or shift that market position in pursuit of the institution's mission and its optimal enrollment, academic, and financial profile (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2009, p. 11).

To stay committed to mission in a competitive enrollment environment that undoubtedly affects an institution's financial bottom line, policy makers must institute specific initiatives to ensure that mission-related goals remain institutional priorities

throughout strategic-planning phases and cycles. Burtchaell (2006) observed that the failure or defiance of purpose and the degradation of public discourse have drawn some Catholic colleges to abandon their calling to be ministries of the Catholic church.

The Catholic tradition of serving the poor directly influences tuition levels at Catholic colleges and universities. During the 2007 fiscal year, Catholic institutions, rated by Moody's Investment Firm, showed median net tuition revenues of \$15,636 compared to \$18,101 for other private colleges in the United States. Despite this comparatively low tuition, most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States depend on tuition revenues. In this same Moody's survey, a median of 82% of operating revenue came from student charges, compared with 68% in other private colleges. The report emphasized that due to Catholic college reliance on tuition, it is imperative that institutions maintain a strong market presence in order to attract net tuition paying students (Supiano, 2009).

In an effort to ascertain whether stakeholders at a specific Catholic university understand a school's mission, vision, and values, Velcoff and Ferrari (2006) measured staff ($n = 178$) attitudes about whether they universally understood institutional mission and whether it was inclusive and innovative. This Mission and Values Inventory assessed the university's identity as a faith-based institution as well as a variety of program options the institution uses to support its mission. The intent of Estanek, James, and Norton's (2006) study of Catholic college mission statements was to examine the potential to assess whether mission-related goals, as outlined in mission statements at American Catholic colleges, were accomplished and if so, to what extent. This study, titled *Assessing Catholic Identity: A Study of Mission Statements of Catholic Colleges*

and Universities, had a two-fold purpose (Estanek et al., 2006). First, the authors aimed to consider mission statements from a representative sample of Catholic colleges and universities as part of an analysis of Catholic-identity characteristics that are institutionally agreed upon and second, to identify and categorize dominant institutional values from mission statements that may identify a Catholic identity assessment process. This study considered two previous studies of mission statements in Catholic colleges and universities (Estanek et al., 2006). The first by Foote, Buzzi, Gaughan, and Wells (1996) reviewed mission statements and the inclusion of diversity initiatives in Catholic higher education. The second study by Young (1997) compared themes in higher education mission statements throughout the country but did not specifically isolate Catholic colleges and universities. Of all Catholic colleges and universities, Young included 235 institutions that are members of the ACCU, but 16 were eliminated because these schools were not located in the United States. The most often-stated themes expressed in the sample of mission statements analyzed were Catholic identity (94%), sponsorship (76%), constituencies served (60%), community (47%), diversity (36%), and student outcomes (91%). These mission statements referred quite often to specific learning outcomes and that these outcomes could be used as a basis of assessment (Estanek et al., 2006).

Religion Versus Spirituality

A national study of college students' search for meaning and purpose was completed at the University of California, Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010). This was a seven-year study that began in 2003 and is the first national longitudinal study to measure spiritual growth, religious

commitment, religious/social conservatism, religious engagement, religious skepticism, and religious struggle in traditional American undergraduate students. Among the initial findings, researchers reported the ability to quantify and assess the way educational opportunities and practices promote spiritual development, especially service learning, interdisciplinary courses, study abroad, self-reflection, and meditation; all had uniformly positive effects on traditional college outcomes (Astin et al., 2010). Although the intent of this study was not to focus on the impact of spirituality on the undergraduate and faculty experience at Catholic colleges and universities, some of the study's early findings are consistent with institutional mission objectives at many of the country's Catholic colleges and universities.

Gray and Cidade's (2010) analysis of the Higher Education Research Institute study on spirituality starts by asking the question, "Are Catholic colleges and universities failing in their mission of educating students in the faith?" The authors found that those students who could be identified as self-reported Catholics attending a Catholic college or university were less likely to move away from church teachings than Catholic students attending non-Catholic colleges and universities; 46% of this group claimed their religiousness became stronger or much stronger during college (Gray & Cidade, 2010). Abelman and Dalessandro (2008), assessing Catholic identity in higher education, found that Catholic colleges and universities were distinct from their secular higher education peers in that Catholic schools are vision-driven institutions that communicate their priorities and define characteristics by employing clear, highly optimistic, and inspirational language (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008).

Commitment to Mission

A national survey conducted by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in fall 2009 measured the national response of Catholic colleges and universities to the economic recession in the United States; results indicated that 76% of the Catholic colleges and universities participating in this survey responded positively to financial aid appeals of new, incoming students to their freshmen classes compared to the prior year. In comparison, 58% of non-Catholic private colleges and universities that participated in this survey responded positively to increased financial aid requests, 63% of Catholic colleges surveyed increased the number of institutional aid awards offered in 2009 compared to 2008, and 55.3% of the survey's Catholic colleges increased the size of the institutional awards offered in 2009 compared to 2008.

Limitations on Literature

The literature and research available that quantitatively measured ways Catholic colleges and universities provide opportunities to underserved students through need-based financial aid programs is surprisingly weak, considering the level of emphasis placed in many Catholic college mission statements and strategic-planning documents on continued commitment to first-generation underserved students. Also, substantial research exists on strategic planning in higher education, but limited research relates specifically to Catholic higher education. Growing levels of research connect institutional strategic-planning initiatives and commitment to mission at Catholic colleges and universities through religious orders that sponsor many of the nation's Catholic colleges and universities. Current research by religious orders is particularly noteworthy within the Jesuits, Christian Brothers, Franciscans, and Sisters of Mercy, as they work to define

their religious and educational philosophies in a rapidly changing environment that is impacted by dwindling new members joining their orders; consequently, fewer serve in academic and administrative-leadership roles on their campuses. An increasing lay faculty and administration is taking greater amounts of operational control, relinquished by Catholic administrators, at Catholic colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Strategic planning on a serious level at many American Catholic colleges and universities became commonplace just over a decade ago in response, in many cases, to acute enrollment and financial pressures that created concerns about the operational futures of many of the nation's Catholic colleges. Strategic planning was introduced, especially at those Catholic colleges and universities forced to take a critical view of their financial efficacy, not just as a way to begin internal discussions about maintaining Catholic identity and recommitting to mission, but to address major issues that threatened their ability, in the most extreme cases, to stay financially solvent.

In the early stages of the higher education strategic-planning era, a handful of the nation's Catholic colleges and universities maintained endowments at levels comparable to the country's top public and private non-Catholic research institutions. These schools were very much the exception, however, and most American Catholic colleges ranked at the bottom of private college and university endowment rankings, emphasizing the need to generate revenue through tuition dollars and student enrollment. An underlying tone of urgency in these early strategic-planning documents forced administrators to address problematic trends affecting enrollment, development efforts, and the relevance of some academic programs. Maintaining institutional mission was not always a major

institutional priority when these early plans were introduced on campuses, especially at schools most challenged by impending financial crisis.

Catholic colleges that were able to meet the demands of the 1980s and 1990s are beginning to include the need to remain mission-centered. Competitive influences in the recruitment of new students and new faculty members, however, continue to challenge these schools and impact their ability to remain committed to their unique Catholic cultures and traditions. These institutions of higher learning, whose faculties, administrators, and boards of trustees were once comprised predominantly of religious men and women, are beginning to change in dramatic fashion. Lay people, not all of whom are Catholic, are beginning to engage important roles at Catholic colleges and universities, which directly impacts policies and academic outcomes that will allow mission either to thrive or to be forgotten.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study warrants a qualitative approach because this type of research design is useful in attempting to understand how individuals perceive their environmental situation, position, or institution (Creswell, 2003). According to contemporary organizational theorists, all organizations, including colleges and universities, are perceived as social systems existing in and interacting with their environment (Aldrich, 1979; Scott, 1981). Because a small number of influential senior policy makers were interviewed in this study, qualitative methods produced detailed information and allowed participants' views of the situation to be studied and analyzed (Creswell, 2003). A case study also allowed me the opportunity to provide an understanding of the complex issues Catholic college and university administrators face when attempting to balance mission and strategic-planning goals in their daily work. Stake (1995) referred to case studies in qualitative research as an investigation of "bounded systems," focused on either the case or an issue illustrated by the case. A case study approach assisted me to understand various perspectives of individual participants in this organization and how their work was influenced by pressures relating to the school's institutional mission and operating needs which are reflected in the institution's strategic plan. An administrator's analysis of an organization's environment is critical in accurately assessing the opportunities and threats the environment poses for the institution and in developing the strategic policies necessary to adapt to both internal and external environments (Cope, 1988). Additionally, Merriman (2001) laid the groundwork for considering, choosing, and conducting case study analysis in educational settings, stating, "Case study offers a means of investigating

complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomena” (p. 41). From a methodological standpoint, a Catholic university provided a good research site for this study because although Catholic colleges and universities share challenges that are comparable to those challenges confronting secular higher education institutions, in extreme cases (Maxwell, 2005), these problems can provide variables that are unique to Catholic higher education.

Research Site: Rheims University

Case study research is a method of empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and when multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1994). The phenomenon, in this instance, between mission and strategic-planning goals, and the context, a Catholic university sponsored by a religious order, apply to Yin’s (1994, 2009) theories on case study research. Yin also suggested that as a research method, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2009). Stakeholders at the university I selected, Rheims University, varied in their understanding and interpretation of the institution’s mission, vision, and values. To gain appreciation into how institutional mission is communicated throughout this community, a case study was warranted and appropriate under Yin’s (1994) definition.

Rheims University exemplifies a Catholic educational community progressing forward. Founded in the mid-1800s, Rheims University is located in a major metropolitan region of the United States. The student body represents 45 states nationally and 35 foreign countries. The full-time undergraduate student population is 3,360. The university

is one of six higher education institutions in the United States sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers. Stakeholders clearly articulate the institution's commitment to "Lasallian" mission throughout the development of an ambitious strategic plan built on success that the university has experienced in recent years. Specifically, the current strategic plan states that [Rheims] has "affirmed a university-wide commitment to its community both on and off campus and to its mission," which involves a massive expansion of its campus footprint and improvement of facilities.

The university, like all Lasallian Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, is tuition-dependent and has a limited endowment. Therefore, this institutional transformation has been financed by increasing undergraduate enrollment and unprecedented levels (14%) of fundraising activities that may have jeopardized the institution's commitment to Lasallian Catholic mission. Strategic planning formally began at Rheims University in 1995 when the first plan was enacted and is credited with significantly increasing enrollment, giving, and alumni involvement in the life of the university. During the mid-1990s Rheims University stakeholders assumed that every initiative undertaken in the strategic plan was mission-based. Therefore, establishing and articulating connections between strategic-planning goals and mission was simply unnecessary. An external consultant helped design the first plan, updated in 2002. In 2008, the university community adopted a third strategic plan that is in its second year of incorporation. During the planning process of this most recent strategic plan, administrators critically analyzed the academic and administrative structure of the university, resulting in a more systematic approach to evaluate progress of the current strategic plan. This new plan claims to be much more quantifiable.

Performance indicators are in place to measure where goals and objectives are being accomplished and where they fall short. A university-wide planning advisory board, consisting of 26 senior administrators, assisted in developing the latest strategic plan in an effort to ensure “buy in.” Considerable attention was paid to creating direct lines to institutional mission and strategic-planning goals in this latest strategic plan and the Office of Mission Integration played a key role in facilitating the plan’s conception.

Participants

The university is organized into four administrative areas, headed by the provost and three vice presidents. Administrative officers report directly to the president. The responsibilities of each area reflect their names: Academic and Student Affairs, Business Affairs/Finance, University Advancement, and Enrollment Services.

The provost is responsible for the university’s central mission of teaching and learning and is assisted in these responsibilities by various deans throughout the institution. The Vice President of Finance administers fiscal programs, security, food service, and the physical plant. The Vice President for University Advancement directs the university’s fundraising programs and communicates its policies and goals to external constituencies. The Vice President for Enrollment Services develops and implements enrollment management (student recruitment, retention strategies, and activities), assisted by the Dean of Admissions, the Director of Student Financial Services, the Registrar, and the Director of Institutional Research. The president is the executive officer of the Board of Trustees and carries final legal authority for daily operational policies and decisions. The president is the chief officer of the entire institution, the official representative of the

university to various groups, and the administrator with overall responsibility for planning, supervising, managing, and evaluating the work of the university.

In total, I invited 15 participants from these five administrative areas of the university to participate in this study. These participants hold positions at the vice president, dean, or director level. Administrative and academic areas represented in my study were from student life, finance, mission, academic affairs (provost), enrollment management, advancement, and the president's office. These administrative officials lead divisions and departments that directly influence strategic-planning goals and maintain commitment to mission throughout the campus.

I conducted this study in two phases. In Phase I, I conducted 60-minute onsite interviews with senior administrators. I audiotaped and transcribed interviews using digital media. In Phase II, I observed on-campus strategic-planning meetings that included a broader range of administrators and faculty members. Similar to the interviews, I conducted observations with strict consideration for research participants, as observation represents a first-hand encounter with the phenomena of interest (Merriman, 1998, p. 94). One hallmark of observation has traditionally been its noninterventionism (Adler & Adler, 1994). Observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their participants. Qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic in essence. It occurs in the natural context of occurrence among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction and follows the natural stream of everyday life.

I collected current strategic-planning documents and analyzed them prior to Phase I and Phase II visits. Qualitative researchers often go to the site of the participants to conduct research, enabling the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual

or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

Researcher's Role

I have 26 years experience in Catholic higher education at three different Catholic colleges; 17 years of this professional experience has been spent at a Lasallian college in various senior-level positions (Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, and Vice President for Enrollment Management). This experience helped me in that I have primary knowledge of the challenges and pressures confronting senior administrators at tuition-driven religiously affiliated institutions. Although I demonstrate considerable expertise to conduct a valid qualitative study, it was important to understand the need to be supervised, trained, and consulted by outside sources who provided objective advice and expertise (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a practitioner, I also participated in seven cycles of strategic-planning design at Catholic colleges from 1995 to the present, and I appreciate how administrators and trustees at Catholic colleges attempt to incorporate mission into strategic-planning goals and initiatives.

I needed to understand that my professional experience and background could create bias and ideological assumptions that I needed to consciously eliminate from the research design rather than consider them a valuable component of it (Maxwell, 2005), Qualitative researchers appropriately self-examine presuppositions and individual assumptions (Mantzoukas, 2005). Objectivity is the basis for the story a researcher is able to tell (Peshkin & Glesne, 1992). It is the strength on which to build one's research and it makes researchers who they are as people and as researchers, equipping them with the

perspectives and insights that shape all they do in their researcher role, from the selection of topic to the emphases they make in their writing. The concept of bias in research is an “antirealist intervention” that provides an excuse for sloppy research (Poses & Levitt, 2000).

In November 2010, I conducted a pilot study at Saint Joseph’s College in Standish, Maine, a mission-driven, highly tuition-dependent Catholic college sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy. The pilot study solidified my decision to pursue my dissertation topic, tested my skills as a qualitative researcher, and assisted in determining participants best suited to provide information for data collection for my dissertation.

Data Collection

In the initial phase of research, I obtained and analyzed strategic-planning documents consisting of two separate strategic-planning cycles conducted over a 10-year period at Rheims University to determine where institutional mission priorities lay. Self-study reports developed for accreditation visits from by the Middle States Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities in the mid 1990s and 2005 were also part of my analysis. A college administrator granted me access to minutes taken at Board of Trustee meetings that were pertinent to my research efforts.

Interviews included structured and unstructured interviews of senior and mid-level administrators at Rheims University. I avoided highly structured interviews in this study. Highly structured interviews do not afford a true participant perspective; they simply get reactions to the investigator’s preconceived notions of the world (Merriman, 1998, p. 74). I interviewed the president, Vice President of Enrollment Management, Vice President of Finance, Vice President of Student Life, Executive Director of Mission,

and the Provost of this Lasallian institution along with the directors of each of these administrative divisions. I aimed to conduct a descriptive study and evaluate how these administrators balanced contradictions between strategic-planning initiatives and mission-related goals at their institution and how they navigate through these contradictions to accomplish divisional responsibilities. To complete this task, after interviewing each administrator separately, I then comparatively analyzed data from their colleagues through the process of triangulation. I attempted to identify how administrators developed strategic-planning goals that take a theoretical approach to strategic planning that was linear, adaptive, or interpretive, or a combination of the three. Triangulation reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations one develops (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to determine how Rheims University develops strategic-planning initiatives that are consistent with articulated mission and how senior administrators at this institution believe institutional policy reflects what it means to be Lasallian by modern definition standards.

I analyzed qualitative data to evaluate how policy makers at this institution developed strategic-planning objectives and how the establishment and execution of these goals allow this institution to successfully follow mission-related initiatives. I collected data directly from site-based interviews with administrators at Rheims University. I used a semi-structured interview process to reveal insightful perspectives from administrators about the strategic-planning process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). I conducted and audio-taped face-to-face interviews with participants.

Observation

Observation methods in qualitative research can assist the researcher in a multitude of ways. Observation provides researchers an opportunity to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with one another, and check how much time is spent on various activities (Schmuck, 1997). Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) believed that the goal for the design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is objective and accurate, given the limitations of the methods.

In my study, I observed policy makers at Rheims University discussing issues of strategic-planning development and execution and gathered data in a natural environment in which participants were engaged in natural behavior (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In contrast, qualitative research conducted through intense or prolonged contact with a field or a life situation are typically normal ones and reflect everyday life of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I observed participants sharing opinions and concerns about their role in the strategic-planning process at Rheims University in the natural setting and evaluated how the mission of the institution was injected into the conversation during these planning sessions.

Data Analysis

Throughout the study I wrote memoranda regularly. Memoranda allow a qualitative researcher to not only capture their analytic thinking about data but also facilitate such thinking, stimulating analytic insights (Maxwell, 2005). After reviewing multiple data sources (interview transcripts, follow-up notes, observation notes, and

physical artifacts) I coded these materials. I used pattern coding in my analysis of data, a way to group summarized sets of data into smaller numbers of set themes and constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I noted patterns and themes that pulled together many separate pieces of data and assisted my attempts to arrive at comparisons and contrasts that determined the conceptual explanation of the case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through interviewing, I also looked for patterns that showed how senior administrators prioritize, formally and informally, a commitment to institutional mission in their daily work-related responsibilities and how these priorities were conveyed to subordinates. Prior to fieldwork, I established a provisional list of codes. The research questions influenced the design of these provisional codes. Patterns focused on strategic planning and commitment to mission; communication with staff members was of primary concern in my initial development of codes. After the first round of participant interviews, I looked for patterns that arose from the raw data from interview responses, which provided threads that tied data together (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and offered a clearer sense of themes in my research.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting the findings. First, all participants who provided perspective on the role of mission and strategic-planning development and execution were senior level administrators or members of the Board of Trustees at Rheims. Students, faculty, alumni, and less experienced administrators with limited policy influence were not included in this study.

Second, participants involved with this study were aware of my personal professional background and experience in the field of higher education. This knowledge may have influenced the way in which participants responded to interview questions.

Finally, the two members of the Rheims' Board of Trustees who participated in this study were both sitting presidents of Lasallian institutions. Although their personal knowledge and understanding of the study's topic provided unique and valuable insight, their responses were not representative of the personal and professional backgrounds of all Board of Trustee members at Rheims University

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how administrators at Rheims University work formally and informally to uphold the institution's mission when external pressures require the development of operational strategies that potentially run counter to institutional ideals and values. In this chapter, I present findings based on the analysis of semi-structured interview data with members of the university's senior administration, with special attention paid to exploring how each administrator remained cognizant of the university's mission as they wrestled with day-to-day responsibilities. I also looked at their level of familiarity with both the university's mission and its current strategic plan. The major focus of this study was also to examine if these administrators consciously used their awareness and knowledge of the university's mission while attempting to accomplish departmental, divisional, and institutional goals.

Emergent Themes

Three main themes were identified in this study:

1. The influence of finances on strategic decision making; this theme relates to how senior administrators and board members placed issues related to finances above the pursuit of mission as well as how they perceived the relationship between strategic planning and mission.

2. Philosophical differences between vice presidents and their managers; this theme focuses on the disjunction among vice presidents, deans, and directors. Theme 2 also consists of three subthemes. Subtheme 1 shows an inconsistent pattern between outward expression of Rheims' commitment to its institutional mission, Subtheme 2 describes the ways administrators implement this mission on a daily basis, and Subtheme 3 relates to how supervisors communicate the relationship between mission and strategic planning to their subordinates.
3. Divergence across campus when balancing mission and strategic-planning goals; this theme focuses on how departments and divisions throughout the university lack proper communication, as each works to maintain balance between mission and the execution of strategic-planning initiatives.

In this chapter, I also include a discussion of historical events that led to high-level decisions made by the Board of Trustees, president, and cabinet members while developing the university's initial strategic plan in order to illuminate how these decisions influenced the administration's ability or inability to balance mission-related goals with strategic-planning objectives. I present interview excerpts to illustrate examples of the potential existence of mission creep taking place at Rheims University.

Overall, participants alluded to the undertone of *mission creep* in the institutional culture. Mission creep, defined as the gradual broadening of the original objectives of a mission or organization, occurs when institutional pursuits move away from their traditional missions (Hartley, 2002). Interviews with participants also revealed that in 2003, Rheims began an ambitious plan to enhance the university's intellectual and

spiritual life through a variety of measures, including enhancing the quality of life in the neighborhood where the campus was located. Some interview participants believed this component of the strategic plan was necessary, given the increased crime rate in the immediate vicinity of the campus and concern that the perception of an unsafe neighborhood was and would continue to be a factor in deterring students from enrolling at Rheims. This challenge also provided an opportunity for the Board of Trustees at Rheims to make a case for the largest investment and development of facilities in the history of the university and eventually led to the school's purchase of commercial space in close proximity to the campus as well as other properties that served the community.

A key component to any Lasallian educational community is a commitment to five core principles set forth by its founder, St John Baptist De La Salle, 300 years ago. One of the five points of Lasallian core principles (Van Grieken, 1999) is concern and commitment to the poor and social justice. Every Lasallian educational institution in the world subscribes to these core principles and uses these core principles to guide its institutional goals and objectives. Accordingly, Rheims was using these core principles in Lasallian mission, which focused on a call to embrace its urban location and overall commitment to the larger community as a rationale to become a regional landlord and real estate development organization. The ultimate goal in the acquisition of these properties, however, was to increase revenues in a manner that extended beyond Rheims's traditional mission.

Theme 1: The Influence of Finances on Strategic Decision Making

As a Catholic university, Rheims strives to offer, through effective teaching, quality education founded on the idea that one's intellectual and spiritual development align, complement, and fulfill each other. The university has, as its basic purpose, the free

search for truth by teaching its students the basic skills, knowledge, and values they will need for a life of human dignity. The programs at the university also aim to prepare students for informed service and progressive leadership in their communities and to fulfill the immediate and ultimate goals in their lives. As a Christian Brothers university, Rheims continues in the Catholic traditions of the innovative educator John Baptist De La Salle, who founded the Order. The university engages in programs in which students' personal, social, and religious values may take root and in which students mature in attitudes and behavior in all human relationships. The university strives to foster an environment of faith that produces a reciprocal respect among all persons in the community and establishes an atmosphere in which community members may openly bear witness to their convictions on world peace and social justice.

Rheims University wants its faculty, staff, and students to be inspired by the life of De La Salle and to understand the full nature of De La Salle's work and legacy. The university engages the community on the development of structures that will advance the university's Lasallian and Catholic heritage, enabling students to explore the connections between faith and life. By doing so, the university demonstrates its commitment to service to others (*Will to Excel*, 2007). According to Morpew and Hartley (2006), mission statements have been ubiquitous in higher education, with strategic-planning goals predicated on their formulation. A clear and distinct mission helps distinguish between activities that conform to institutional imperatives and those that do not (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008). A mission statement is a vision for what an institution does and what it deems important. For Catholic colleges and universities such as Rheims, a mission statement is an opportunity to enforce its Catholic identity (Martinez, 2007)

and links this identity to priorities and goals that are outlined in the institution's strategic plan.

Analysis of respondents' accounts revealed that the influence of finances on strategic decision making was prevalent in that most participants noted this as a major challenge in accomplishing both short- and long-term departmental and divisional objectives. In 1993, during a visit to Rheims University, Brother Luke Salm, FSC,¹ the preeminent American biographer of St John Baptist De La Salle, identified the values derived from De La Salle's compassionate vision that characterize and energize a Lasallian institution. One of these values was service to the poor. Since Brother Luke's visit, in an effort to connect this important aspect of Rheims' mission to the overall goals of the university, the president of Rheims University constantly has reminded community members, during campus-wide convocations and other public forums, that although the economic status of today's students is very diverse, the university remains dedicated to educating all students to lead lives of service, especially to the poor and those on the margins of society (*Will to Excel*, 2007).

Commitment to providing access to students with limited means has not been easy in recent years at Rheims. The increased costs associated with running the university have required the school to raise tuition to extraordinary levels. For example, in the past five years, the full-time cost of attendance for an undergraduate resident student at Rheims increased by 13%, and annual financial aid budgets during this period of time did not keep pace with the increases in tuition, fees, and housing charges. These business-oriented decisions resulted in a philosophical gulf between administrators and board

¹ The abbreviation FSC, appearing after a De La Salle Christian Brothers name, stands for the name of the Institute which in Latin is spelled out as *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum*. The English translation of *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum* is Brothers of the Christian Schools.

members. Some members of the administration have complained that the board was being ignorant and shortsighted about Lasallian mission and expressed frustration in how finances drive most major decision-making strategies at the university. For example, the Vice President of Mission, who came from the faculty and had spent less than a year in this inaugural position, discussed this issue in her interview:

My experience so far is that the team [cabinet] is much more focused on nuts and bolts than on qualitative stuff. I don't think that's bad. I just think that every team meeting starts out with enrollment reports and budget reports and a lot of times you don't get beyond that. Those are obviously the two big things at a university. I think there is a real effort amongst the team to try and understand how everybody else is bringing mission into their work; but when the conversation takes place, it kind of happens on an ad hoc basis and it never ends up on formal meeting agendas.

Commenting on the financial influence in decision making on a daily basis, most respondents believed that contrary to public perceptions in recent years, bottom line financial issues were consistently the university's priority on most strategic matters and commonly took precedence over mission-related goals. Publicly, the university has gone to great lengths in the past decade to develop its public image with strong emphasis on its Lasallian heritage. The university even retained an outside brand consultant to develop a 75-page long "Brand Book" that was used internally to ensure consistency in promoting the university's image to external audiences and to describe ways in which Lasallian heritage plays a role in meeting educational objectives of the university.

I found, after analyzing strategic-planning documents from 2003 to the present, that administrators and board members who were responsible for crafting this plan always placed mission above operational goals that had financial drivers at their core. This was evident in the way in which the strategic-planning document is laid out and prioritized. The university's mission statement is prominently formatted in the document that precludes all strategic initiatives and is interwoven into all of Rheims' goals. It is apparent that the authors of the document wanted readers to understand the important role of Lasallian influence in all matters relating to strategic decision making:

Rheims University Mission Statement. Rheims University, dedicated in the traditions of the Christian Brothers to excellence in teaching and to concern for both ultimate values and for the individual values of its students, is a private Roman Catholic University committed to providing a liberal education of both general and specialized studies.

In the interviews, several participants held similar opinions about the secondary role that Rheims' mission held in connection to their work and to their professional contributions to the university, expressing frustration at how much influence finances had on day-to-day decision making, consistent with the concerns outlined in Theme 2. These opinions also represent a direct contradiction to the intended role of mission in the execution of strategic-planning goals and are contrary to the school's intention of making mission the root of all strategic-planning goals and objectives. Diane, the Director of Student Life, addressed this point when asked for an opinion of the Board of Trustees' focus on operational issues, decision making, and strategic-planning development:

It's across the board. It is all of those things; then there's certainly a financial issue given the last four years we've been through. A good part of our meetings address some sort of enrollment-related issue and our budget issues and our property and facility issues and that's all kind of essential stuff that leads to the [financial] bottom line. Here we see potential evidence connecting the expansion of the campus in 2008 and the impact this decision has created for administrators attempting to achieve goals outlined in the strategic plan.

There appears to be a constant give and take in administrative decision making between certain mission-related goals and implementation of the strategic plan when finances are mixed into the equation. The root of this strain can be traced back to 2009 after the university expanded the campus and took on additional debt burden to finance the project, ultimately resulting in the need to control expenditures and create additional revenue-generating opportunities. Diane's observation also exemplifies how these prior mission-related decisions led to unintended consequences in later years, which now require members of the administration to carefully balance the delicate relationship between remaining mission-driven concerns when institutional financial resources are scarce.

The board's apparent fixation on enrollment issues is connected to the university's heavy dependency on tuition dollars. A point of emphasis throughout the current strategic plan is the need to increase revenue through increased enrollment and targeted financial aid techniques. Maintaining a mission-related focus on decision making appears not to be a priority during board level discussions. Almost 100% of revenue generation at the university comes from tuition dollars. The board, through the president,

is consistently reminding the Rheims community that the organization is a critical asset and that strong fiscal management and responsibility by budget directors is crucial in order to advance the goals of the university. For instance, a director within the Enrollment Management Division described the dilemma of maintaining balance between mission and strategic-planning implementation this way: “Mission comes with a cost. We all get that; but I also know if I go over my budget trying to keep up with mission, there will be hell to pay.” This director was appreciative of the role of mission at the university but was more concerned about his fiscal responsibilities, alluding to the fact that going over his budget will not be received favorably from the vice president who oversees his division. His emphasis on the need to stay in budget because failure to do so would upset his vice president is also an example of the inconsistent message commonly sent from vice presidents to their directors as directors work to maintain balance between mission and strategic planning goals. Tom, a senior administrator from the Finance Division, expressed his frustration with cost containment and potential inconsistencies between mission and strategic planning in his work:

I don't know if as a community or as an organization, that we really ever talk about mission and where we are going. My issue is if you're a Lasallian school and you're charging \$50,000 there should be some discussion about that. I recognize as a private university that we have to cost a certain amount and we obviously can't be free to serve everyone, but the question I ask—Are we doing everything we can to keep our costs low and within reach of low-income students?

The apparent contradiction that this senior administrator observed between Rheims' high cost of attendance and the impact of high tuition on the university's neediest students appeared to be very real and was brought up in discussions with other respondents. The attempt in 2009 to increase enrollment and create additional revenue streams was at play, resulting from the strategic decision that may potentially impact mission-related enrollment goals. In order to meet enrollment and overall revenue goals in 2009 as part of the strategic plan, the university was compelled to change the way in which financial aid was distributed to undergraduates and develop a new strategy intended to appeal to low-need students by shifting funds within the school's financial aid/scholarship budget away from need-based grants and towards merit-based scholarships. This strategy was intended to ultimately increase the number of students enrolling at Rheims with lower financial needs, requiring less of an investment in financial aid dollars for the university. However, this strategy was not in concert with meeting the financial needs of a large percentage of students in high need. Rheims' outreach goals had focused on low-income students in the past. As illustrated in Tom's interview, the majority of senior administrators who participated in the study felt frustrated by the university's reluctance to address the issue. The president, however, pointed to the realities involved with funding high-need students with limited a limited financial aid budget, explaining that even though the primary purpose of Lasallian colleges and university a century ago was to provide education to the poor, this level of commitment is no longer realistic:

If the Lasallian mission of this university is defined by whom we educate and specify it by economic class, which in the traditional formulation of

the brothers we would train, we were founded to teach schools gratuitously and to teach gratuitous schools for the poor. If we held ourselves to that literal standard, we [the De la Salle Christian Brothers] probably couldn't run colleges and universities in the United States.

The university's sticker price was a common point of contention with all interview participants and each had difficulty rationalizing such a high cost of attendance when the university's mission was primarily focused on providing access and opportunity to needy students. According to Frank, who was charged with student financial aid, a lack of financial resources had a direct impact on his work, as his department attempted to integrate mission-related goals with strategic-planning objectives and he and his staff worked to offer financial aid awards to high-need families with a limited financial aid budget.

My translation of Lasallian mission is providing that attention to all of our students, regardless of where they fall on the academic spectrum, and that everyone gets that—security guards, the admissions folks, the faculty—everyone understands that. So in that regard I would say absolutely. The part that I know I have a lot of off the record discussions with folks on the campus about is how you balance the mission towards those less fortunate and a \$52,000 tuition and room and board price tag, especially in the financial aid process so it becomes a little bit more difficult with that type of balancing act. Our biggest challenges are costs. Number one is cost of attendance, for the type of student that enrolls in Rheims and the type of student who can afford Rheims is sometimes off kilter a bit.

He further explained that the balancing act between serving the disadvantaged while also maintaining financial stability has become a constant struggle that senior administrators at Rheims grapple with on a daily basis.

In summary, most senior administrators ($n = 12$) described the high cost of attending Rheims strictly on the basis of sticker price and did not take into consideration the high percentage of students that also received need-based financial aid and merit-based scholarships. However, a small number of administrators ($n = 3$) did express an understanding that a high percentage of students received financial aid from Rheims and that very few students actually paid the listed tuition price. These were administrators that worked primarily in the Offices of Admissions and Financial aid. This misread of policy led to inconsistent attitudes about the role of cost at the university and its connection to institutional mission among divisions.

Theme 2: Philosophical Differences between Vice Presidents and Managers

Participants described that the disconnection between institutional mission and strategic-planning execution occurred because the individuals to whom they reported did not truly appreciate the challenge in remaining consistently mission-centered in their decision-making patterns. Mid-level administrators at the director or dean's position most commonly noted the disconnect between themselves and their bosses, resulting in a high level of frustration. For example, in spite of being supportive of institutional mission, directors and deans indicated that their vice presidents were not completely cognizant of how challenging and unrealistic it was to remain mission-centered at Rheims while meeting strategic-planning objectives, especially when goals were driven by finances.

In particular, a director within the Enrollment Management Division described the strategic plan as not being a living document and not a document with any real meaning;

“It was ultimately written by the former Vice President for Enrollment Management with little input from subordinates.” This director also mentioned that the strategic plan was never discussed within the department nor was it used as a decision-making guide, leaving the impression that strategic-planning directives were formed at the university’s highest administrative levels and given to director-level administrators to execute without consultation. This director provided the following response to my questions about the connection of strategic planning and mission that demonstrated how resigned to this fact she felt: “Strategic planning issues that coincide with mission really never filter down from above. It is really just a shelf kind of thing, which is a shame, but there really is nothing I can do about it.”

I noticed a high level of frustration throughout conversations with director-level participants; they repeatedly mentioned having had little to no conversation with the vice president to whom they reported about the need to connect operating goals with mission. A member of the Enrollment Management Division provided insight into how the current strategic plan was designed and how the implementation of goals was presented to the administration:

The *Will to Excel* was really written by a small group of people. The approach was very top down and was not the organic plan certain people within the administration want others to think it is. The info was basically brought into a room of working teams and we all rubber stamped what was pretty much already written. People were surprised to read some of the things in the document when it came out and because of the plan’s

structural deficiencies, it was really not liked by the community, especially the faculty.

The Vice President of Advancement also expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support he received from the president and the Board of Trustees regarding mission integration and offered insight into how mission-related matters were discussed but never measured in a manner comparable to strategic-planning initiatives.

I don't think mission has a high level of support from the president. I mean I just don't. At the board level and in VP meetings they/we never talk about [mission]. I never see them debate; I see the discussion go on at the board meetings, but there are no metrics of what we are looking at and really no understanding of what mission is.

My interview with two members of the Board of Trustees supported the Vice President of Advancement's comments that mission integration was not a priority for the Board of Trustees. These responses are unique and insightful because both of these board members are current presidents at other Lasallian institutions and both are personally in tune with the role of mission in Lasallian higher education. These board members also described their experience working with their boards at their institutions when responding to my questions. One board member stated:

I think the board at Rheims is like the boards at a lot of Catholic and Lasallian institutions in that everyone would tell you that they are committed to mission, but what they mean by that might not be the same criteria used by all members amongst the board. I think on our board there is a real division between those that think Rheims should be aggressively

pursuing a line of becoming more suburban and richer and keeping up with the Joneses as are some other schools in the city and seeing a rise in our SAT scores as well as in our ability to attract a greater number of less needy students. There are also those that believe in the commitment to minister to the Lasallian mission even if it means that Rheims becomes a less prestigious operation than others want it to be.

As such, this rift at the board level also carried over to the administration when administrators wrestled with the challenge of being mission-centered at an institution that relies heavily on tuition revenues to meet institutional operating needs. Participants indicated that mission-centered decisions commonly did not receive priority over decisions that impact institutional operating needs. The Vice President for Enrollment Management offered interesting insight on this matter:

Is the board too bottom line oriented? Yes, and I think those voices are pretty strong and they are the group saying, “no margin, no mission.” They are entirely focused on margin and think that their job as board members is to make Rheims as strong as possible. That’s why they say we are going to drive those SATs up and that if you don’t have the higher *U.S. News* rankings the school is going to go in the tank and there will be no mission; but if you say to them mission should come first, they don’t get the point that maybe your mission isn’t to keep rising in *U.S. News and World Report*, but maybe it’s a whole different reality emerging around you that you need to be responsive to. There is very little of that kind of conversation going on at the board level that I do not think requires so

much attention. This is important but so are many other non-monetary issues.

This comment reflects how the board considers the importance of mission in their deliberations. When the pursuit of mission comes at financial expense, the university administration often face challenges incorporating mission-centered goals into strategic-planning discussions. The Vice President for Enrollment Management indicated that when mission-related plans drain financial resources, the board is reluctant to support these types of initiatives and goes on to provide a different and somewhat contradictory perspective on this point as to how enrollment goals are the main focus of all cabinet-level discussions:

I have learned in my short period of time here that enrollment is really our number one priority. It seems like everything I discuss at the cabinet level is centered around the number and how we get there. I do think this is important, but what will be more important is what we do with students when they arrive here to live our mission. I don't have a good answer for that right now because we really never get around to discussing outcomes.

Divergent viewpoints on strategy often exist between Admissions and Financial Aid Offices that are brought together under an enrollment management model in form but not substance in that one office merely has operational oversight of the other. Commonly an office of admissions sets its goals on the number of new students enrolled at the institution, whereas the financial aid office simply sets its goals with an emphasis of staying within a given budget (Scannell & Kurz, 2005). This phenomenon appears common at Rheims and may be detrimental to leadership's ability to articulate

institutional priorities in a way that provides greater clarity to director level administrators who are unaware of the institution's ultimate goals and their individual roles in achieving these goals. For Irene, a Student Life professional and student advocate, her response to this issue started off as almost apologetic in tone:

We can't take everybody who needs this education because in a contemporary mission, when you have the haves and the have nots like we do, the reality is, at the end of the day we are a business and the business has to live so that it can continue providing and that's very natural.

Irene's commentary on this issue is comparable to the same concerns expressed by other participants, particularly by those in Enrollment Management and Student Life positions that consistently refer to Rheims' commitment of access to students of limited means. There is also an understood reality by administrators, however, that as a tuition-driven institution with a small endowment, in order to meet this particular mission-related goal, sacrifices need to be made in other areas of the strategic plan.

The administrator interviewees provided examples of strategies they developed to remain mission-centered in their work. These strategies included off-site meetings with their staffs at the end of each academic year to evaluate how successful each department was at meeting goals that were both strategic and mission-centered. I also had the impression these meetings offered an opportunity for staff members to vent frustrations with deans or directors. I did not, however, get a clear sense of how information from these meetings was passed up the command chain to vice presidents or whether vice presidents were even aware that these meetings were taking place annually at the

departmental level. One director stated that these meetings provided her with a good opportunity to keep her “finger on the pulse” of mission-related issues.

Organized anarchies. Existence of organized anarchies traits are a subtheme of Theme 2. Mid-level managers described Rheims in a manner consistent with Cohen, Olsen and March’s (1974) organized anarchy theory. Organized anarchies are organizations comprised of people who make decisions in different ways and to different degrees. In the case of Rheims University, development of policy decisions that impact the relationship between strategic-planning goals and mission are made at the presidential, vice presidential, and Board of Trustee level. The execution of these goals, however, is done at the director level; and directors do not appear to have influence on policies at the developmental stage, which has led in some cases to resentment between vice presidents and the directors that report to them. For example, when asked about the influence he had in the development of the current strategic plan being used by the university, the Director of Financial Aid responded as follows:

In the past five years I had zero influence on designing strategic plans for my area. That was basically written by the Vice President for Enrollment Services, and he said here it is after everything was done and our marching orders were in place.

In organized anarchies, decision making is often inconsistent. Participants prioritize decisions on the basis of how much a problematic issue matters to the decision maker rather than how much the issue matters to the organization as a whole. Instituting change in an organized anarchy is difficult because not all issues matter to everyone within the organization all the time, and decision makers tend to rely on the status quo.

Administrators at Rheims also do not always accept the fact that mission-related goals are typically ambiguous and uncertain.

Uncertainty of mission stewardship. Since *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Catholic higher education leaders and their associations have contributed to a wide range of mission-supporting initiatives. Individual campuses and their sponsoring religious communities have increased the profile of sponsored initiatives designed to increase mission leadership capacity. Among the mission strategies being employed, a growing number of Catholic colleges and universities are appointing mission leaders to provide campus support to the integration of Catholic mission or the sponsoring religious community's charism (James et al., 2010). In 1986, at the 41st General Chapter of the Brothers of Christian Schools, Superior General Brother John Johnson began a national dialogue that addressed the growing phenomenon American Lasallian colleges and universities were facing, which was a diminishing number of Brothers serving as faculty and administrators in their schools and an increasing number of lay people beginning to fill roles commonly held by Christian Brothers. The Chapter saw this integration of Brothers and lay people as a positive development that would enhance the overall quality of their schools and of their service to the Church (Tidd, 2009). These lay associates were formally defined as "partners" who shared the Brothers' mission in its multiple, educational, catechetical, apostolic, and professional aspects. The Brothers also felt as if these lay partners were people who would feel the call to deepen the character, spirituality, and Lasallian communion (Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2000).

Considering that mission integration with lay partners at Lasallian colleges and universities had been prominently discussed throughout the Order for three decades, it

was surprising to learn that the Office of Mission was created only in the past year at Rheims, and the position of Executive Director of Mission was also newly formed and just recently added to the university's cabinet. Of the six Lasallian colleges and universities in the United States, four have established mission-leader positions at the vice presidential level; and one incorporates mission into their Vice President of Student Life's administrative responsibilities. Rheims appears to be taking a tepid approach, in comparison to their peer group, toward defining the role of a chief mission officer. Participants expressed uncertainty as to the functions of the Executive Director of Mission and her influence on the Rheims community and with the responsibilities she will perform on daily basis. When asked how the Office of Mission would provide stewardship for Lasallian mission at the university, the executive director replied as follows:

I'm developing, which may be the wrong word, I'm tweaking how to steward mission throughout campus. The Office of Mission will work with all the other VPs because really, everybody needs to be a steward. I mean if [the board and president] think one person can do this for the whole university, they're going to be very disappointed. I said to someone a couple of weeks ago, you know, I'm not the prayer person; I'm not the person, if you're here and need a prayer that says the prayer, that's not really what I do. There are other folks who can do it and I'm happy to take my turn but I'm hoping to provide more than just this one function for the university.

An obvious challenge for the Executive Director of Mission would be to differentiate her role from that of the Director of Campus Ministry and to emphasize to the Rheims community that this new office's responsibilities will focus on maintaining mission focus at the university in all activities, both administrative and academic.

The Dean of Students, who is also an alumnus of the university, discussed mission stewardship in these terms:

From my own personal experience, I arrived here as a freshman in college.

We never used the term *mission* and it wasn't in the student culture and I think it wasn't in the university culture. I do think it was in the Brothers culture, but with the advent of Lasallian thinking, as opposed to Christian Brothers thinking, and the intention of the Brothers community to involve more people, it has filtered down and yeah, I would say in the early 1990s we just had signs all over the place that said it's everybody's job, and we were speaking of mission and students so I think the issue has grown to where we find ourselves today.

Responsibility for mission and the important role that mission plays in administrative decision making was apparent to the study participants. How the role of mission is introduced and how it is emphasized to various constituencies throughout the university is inconsistent and open to interpretation in some instances. All participants made it clear that they understood their role in the stewardship of mission at the university. They firmly believed that they consistently prioritized mission in major decisions that positively impacted and strengthened their individual commitments to

institutional mission. For example, The Vice President of Finance discussed some of his decisions that disregarded cost and prioritized mission:

As Vice President of Finance and CFO, I propose things on a business model standpoint that is not just Lasallian. Here's a simple example. We have a \$12–13 million dollar food service operation. This past summer I recommended we implement an outsourcing of that dining program. Some did not think that was Lasallian because you got a number of employees that have been here for hundreds of years. You have 167 employees that were impacted by that decision. We negotiated what I thought was a Lasallian package and we kept them all; we gave them the same benefits and we grandfathered our tuition benefit. This was a very expensive option but one the university thought was important to its mission.

The Vice President of Finance acknowledged a commitment to institutional mission taking priority over a strategic-planning initiative, even though the end result was more costly to the university. This instance highlights how strategic planning differs from a school or organization not fundamentally driven by its mission, when compared to a mission-driven institution such as Rheims. The university's strategic-planning positioning statement noted that Rheims is a dynamic educational community shaped by Lasallian and Catholic values, a deep respect for each individual, and a belief that intellectual and spiritual development go hand in hand. Although, in this case, the decision to retain employees who had been part of the Rheims community for many years negatively impacted institutional finances, reconciliations with these employees was justified because the final outcome was consistent with Rheims's Lasallian mission.

The Blue Book. In my interviews, participants were asked about where they go to reference the role of mission in their professional responsibilities. I was interested to know if there was a guide that members of the Rheims community could follow or a person with whom they could consult on campus to assist in their efforts as Lasallian educators. Some participants said they relied on their vice presidents to help them understand the role of mission in their work, as was the case with the Dean of Students:

“Dr, Smith, who is our VP, has charged us to use the *Will to Excel* to understand goals, objectives, assessment, semester reporting, and annual reporting.”

Others talked about not needing a document but just knowing what “Lasallian was all about.”

Only two of the 15 participants mentioned the university’s *Blue Book*, a 100-page document that provides context for the influence of mission in the educational experiences of undergraduates at Rheims. In 2008 this small booklet was written with the intent of introducing Rheims to new students. It described the university’s founding, the story of John Baptist De La Salle, and the beginning of the Christian Brothers. The university published an expanded second edition in 2009 that was distributed to new faculty and students in Fall 2009. *The Blue Book* outlines and describes the university’s mission statement, the connection between Lasallian spirituality and Lasallian mission, and the way students can benefit from incorporating Lasallian mission in their personal educational experiences. According to the booklet’s author, the document intended to lead to a deeper understanding of the university, its mission, and its values. However, the

Rheims University administration was not included in the distribution of the Blue Book. Although Rheims University administrators were probably not intentionally excluded from the distribution of *The Blue Book*, this oversight may be an indication that the university feels students and faculty require a different type of introduction to the role of mission in their work and in their studies. The Rheims administration is in continual discussion about the role of mission and its connection to operating decisions made on a daily basis whereas the faculty and student body are not. Creating *The Blue Book* may be an opportunity to provide information to administrators and faculty members about the influence of mission on the work they do.

Theme 3: Divergence when Balancing Mission and Strategic-Planning Goals

Documents and archives on Rheims University and members of the Rheims community frequently mention service to the poor. In a letter dated January 5, 2009, the president of Rheims University reminded the community that “the importance of community” and “service to the poor” are two of the four values that define the university’s educational heritage. These values are also hallmarks of Lasallian core principles that specifically call upon educational institutions to provide human and Christian education to youth, especially to the poor and marginalized, and for professionals (faculty and administrators) to act together and by association for the service of mission (Van Grieken, 1999).

During his interview with me, the president made frequent mention of service to the poor and seemed to tie this aspect of mission to the *Will to Excel* more than any of the other respondents. However, the president was also very aware of the conflicts that may arise as the university works to maintain balance between mission and the school’s

operating needs, especially as these needs are connected to practical challenges facing many comparable colleges and universities nationally:

Maintaining the current nature of our student body is the most complicated challenge to our strategic plan. Practically everywhere you look within the strategic plan there are aspirations and upgrades built in. Well, an institution like Rheims lives, and in this we are not alone, we live largely off tuition; we have a very modest endowment and certainly not big enough to replace all of the financial things we use. I mean, to be a higher education institution in the United States is incredible. You have to keep improving yourself, you have to keep the technology up to date, you have to keep your facilities up to date if not highly amenitized, you have to have a good product, and that is in some tension with the traditional view of things that you educate an economic class that is mixed and can't all be very financially needy. If we are going to be tuition-dependent, then we need people with low to no financial need in that mix.

This response is somewhat contradictory to the president's earlier comments about maintaining an institutional commitment to providing access for students of limited financial means. However, the president provided a realistic rationale for this viewpoint that spoke to the greater challenge of remaining mission-centered at an institution with a modest endowment and a heavy reliance on tuition revenue:

I'd say it's not as though any one part of the strategic plan is more complex than the other to achieve. It's the cost of doing business that brings a high level of pressure. I think some fundamental assumptions of

the institution has built into its genes and into the institution that we have to keep asking ourselves is—should we have higher aspirations, should we reconfigure the view of who it is that forms a student population?

Shouldn't there be more students with more means, and should we try and move ourselves into a position where we get more economic diversity and where we have plenty of money with an unbelievably racial and ethnic diversity? We have to keep asking ourselves—are we being attentive enough to presenting a package that allows us to bring some more of the good students who would be less dependent on financial aid into this mix for everybody's good?

According to Weisbrod et al. (2008), the pursuit of mission requires a school to use student financial aid policy strategically, not simply as a means of pursuing maximum revenue and accepting whatever mix of student results occur. Instead, mission-driven schools should use tuition and financial aid policies to attract certain types of students, even when doing so requires forgoing some revenue. Rheims' commitment to its mission-driven commitment of providing opportunities to first-generation students has come at a cost, which is evidenced by the amount of financial aid targeted to low- and middle-income students each year. In the fall of 2008, 34% of enrolled undergraduates at Rheims were the first in their families to attend college, and 93% of the total undergraduate student population received some form of institutional financial aid (Economic and Social Impact Report, 2009). Rheims' high dependence on tuition revenue makes awarding this level of financial aid a true commitment to its educational endeavors and is consistent with the strategic use of financial aid to meet mission-related

objectives. The president recognized the variety of pressures felt throughout the institution and the overwhelming task of meeting the university's many and often conflicting institutional goals. The president's tone and demeanor indicated resignation that, due to Rheims's commitment to its mission, especially in relation to the university's commitment to providing access to underserved students, there would never be an ideal balance between mission and all of the strategic operating needs of the institution. For a Lasallian university, this revelation is notable, suggesting a potential challenge faced by other colleges and universities sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers in the United States as they work to achieve a common mission-centered goal of providing educational opportunities to large numbers of financially needy students, especially underserved minorities.

Mission and strategic undergraduate recruitment initiatives. This subtheme describes the relationship between mission and strategic undergraduate recruitment initiatives. In recent years, recruitment of first-generation, underserved students has been the focus of strategic planning at Lasallian colleges and universities nationally. American Lasallian colleges and universities have worked hard to establish outreach activities designed to attract first-generation, underserved minority applicants due to the Order's mission-related emphasis of providing educational opportunities to the poor and disadvantaged. At Rheims, the total number of minority students was 28% in 2007, higher than many peer institutions the university used to compare enrollments, such as Widener University (22%), Villanova University (18%), St Joseph's University, PA (14%), Loyola University, MD (11%), and Scranton University (8%). The same year, 22% of incoming freshmen were federal Pell Grant recipients and came from households

with incomes below the national median of \$46,326, indicating these families had little to no ability to pay tuition. Additional comments from the president, relating to affordability and access for students, speaks to the difficulty the university faces as it maintains outreach initiatives designed to attract high percentages of high-need students.

When you are educating an economic class that is very much on the margins, they can't all receive huge financial aid packages when you are as tuition-dependent as we are. If we are going to remain this tuition dependent, then we need other people in the mix who are receiving less financial aid and paying higher levels of tuition to make everything balance. This isn't easy.

These comments also highlighted the need to consider a strategy aimed at admitting more low-need or full-paying students who require less financial aid and generate greater levels of revenue for the university.

At the institutional level, attitudes and opinions relating to recruitment strategies of undergraduate students differ greatly among divisional leaders. These differences, in recent years, have influenced strategic decision making that resulted in the university struggling to meet its enrollment goals. For example, the university's financial aid model was changed in the middle of the 2012 admissions cycle because the Vice President of Finance believed revenue goals were falling short of desired outcomes and were not yielding anticipated results. The following response from a vice president from the Academic Affairs Division spoke to this incident, providing context for the disconnectedness that exists throughout the Rheims senior administration when mission integration and strategic planning conflict.

Last year we missed our [enrollment] goal by 42 students and VP1 and I and VP2 were on the phone in February. VP2 was in Asia doing something and we were on the phone together and a decision was made between VP 1 and VP2 that we were going to cap financial aid, unlike past years, for all our 5's and I said, and still recall to this day saying, I hope you guys are right because if you're not right, we're not making our class. They weren't right. We didn't yield the way we needed to. I think the reason why I brought that up was because we learned from that and we were conflicted about it. We didn't all agree with each other but I didn't criticize it. I didn't walk out of there after that phone call and then I didn't go back in and say I told you guys you should never have done that.

This vice president's comments exemplify disconnectedness, resulting in a negative outcome that impacted the entire Rheims community and led to the resignation of the Vice President of Enrollment Management. Conflicts between mission and strategic-planning goals were present and provided insight into how dependent Rheims has found itself in recent years on tuition revenue. The provost, who was an active participant in this incident, explained how conflict among vice presidents impacted all parts of the Rheims University campus:

When VP1 refers to "capping fives," he is referring to limiting the amount of financial aid offered to the most financially neediest applicants and lowest achieving students in the Rheims applicant pool. From a mission-related standpoint, these students, primarily first-generation and underserved minority applicants, fall into categories that the university

claims to prioritize in their mission-related recruiting strategies. VP 1 and VP2 felt that limiting the amount of financial aid offered to five-level students would not have resulted in a shortfall of enrolled students but rather was an attempt to enroll an optimal number of students with less financial aid ultimately generating more revenue for the university.

This is a good example of tension that arises between administrators who are directly involved with instituting policies that impact initiatives that influence both the university's mission and the university's strategic-planning goals. Some vice presidents are arguing for the need to offer more financial aid to high-need students in order to enroll them and increase the size of the freshman class, while others are making the case that Rheims simply cannot afford to fund these students at the levels necessary to make attendance possible. Ultimately, the final decision will result in either an increase to the university's tuition discount rate by making more financial aid available to students than was previously budgeted or in limiting the amount of financial aid awarded. Offering less financial aid will impede high need students from enrolling at Rheims. Less financial aid offered, however, will have a positive impact on revenue goals.

Expansion of the Rheims campus. Expansion of an organization's capital or its size is usually a good sign in many business situations; but when it comes to funding and operating a nonprofit institution, expansion beyond an organization's mission and goals can be the negative indicator of progress. This example of mission creep might lead to organizational misalignment and misuse of valuable resources (Kobak, 2013).

Throughout the study, several participants referred to two major executive-level decisions made in 2007 that required a substantial financial commitment from the university. Both

decisions involved the acquisition of property close to the Rheims campus in a depressed, rundown section of the city. The first decision resulted in the purchase of five acres of land from another educational institution. The second decision involved the purchase of a hospital for \$10 million. The two purchases added an additional 129 acres to the Rheims campus and increased the size of the campus by almost 30%. The president and Vice President of Finance noted these purchases were evidence of Rheims's commitment toward its mission of enhancing its visibility and presence among the local community, which, along with mission integration, was one of the six goals highlighted in the university's strategic plan. Underutilized space in the hospital facility was converted into a "West Campus," and the hospital itself was able to remain in operation and continue to serve the external community's health needs. It is important to note that this decision, which was considered an attempt by the senior administration to blend targeted elements of strategic planning and mission integration, created a strain on the university's already limited operating budget and created concerns throughout the campus community as to whether the university could afford to take on such a massive financial commitment, considering its already stretched operating needs. One vice president who opposed the decision to take on this extra debt burden responded as follows:

Our CFO had an entrepreneurial dream that this decision would result in opening streams of revenue that would benefit the university's bottom line by providing space that could be rented to researchers doing cutting edge research. This never happened. Instead we are now saddled with an old building that has a ton of vacant space and requires a lot of maintenance. I

never felt this was a decision that lent itself to our mission but was more a decision to control who we wanted our neighbors to be.

The administration also thought of this decision as a strategy to enhance the campus through a strategic expansion of the university's physical plant as well as to achieve the strategic initiative of managing enrollment. This initiative called on the university to develop a five-year integrated enrollment and revenue plan to increase steady enrollment and revenue and achieve optimal university enrollment by 2013. The plan also established new freshman enrollment targets of 875–900 annually with the hope of ultimately increasing overall university enrollment by 9–10.6% by 2013. It is also worth mentioning that the Rheims 2006 annual report from the Division of Enrollment Management noted that the university had undertaken a strategic initiative that year to extend its recruitment initiatives beyond Rheims's traditional local markets.

This expansion seemed to be an attempt to extend outreach activities, to increase undergraduate enrollment in anticipation of campus expansion. Although in 2006 applications from these secondary markets increased, conversion percentages of accepted applicants from these markets were lower than expected and brought the university's overall conversion rate down to unprecedented levels. In subsequent years conversion percentages in each year's freshman class continued to drop (see Table1).

Table 1

*Applications Received, Acceptances, Acceptance Rates, Enrolled Students, Yield Rates
2009-2013*

	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
Number of applicants	5,597	5,839	5,696	5,963	5,807
Number accepted	4,026	4,180	4,208	4,384	4,370
Percent accepted	71.9%	71.6%	73.9%	73.5%	75.3%
Enrolled freshmen	948	916	902	858	876
Percent enrolled	23.5%	21.9%	21.4%	19.6%	20.0%

Since the start of the university’s most recent strategic plan, freshman applications have sporadically increased on an annual basis. The overall number of enrolled freshmen fell slightly below the targeted goal in 2012 but rose again to 876 in fall 2013. The institutional acceptance rate also rose as the percentage of students offered admission who chose to enroll at Rheims declined. Application activity and acceptance rates have been relatively consistent over the past five years. Yield rates have dropped, however, a trend that may be connected to a change in the university’s financial aid policies. Reduction in the amount of financial aid offered to students, in an attempt to increase institutional revenue goals, was reportedly responsible for this policy shift. Reducing financial aid packages was also credited with impeding access to the university for their most needy accepted applicants and contributed to the decline in yield rates.

As shown in Table1, expansion of the university is noteworthy because although growth was strategic in nature and also aligned with goals consistent with the school’s

mission, evidence suggested that the purchase of these properties created a financial strain for the university that has since impeded other initiatives outlined in the current strategic plan. Although this decision came with a significant cost, the move was consistent with mission-related goals at the time that were also strategic in nature. These goals are spelled out distinctly in the *Will to Excel*, the title of Rheims' previous strategic plan:

Rheims University will remain one of the nation's finest Catholic higher education institutions. Our new strategic plan will focus on a Lasallian education rooted in three key dimensions of the Christian Brothers' heritage: Context—our urban location, Practicality—linking theory and practice, the Social ends of learning—commitment to others.

These three dimensions guided the board and president to move ahead with the acquisition of additional campus space and showed a strategic initiative clearly focused on maintaining Lasallian mission. Rheims is located in one of the poorest sections of a major metropolitan region of the United States with a high crime rate and adjoining neighborhoods in need of revitalization. Losing a hospital in this neighborhood with an active emergency room that handles 17,000 patients annually would have been catastrophic for the area. Although the successful acquisition of additional campus space at the time was dubbed mutually beneficial for both the community and especially for the university's growing School of Nursing and Health, the complicated deal added to Rheims' debt burden and placed an unprecedented strain on the school's operating budget. Ten years later many members of the Rheims administration question whether this decision, although noble and consistent with mission, made financial sense. Clearly, this

historic policy decision has had a major impact on the relationship between strategic-planning development and institutional mission at Rheims.

Summary

Strategic planning at Lasallian colleges and universities was undertaken over a decade ago, primarily in response to market pressures stemming from dwindling enrollments and increased operating expenditures. Strategic planning has remained a standard and a regular part of planning and policy making on those campuses, and is credited with literally saving some Lasallian institutions from closing their doors forever. Rheims University has been very much amid the national strategic-planning discussion and is considered somewhat of a model institution in the way in which its plan has been designed in comparison to other Lasallian colleges and universities across the country. Hossler and Kalsbeek's (2009) observation that Catholic colleges and universities should constantly have one eye on market-based realities and one eye on mission-based aspirations while managing tensions between them is a philosophy that is very much in play at Rheims.

Findings suggests that the Rheims University senior administration was under considerable pressure due to a heavy institutional reliance on tuition revenue, coupled with the fact that all of the university's senior administrators had been hired in the past three years and were still adjusting to their individual roles as leaders and mission stewards in the Rheims community. Strategic Initiative 3, Managing Enrollment, called on the administration to develop and implement a five-year integrated enrollment and revenue plan that would provide steady enrollment and revenue growth and achieve optimal enrollment by 2013. However, there is disagreement among the administration as

to whether Strategic Initiative 3 has been met. Some members of the administration felt that although overall enrollment goals were met in terms of numbers, the amount of financial aid being used to accomplish this goal is draining institutional resources, resulting in annual budget shortfalls. It is also worth noting that the vice presidents' views of the relationship between mission and strategic planning differed from those of directors and deans. Although all of Rheims' vice presidents have less than three years of working experience at Rheims and the university's deans and directors have been employed by the institution for a considerably longer time, I found senior administrators tended to have higher levels of optimism when discussing the connection of mission and strategic-planning goals than those participants at the director and deans levels. It is also worth noting that the vice presidents, deans, and directors had limited contact with Board of Trustee members and were rarely asked for opinions from the board or president on mission-related challenges that influenced their administrative duties. The university's president and vice presidents all indicated that the current strategic plan and all mission-related initiatives were clear to those who were implementing them, whereas the university's deans and directors told a different story, demonstrating varying levels of cynicism when discussing the university's true commitment to the Lasallian mission as they viewed this commitment through the lens of their administrative work.

I found that administrators were not unified in how they dealt with challenges presented to them as they worked to balance mission and execution of strategic-planning initiatives. Although discord between administrative units was not apparent, working independently to accomplish departmental and divisional goals was not uncommon. The issue of board and senior-administrative-level decisions that focused on the financial

welfare of the institution at the expense of institutional mission was a theme I explored along with others to gain insight into how administrators balanced the university's operating needs and its committed focus on mission. Rheims' decision to grow its campus by acquiring unprecedented levels of debt at a time when pressures at mission-centered, faith-based institutions, in particular Catholic institutions in the United States, placed a considerable burden on administrators charged with the task of executing the school's strategic plan while simultaneously stewarding its mission. Was the expansion of the Rheims' campus and acquisition of additional properties a good decision that will ultimately make the institution stronger in time? The administration will continue to grapple with meeting strategic-planning objectives without negatively impacting mission-related goals on both an individual and collective basis. .

Analysis of data indicates that the administration is well aware of the way in which their work influences institutional mission. All of the participants I interviewed provided responses that revealed a strong commitment to the university and an understanding of responsibility that each individual shared in executing strategic-planning initiatives intended to make Rheims University fiscally stronger. Some participants, who had worked at both Catholic and secular institutions before coming to Rheims, remarked on the distinctiveness of the Rheims' community and the fact its Lasallian connection makes the school stronger and identifiable to external audiences, while others were concerned that maintaining a commitment to a mission rooted in Lasallian values was simply impossible to sustain if expectations to achieve operating goals over the long haul was also an institutional priority.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between strategic-planning development/execution and institutional mission at Rheims University. This study sought to better understand how administrators at a mission-driven institution wrestle with tensions that arise between goals that are mission-based but aligned with specific strategic planning initiatives. Over the past two decades, Catholic colleges and universities in the United States have begun dialogue on their campuses as to what it means to be Catholic. The struggle with institutional identity is even more complex for those Catholic institutions that were founded and still remain supported by religious orders. In the case of Rheims University, this struggle has created tensions between a continued institutional commitment of enhancing academic quality and developing strategies that address immediate financial needs, such as growing the school's endowment or addressing deferred campus maintenance issues, while at the same time trying to remain true to their Lasallian character.

Summary of the Present Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an understanding of the unique challenges facing Lasallian Catholic colleges and universities in the United States as each works to achieve its mission-centered goal of providing an undergraduate experience that enriches each of its student's cultural, intellectual, social, and spiritual

development while also maintaining an institutional commitment to provide this experience to economically disadvantaged student populations.

Fifteen senior-level administrators with positions that had significant influence on institutional policy participated in the study. The study also included two Board of Trustee members who were presidents at other Lasallian institutions. Participants' professional experience ranged from 15 to 32 years working in higher education. With the exception of two participants, all had either spent their entire careers at Rheims University or came to Rheims from another Catholic university. After conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 senior administrators, two Board of Trustee members and the president of the university in conjunction with strategic-planning documentation, I outlined the challenges currently in place at Rheims University as the administration works to maintain its commitment of remaining mission-centered while addressing important operational needs of the institution that are, in some cases, comparable and in other cases unique to their university.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my study:

- How do administrators navigate mission and strategic-planning goals and objectives at Rheims University?
- How do administrators at Rheims University steer through inconsistencies that exist between mission and strategic-planning goals?
- How does the conflict between mission and strategic planning manifest differently across departments/divisions in the university?

The study offered insight into the influence of mission and its impact on strategic decision making at the university's most senior administrative levels. The study also offered understanding into how the Board of Trustees assisted in the establishment of strategic-planning goals and how board members perceived a connection between mission and strategic planning. Based on the analysis of data, I identified three themes as having the greatest impact on the administration's ability to remain mission-centered while executing strategic-planning initiatives: (a) the influence of finances on strategic decision making, (b) philosophical differences between vice presidents and their managers on how to properly maintain institutional mission while executing strategic-planning initiatives, and (c) divergence across campus when balancing mission and strategic-planning goals.

Each finding is summarized and accompanied by discussion of its connection to the study's theoretical framework and relationship to the literature. Concluding recommendations for continued research, as well as recommendations for policies and procedure development, are also presented.

The Influence of Finances on Strategic Decision Making

The decision to expand the campus in 2005 had a marked influence on strategic-planning development in subsequent years at Rheims University and placed an unprecedented strain on the university's operating budget in the following years. The study revealed that during this period, focus at the Board of Trustee level began to shift from mission centeredness to establishment of the institution's fiscal health; in other words, concern over university finances became an institutional priority in all matters associated with implementation and execution of strategic-planning goals. Dependence

on tuition dollars to meet revenue needs of the institution was a constant concern at the board level. The administration designed plans to increase enrollment and target financial aid differently in order to recruit larger classes with less of an investment in financial aid and scholarship dollars.

According to Keller (1983), before an institution begins to shape an academic strategy, it needs adequate information on which to base decisions, such as student demographic data and forecasts on new and emerging academic programs. Just as a university can be plodding and contentious, it can also be ambitious beyond its means or capabilities. Weisbord et al. (2008) have observed that the mission of higher education simply cannot be accomplished without external funding and new revenue streams. It is for that reason American colleges and universities must constantly pursue new funding opportunities. Rheims saw an opportunity to expand its campus by purchasing land and real estate that had the potential to make the university and some of its academic programs stronger and superior to other competing institutions. This opportunity also allowed the university to maintain control of a space adjacent to its residential campus, an important consideration due to the high crime rate and deteriorating state of the neighborhood in which the school was located.

Expansion of the Rheims Campus

The decision to acquire additional campus space and expand the university's physical plant in 2005 significantly influenced strategic planning and operating expenses at Rheims University. The study indicated that this decision is now met with mixed assessments as to how prudent and necessary the acquisition of additional space and commitment of financial resources has been to the university's goals and mission-related

commitments. At financially fragile universities it is extremely important that every incumbent, from department chairs to deans and up to vice presidents, be able both to demonstrate an understanding of the current strategic directions of the institution and to set aside local interests to support the broader purposes of that plan (Middleton, 2009). Fragile universities are characterized as institutions with limited endowments, strong dependency on tuition, and small reserve funds for unforeseen emergencies that impact campus facilities. Although Rheims does not fit all the criteria associated with Middleton's (2009) definition of a fragile university, some characteristics, such as a high tuition-discount rate and high tuition dependency, do challenge the school's operational needs.

Therefore, it is important to include a wide array of community members in the development of a strategic plan in order to receive buy in and acceptance from the community that will ultimately influence the plan's success or failure.

Catholic college leaders throughout the nation are challenged by the fact that their institutions face very complicated academic, financial, and strategic issues while attempting not only to sustain but also to develop the religious and social missions that make their educational experiences distinct for students in comparison to non-Catholic colleges and universities (Wilcox, 2013)

Over the past two decades, Lasallian colleges and universities, once predominantly led by members of its founding order, the De La Salle Christian Brothers, began to fill senior leadership roles at their institutions with lay people, not all of whom are well versed in Lasallian mission. In response to this change in organizational structure, Lasallian colleges and universities have worked to achieve a high level of shared mission

between their religious communities and lay leaders in an effort to protect the Lasallian identities of their campuses (Castle, 2013).

At American Lasallian colleges and universities, planning for mission, decision making, implementation, and evaluation (Salm, 2006) are all activities consistent with shared mission objectives. Lasallian colleges and universities tend to be highly dependent on tuition revenues, relying on limited endowments when facing financial crisis. In general, Catholic institutions with weak mission-centered cultures and limited connection to their missions in many instances struggle with profitability margin and are often concerned as to whether they can continue to attract sufficient numbers of students (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Catholic institutions in this quandary find themselves struggling to develop plans designed to address their very survival while also working to maintain a commitment to their mission. Balancing priorities may, at times, jeopardize their ability to operate in the manner intended when these schools were founded.

Rheims' dependency on tuition revenues, even at a time when pressure to remain mission-centered in all matters relating to institutional policy, has become challenged at unprecedented levels. Rheims University, like many faith-based, mission-driven colleges in the United States, was inevitably forced to consider strategies that may compromise mission in order to maintain operating needs that come at an escalating cost each year. For instance, advancing the institutional mission of providing opportunities to first-generation, underserved students will sometimes require that these students be admitted at a lower net tuition price (tuition minus financial aid) than other types of student who are willing to pay but would contribute less to the school's overall goals of diversity (Weisbrod et al., 2008). The applicant pool at Rheims includes many students who meet

the university's mission profile such as first generation, underserved, and high need. The great challenge, however, is how many of these students can Rheims afford to admit while at the same time providing high levels of financial aid throughout their matriculation process. Many administrators I interviewed addressed this tension and realize the challenges that exist at the university to provide high levels of funding to students of low socioeconomic backgrounds. There was also universal agreement by Rheims administrators, however, that this mission-related goal would need to be reduced in years to come because the university simply could not sustain its operating obligations if the university's overall financial budget was increased any further.

Departmental/Divisional Differences between Mission and Strategic Planning

In this study, conflict between mission and strategic planning appears to manifest differently across departments/divisions throughout the university, and every division throughout the university prioritizes execution of strategic-planning goals differently. In this respect, Rheims exhibits traits of a loosely coupled organization. In loosely coupled systems, colleges and universities are organizations in which individual elements or departments have high autonomy relative to the larger system, often creating a federated character (Orton & Weick, 1988). Orton and Weick (1988) define a loosely coupled organization as one in which several means can provide the same result, planning lacks coordination and an absence of regulations, and at times very slow feedback takes place. Positive results experienced by loosely coupled organizations include allowing local adaptations and creative solutions to develop, subsystem disintegration can occur without damaging entire systems, and loosely coupled systems can encourage more self-determination by members within an organization. In the case of Rheims University,

administrators commonly took differing and inconsistent approaches towards accomplishing tasks that met the school's operating needs in a manner that was consistent with institutional mission.

Participants differed in their knowledge of how departments and divisions, other than their own, addressed challenges relating to the integration of mission into strategic planning execution. Vice presidents had a better understanding of how their fellow cabinet members addressed this issue because of discussions that took place at monthly cabinet meetings with the president, but deans and directors could only speculate on this issue without first-hand knowledge. When asked what challenges impeded their ability to meet departmental operating needs that are part of Rheims's strategic planning goals, participant responses were similar across departments/divisions they represented.

Role of the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees at Rheims University has the greatest influence on strategic-planning policy. The board literally sets the agenda for the institution on which issues are prioritized and which issues are set aside for discussion at another time. As is the case in most Catholic colleges and universities, responsibility for protecting the institutional mission also falls with the board. Data from this study suggested the Board of Trustees at Rheims understands and appreciates the university's mission and commitment to Lasallian core values. Findings also suggested the board believes it to be their responsibility to monitor, protect, and prioritize the university's financial welfare over mission stewardship. Smith (2000) discussed the need for trustees of Catholic colleges and universities to possess a moral code that should influence all aspects of decision making in order to establish and protect the identity as well as vocation of the

organization. In this regard, trustees are actually the custodians of institutional mission and should be capable of protecting mission-related initiatives, especially those that may be unpopular.

According to Seiver (2014), effective university boards should look at key strategic challenges through the prism of risk and should establish policy, in collaboration with senior administrators, that takes into consideration appropriate levels of institutional risk tolerance. Pelletier (2012) feels that in recent years boards have become less passive, more strategic, more engaged, and more professional in their work. Boards recognize that in order to guide the institutions they are serving they must have a greater understanding of both the institution's operations and its academic culture.

Role of the President

Eckel and King (2004) contend that the ultimate responsibility of a university's Board of Trustees is to hire and delegate much of the school's administrative responsibility for managing the institution to the president, who is charged with providing overall leadership to the institution when developing and executing the institution's mission. Morrill (2003) observes that in order to effectively set directions within a university context, strategic decision making must be collaborative, integrated, and action oriented. In other words, trustees, in concert with the university's president, should be an important voice in the university's strategic conversation.

The president at Rheims reports directly to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees hires the president and evaluates the president's executive performance on an annual basis. The Rheims University president is passionate about the role of mission in everyday administrative life at Rheims. The president does an excellent job articulating

how the university is achieving its goals as a mission-centered institution and where the university is falling short. The president is a conduit between the board and the administration about issues that are directly connected to the strategic plan and is responsible for communicating the board's priorities to the Rheims community.

Role of the Vice Presidents

Vice presidents at Rheims assist in the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan and oversee the complete operation of their divisions in accordance with the direction that has been established in the strategic plan. Vice presidents are also responsible for communicating to deans and directors throughout the campus how each initiative of the strategic plan will be executed and which institutional priorities should receive the most attention during the plan's execution.

Legon's (2014) assertion that university presidents cannot succeed in a vacuum when implementing strategic planning initiatives that are developed at the board level, is accurate and consistent with how strategic planning initiatives are executed at the vice presidential level at Rheims. Hitt and Ireland (2002) define strategic leadership as the effective utilization of resources and Curry (1992) and Kanter (1989) identify a key component of leadership at the vice presidential level when implementing strategy as being able to create incentives and opportunities for stakeholders to become involved in the execution of ideas.

Existing Literature on Strategic Planning in Higher Education

The primary focus of the existing literature on strategic planning in higher education centers on the organizational culture of higher education institutions and how multiple constituents within these organizations work collaboratively to serve a specific

purpose (Hinton, 2012). Higher education historians have considered the “golden age” of American higher education to have taken place between the mid 1950s and the mid 1970s. According to federal demographic counts, the number of full-time undergraduate students increased from 2.5 million in 1955 to 8.8 million in 1974 (Keller, 1983). Beginning in the mid 1970s and early 1980s, all types of colleges and universities in the United States began to experience decreases in enrollments and changes in student demographics. Strategic planning in higher education became viewed as a tool to articulate institutional mission and vision, help prioritize resources, and promote organizational focus (Keller, 1997).

When I spoke to each of the study participants, all were genuinely committed to Lasallian mission and displayed a high level of passion for the work they do. One participant even referred to his work as vocational and was proud to be able to serve an institution committed to its mission. Even though commitment toward mission is pervasive throughout the university, senior administrators lack consistency in their professional dealings with one another when attempting to meet departmental strategic-planning goals that are also mission-based.

Accreditation and Mission

In recent years higher education accrediting agencies have concentrated on the connection between institutional mission and strategic-planning and have established measurable criteria that consider whether an institution’s mission is clear, articulated publicly, and adequately guides the institution’s operations. Holding colleges and universities accountable and requiring schools to provide evidence that connects their institutional mission to outcomes that result from strategic planning also have become a

focal point of the Obama administration's second term. The president's *Plan for a Strong Middle Class and a Strong America* (2013) calls on colleges to be accountable for cost, value, and quality in the overall educational experiences provided to undergraduate students and their families. The plan also recommends setting benchmarks for affordability and student outcomes as criteria for receiving federal student financial aid and is consistent with Rheims' strategic, mission-based commitment of providing opportunities to first-generation, traditionally underserved students.

The mission of Catholic institutions of higher education are much broader than those of their public or nonsectarian counterparts in that these missions are focused on the human person (Burns & Mooney, 2013). This difference makes assessment of mission at Catholic colleges and universities different from those of secular institutions. For instance, Catholic college and university mission statements tend to consider intellectual development of the whole person, service, leadership, and citizenship (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009), whereas secular college and university mission statements do not typically prioritize a need to serve or to provide a student-centered educational experience.

The complexity of missions at Catholic universities often complicates and exacerbates the process of communicating the mission in a manner that allows members of the university to act upon it (Burns & Mooney, 2013). Mission and the pursuit of strategic-planning initiatives frequently compete with one another for financial resources. At Rheims, the cornerstone of the Lasallian mission is a university-wide commitment to make Lasallian education accessible to all who deserve it, to make every effort to be of service to the poor, and to make educational service to the poor an effective priority (Van

Grieken, 1999). However, limited finances and a commitment to providing an education to those students most in need create built-in tensions that constantly challenge members of the institution. These tensions are also consistent with Hartley's (2002) observation that institutional mission statements can ennoble work by explaining to individuals how their efforts contribute to a larger cause, which in turn generates a greater commitment.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Senior administrators and board members share the same goals when developing and executing policies at Rheims to advance the university's mission and support the university's operating needs. There are few formal programs in place, however, that provide opportunities for those throughout the Rheims' community to analyze how the work they do on a daily basis impacts the institution's commitment to its mission.

Recommendation 1. Improve Communication Between Administration and Board of Trustees

Direction for strategic decision making at Rheims University comes from the Board of Trustees with input from the president. Vice presidents are present at board meetings as ex officio members of the board but do not play a role in developing or influencing institutional policies or strategic-planning initiatives. Evidence suggests the board is rarely interested in the role of mission in strategic-planning development, and much of the discussion at board meetings focuses on university-wide financial issues and enrollment. The university's high-tuition dependency and high tuition discount rate contributes to this constant focus on finances with little attention paid to other areas of the institution.

Martin and Samuel (2009) suggest three indicators that categorize institutions under financial stress: (a) tuition discount rates at 35% or higher, (b) tuition dependency

of more than 85%, and (c) more than 10% of debt service. Unfortunately, Rheims meets this classic definition of an institution under financial stress, with the board's fixation on the financial state of the institution. When attempting to build organizational capacity in higher education, leaders and senior managers should first clarify the mission and aspirations of an institution, using them as starting points in developing and implementing strategy (Toma, 2010). In doing so, they should also conduct constant analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. Ultimately, strengthening leadership capacity within any organization is necessary in order to support initiatives that move schools toward achieving their institutional goals. Leadership is key to clarifying mission and defining aspirations as part of a school's strategic plan, and leadership ultimately helps institutional constituents to understand how their work influences organizational goals.

Evidence suggests that communication between the Rheims administration and the board is lacking. This places the institution at a disadvantage; improved communication between board members and senior administrators would provide a better understanding as to how mission directly and indirectly influences strategic decision making at the institution. Mission-driven colleges and universities should consider developing a board structure that lends itself to receiving input from vice presidents representing various divisions across the university on matters that influence the role of mission in strategic planning and development. Forming individual committees co-chaired by board members and vice presidents and that include faculty members, administrators, and students, who are charged with the task of analyzing the relationship

to strategic-planning goals and mission could provide insight into developing priorities and establishing agendas.

There is a lack of communication between the board and management at Rheims. To be more effective, managers need to feel empowered to make strategic decisions that are supported by institutional leaders. Institutional policy makers should also be appreciative of the delicate balancing act that exists when managers work to support institutional mission while remaining committed to accomplishing strategic-planning goals.

Recommendation 2. Mandate Orientation Programs for All New Employees

Religiously affiliated mission-driven institutions should provide orientation programs to help new employees (administrators, faculty, and staff) to better understand the relationship between the supporting order's culture and traditions and its current planning practices. William P. Leahy, SJ (2008), president of Boston College, described institutional culture in the following terms: "Culture is like a fine mist. If you stand in it long enough, you will be soaked." The particularity of each university's religious congregational heritage is a significant part of the school's culture (Wilcox, 2012) and plays an important role in the work administrators do each day. Administrators cannot assume that newly hired administrators come to the university with a clear understanding of institutional mission and its connection to their work. Catholic colleges and universities who have a strong desire to maintain a commitment to their mission should provide employees a context in which their work is valued and connected to the institution's goals.

Recommendation 3. Conduct Open Forums for Senior Administrators throughout the Year to Evaluate the Role of Mission in Strategic Planning Execution

The Rheims administration was uncertain as to how colleagues in other divisions addressed mission and its connection to strategic planning. At the Cabinet level, mission and its role in strategic planning was evaluated and discussed formally at meetings. Administrators at the dean and director levels did not meet outside of their divisions to address this issue. Open forums scheduled once a semester or twice a year with the exclusive purpose of discussing and evaluating the role of mission in strategic planning with all senior-level administrators in attendance might be helpful in making decision making more transparent and aligned with Rheims's strategic values and objectives (Carpenter & Bach, 2010). According to Bolman and Deal (2003), meetings may not always produce rational discourse, sound plans, or radical improvements. They can, however, serve as symbolic arenas allowing key players to develop a sense of their role in decision making and, as a result, could facilitate individual and organizational integration.

Recommendation 4. Form an Institutional Effectiveness Committee to Assess Connectedness between Mission and Strategic Planning Execution

Institutional effectiveness is the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring performance against mission in all aspects of an institution (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Resource Manual). In recent years, many Catholic institutions have established institutional effectiveness committees comprised of faculty, administrators, and students responsible for the task of measuring and evaluating whether a school is meeting its mission-related goals and where the university may be falling short. Institutional effectiveness committees typically serve to coordinate an annual reporting structure that assesses progress on operating goals and evaluates the connection between strategic planning and mission on a departmental and divisional basis. Rheims

has not formed an institutional effectiveness committee to date. An institutional effectiveness committee would provide a way to measure and assess decisions that impact the university's operating needs and prioritize balance between strategic planning and the university's mission-based goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

The focus of discussion by senior administrators and Board of Trustee members at Rheims University regarding cost of attendance centers on the amount of financial aid budgeted each year and how the distribution of this financial aid impacts revenue goals. Considering the influence of cost in the college selection process, additional research should be conducted at Rheims on price sensitivity and the institution's actual sticker price. Questions such as the following should be asked: How price sensitive is the Rheims' market? To what level can tuition be increased while still remaining affordable to broad ranges of socioeconomic groups? What is the market's perceived educational value of a Rheims education? What are the university administration's view on mission-oriented goals and strategic planning initiatives changes? Can campus-wide tension on these issues become minimized, widened or reconciled? Answering these questions could lead to strategies that minimize annual tuition increases and place less of a burden on the school's financial aid budget.

Future research should also be conducted to evaluate whether additional expansion into the surrounding community is worthwhile and consistent with Rheims' strategic planning goals and mission-related initiatives. Expansion of higher educational institutions in urban areas can be complex, especially when acquisition of new land or property can result in a university creep into neighborhoods where the scale of

development may not be in line with past and current community character (Hirokawa & Salkin, 2009). Rheims has made a considerable investment in the community and has used mission to rationalize these decisions. The outcomes of these decisions, however, may not be delivering the results initially intended.

Future research also needs to be conducted on Rheims' ability to retain low-income, underserved students that are so vital to the institution's mission. Studying retention trends for this group of students will show if there are factors beyond affordability that impede academic success that need to be addressed in future strategic planning initiatives.

Throughout the world, 64 colleges and universities are currently sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers. Of those institutions, six institutions are located in the United States. The remaining 58 Lasallian universities are dispersed throughout every continent in the world. Consideration of future research on the role of mission in strategic planning development and execution should include the five remaining American Lasallian colleges and universities and international Lasallian colleges and universities. This type of comparative research between Lasallian colleges and universities in the United States and Lasallian institutions worldwide, could potentially identify significant differences in how mission-related challenges impact institutional operating needs of both American and international Lasallian universities and how these institutions grapple with their commitment to promoting Catholic mission and vision. Differences in strategies used by these schools in their efforts to maintain balance between mission and strategic planning initiatives should also be part of future research endeavor.

Conclusion

This study presented experiences of senior administrators and Board of Trustee members from one Catholic institution in their collective attempt to develop strategies to meet the university's operating needs while remaining conscious of mission-related goals and objectives that are closely connected with the school's philosophies. Prior literature on strategic planning in higher education does not focus on the unique challenges Catholic colleges and universities face as they work to maintain mission-based goals and objectives in the development and execution of strategic-planning initiatives. Rather, much of the literature focuses on organizational modeling, concerned more with the inner workings of schools and less with the link between the pursuit of strategy and its impact on institutional mission.

Considering the ever-changing higher education landscape, the increased market pressures all private colleges and universities face, and the evolving relationship currently underway between sponsoring religious orders and the colleges and universities with which these orders are associated, this study contributes to the literature by providing insight and recommendations for Catholic colleges to follow in their quest to remain mission-centered in market-driven environments. In recent years, due primarily to Pope John Paul II's call in *Ex Code Ecclesiae* for American Catholic colleges to embrace their missions and strengthen their Catholic identities, the institutionalization of Catholic mission on Catholic college campuses has become a common topic of discussion. In the most recent papal doctrine, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis (2013) makes mention of the fact that universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing an evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Expecting all

members of a Catholic college or university community to embrace mission can be challenging considering that many faculty members and administrators assume that the cultivation and stewardship of mission belongs to campus ministry and theology departments. Many of these faculty members and administrators simply reduce mission to being fair and kind to students and being good to colleagues (Bailey, 2013).

Incorporating specific aspects of an institution's mission into a strategic plan provides an opportunity for any religiously affiliated college or university to work toward, not compete with, mission-centered goals and objectives. Interweaving mission into strategic-planning initiatives also allows schools to regularly measure and assess their accomplishments and shortcomings on regular basis.

A commitment to mission appears to be at the center of all strategic planning and execution activity at Rheims. As described in this study, maintaining this commitment has been a challenge in recent years. The root of this challenge has been the operating pressures the Rheims administration has been forced to confront in the school's quest to advance its mission while also improving its status and reputation as a first class higher education institution. .

In the words of Brother Luke Salm (1996), "The life of any Lasallian Institute is a continual challenge to be creative while remaining faithful to its origins." The Rheims University administration appears to understand the challenges they confront now and the challenges they will confront in the future. Despite how difficult it will be to maintain this commitment to balancing mission and strategic-planning goals, Rheims appears to be positioned to remain a model Lasallian institution for many years to come.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS- RHEIMS UNIVERSITY

Background Information

- How long have you been employed at LaSalle University?
- Did you work elsewhere prior to working at LaSalle University?
 - o If yes, where? What position(s) did you hold? Did you have experience with strategic planning development in your previous positions?
 - o If previous employment was at another college/university, was the school religiously affiliated?

Strategic Planning Development

- Can you explain to me the role that your department/division plays in developing strategic planning initiatives at LaSalle University?
- Do you involve subordinates in strategic planning development that impacts your department/division or are you the sole person within the department/division involved in the strategic planning process?
 - o If yes, specifically, which subordinates assist you in the sp process? Exactly how involved are they in this process?
 - o If no, why are subordinates not involved in strategic planning within your division? Is this a personal choice? Is this an institutional choice? Does this level of involvement differ from other departments/divisions throughout the University?

- Is your staff familiar with the University's Strategic Plan, and are they able to refer to the document on a regular basis to see where strategic planning initiatives are being achieved?
 - o If yes, do you do something or does the University do something specific that can be attributed to your staff's familiarity with LaSalle's Strategic Plan? If so, what are you and/or the University doing to enhance familiarity with strategic planning amongst your staff?
 - o If no, why do you feel your staff is unfamiliar with the University's Strategic Plan?

Challenges Connecting Mission/Strategic Planning Initiatives in Day-to Day Work

- Do you feel the LaSalle Community embraces its mission?
 - o If yes, can you provide examples as to how mission is embraced throughout the community?
 - o If no, can you provide examples as to how mission is ignored? In your opinion is this intentional or unintentional?
- Do you encounter challenges in your day to day work that make remaining committed to mission difficult while also remaining conscious of institutional goals that are part of the University's Strategic Plan?
 - o If yes, can you provide examples of these challenges?
 - o If no, what do you attribute to your ability to stay committed to mission while also being able to remain conscious of institutional goals that are part of LaSalle's Strategic Plan?

- Are there any aspects of LaSalle's strategic plan that make it difficult to accomplish strategic planning goals within the division/department while staying true to mission?
 - If yes, can you provide examples as to how you navigate through these conflicts?
 - If no, what do you attribute to the reason as to why strategic planning initiatives and mission are so closely aligned at LaSalle?

Institutional Responsibility for Mission

- Who/what department/division is responsible for mission stewardship at LaSalle university?
- Do you feel that this is the appropriate person/area within the University to be responsible for maintaining mission?
 - If yes, why?
 - If no, why not? In your estimation what person/area of the institution should be responsible for mission related initiatives?

Institutional Understanding of Strategic Planning's Relationship to Mission

- Do you feel that the Board of Trustees at LaSalle appreciates and understand the role of mission in day to day life at the University?
 - If yes, can you provide examples as to how this appreciation is exhibited?
 - If no, can you provide examples as how the role of mission in everyday life at Rheims is ignored by the Board?
- Do you feel that the Board of Trustees at LaSalle University support mission related goals that are connected to strategic planning at LaSalle?
 - If yes can you provide examples of how Board support is provided to mission initiatives that are connect to strategic planning goals?

- If no, why do you feel the Board does not support mission and its connectedness to strategic planning goals?