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The Role of Noncredit Continuing Education as a Workforce Revitalization Partner

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Joseph L. Combs

May 2012

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Keywords: Noncredit continuing education, community education, workforce development,

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## ABSTRACT

The Role of Noncredit Continuing Education as a Workforce Revitalization Partner

by

Joseph L. Combs

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the partnership role of noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce during the economic crisis that started in 2008 in selected communities in East Tennessee. This research synthesized meaningful information regarding how the leaders of business and industry perceived the role of noncredit service providers as economic development partners.

This qualitative study was conducted using interviews of chamber of commerce officials in 9 of the 10 counties served by Walters State Community College. The participants indicated that they were interested in partnering with the noncredit department to accomplish the goal of helping displaced workers be retrained and employable.

In order to meet this goal, the respondents stated that communication is essential. The perceptions of the participants could serve as a catalyst for the community college to implement the specific changes identified by the respondents to the interview questions.

The synthesis of data collected from a microcosm of communities in East Tennessee and their relationship with Walters State Community College suggested that there was a perceived role of noncredit continuing education as a workforce revitalization partner. The data suggested 2 barriers negating the effectiveness of this partnership: communication and awareness. This may

or may not be universally applicable to other colleges in other communities. Further research could synthesize meaningful information regarding noncredit programs in other communities and identify additional barriers between colleges and business and industry.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my wife Jane, who has been my inspiration and has provided encouragement and support for me to start and complete this project. I also dedicate this to my three children Julia, Jennifer, and Joe who not only provided support and inspiration, they also checked my “report card” to make sure I was studying hard. I also dedicate this to my mother Elizabeth, who set a great example of being a lifelong learner.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

During periods of high unemployment displaced workers enroll in college to learn new skills. Most of these are nontraditional students who have been given a choice between traditional credit courses or noncredit community education. Traditional degree programs take 2 to 4 years to complete. Noncredit community education programs can be completed in less than 6 months (Kantrowitz, 2010). Financial aid had been available for credit courses but not for noncredit programs (Bailey & Jacobs, 2009).

The administrators of the noncredit programs responded to the changing economic and demographic fluctuations quickly (Fletcher, 2010). Noncredit programs had the capability to engage in emerging technologies where knowledge and comprehension were not well defined and expertise was relatively nonexistent (Voorhees & Milam, 2005). Business and community leaders questioned the administration of community colleges regarding the scarcity of noncredit programs to educate displaced workers in the wake of the economic downturn (Voorhees & Milam, 2005). The leaders of the Tennessee Business Roundtable stated that noncredit workforce development should have been a major contributor to satisfy the educational business needs in Tennessee (Murray, Cunningham, & Shone, 2008).

During a period of severe economic recession when a record number of displaced workers were in great need of retraining, state funding to community colleges and universities was either reduced or eliminated. The irony of this paradox was that state funds were used to pay unemployment compensation to displaced workers for extended periods of time instead of funding short-term expenditures while retraining them for the jobs that were available.

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the partnership role of noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce in selected communities during the economic crisis that started in 2008. I reviewed the perceptions of chamber of commerce officials in a specific multicounty area that was served by a local community college regarding the sociological impact of workforce education. I reviewed their perceptions of the quality of noncredit continuing education programs offered by the community college.

### Research Questions

The central question addressed in this study was: How can a community college division of noncredit community education partner with business and industry in a specific multicounty area to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce? I found answers to the following questions:

1. How can local business and industry partner with the administration of a regional community college to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce?
2. How does the recession impact the local communities?
3. How do chamber of commerce officials describe the skills and knowledge needed by employees in order for their organization to survive and thrive?
4. How do chamber of commerce officials describe the skills and knowledge that displaced workers need in order to keep or find new jobs?
5. How do chamber of commerce officials identify gaps between employee skill needs and employee skills?

6. What resources can a community college provide to the local community to help with economic recovery?

### Significance of the Study

There have been numerous studies, literature, and newspaper articles about troubled university and college systems nationwide. However, very little new information has been forthcoming regarding noncredit continuing education. This research synthesized meaningful information regarding noncredit programs and provided guidance for the administration of community colleges for the purpose of planning noncredit programs. This study has provided a qualitative research planning tool to assist other community colleges in Tennessee as they seek to improve their program offerings.

The leadership of noncredit workforce development departments at community colleges and universities has an unprecedented advantage to partner with business and industry to create new curricula consistent with employment needs. The leaders of noncredit community education departments have the capability to respond quickly to industry demands more creatively than academic administrators of traditional credit programs. The process for academic credit programs to receive approval from state and accreditation boards of review has required up to 2 years before the college was authorized to deliver the content. However, the leadership of noncredit workforce development departments has been able to design and deliver new curriculum quickly to help displaced workers find meaningful new jobs.

Today the leadership of noncredit workforce development divisions at community colleges must seek new business aggressively in order to compete with other service providers. There are many trade schools and private for-profit colleges as well as independent and national consulting and training companies competing for the same clients. The leadership of noncredit

workforce development departments can have a significant economic impact on the bottom line of a community college. Many major employers spend over \$4,000 per employee per year creating financial opportunities for community colleges nationwide.

### Researcher Perspective

I am currently the dean of community education at a public community college. Consequently, I have an interest in enhancing the perception of community colleges as the training partner of choice for business and industry in East Tennessee. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to design a questionnaire for the Tennessee Board of Regents to contrast and compare workforce education provided by each of the community colleges in this state in order to identify the collective perception of noncredit training programs by the leadership of business and industry. I anticipate that the results of that questionnaire will have minimal influence on this study but will add to the literature available. I acknowledge a predisposition to the needs of business and industry based upon my five years of service in this position. Therefore, I must endeavor to remain objective throughout this study.

### Definition of Terms

*Academic Credit:* Vital calculation of academic progress towards the attainment of a degree or certificate. There are not any standards on how to assign academic credits to course work (Lipka, 2010).

*CEUs:* Continuing Education Units are nationally recognized units earned for participation in qualifying continuing education programs (SACS, 1994).

*Chamber of Commerce:* A nonprofit organization of businesses organized to advocate on behalf of business and industry. Membership is voluntary and local businesses pay annual fees to belong to the chamber. Members elect a board of directors who, in turn, hire a president or

executive director. Some chambers also have an economic development group, tourism group, or visitors' bureau. The chamber has no actual authority to bind its members under their charter in the United States (Castles, 2009).

*Countercyclical:* A policy that works against the cyclical tendencies on the economy, sometimes considered counterproductive or destabilizing (Kantrowitz, 2010).

*Evolutionary Change:* Change that is gradual, incremental, and narrowly focused (George & Jones, 2001).

*Noncredit Continuing Education:* Any training that is not for academic credit is considered noncredit. Students are typically older than traditional college students and have different skill levels (Voorhees & Milam, 2005).

*Traditional Student:* An individual with a high school diploma who is seeking a degree at an institute of higher education (DOE, 2005).

*Nontraditional Student:* A student who is older than a traditional college student, working a full time job, a back-to-work mother, or a displaced worker (Merisotis, 2007).

*Workforce Education:* Empowering adults through education and lifelong learning to acquire the skills and abilities to succeed in a changing workforce environment (Workforce Investment Act - Title III, 1998).

### Limitations of the Study

The following limitations applied to this study: I interviewed representatives of the leadership of the local chambers of commerce for the major communities in the Walters State Community College service area who were the participants in this study. The participants' job titles varied. For example, some had the title of president and others were referred to as economic and development advisors. They were considered to be subject matter experts for their

communities. The methodology of this study was limited to a deliberate sample of 10 members that represented one member from each county. I conducted the interviews face-to-face or by telephone based on the availability of the participants. This study used constant comparative analysis to generate conceptual categories as a method to build a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study concentrated on the needs of business and industry in the Walters State Community College noncredit community education 10-county service areas; therefore, the results were not easily generalized to other areas or situations.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions were important to this study: Members of the local chambers of commerce provided honest and insightful responses to the questions. The members represented a nonbiased cross section of community leaders with direct knowledge of the issues in their communities. The members had expertise in community and economic development in their communities.

### Organization of the Study

This study is presented in the following manner: Chapter 1 presents the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, researcher perspective, definitions of terms, limitations of the study, assumptions, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 contains the review of the related literature and research. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used to gather data for this study. Chapter 4 summarizes and analyzes the raw data using minimal interpretation. Chapter 5 presents the interpretation and implications of the data including a critical examination of the framework presented in the literature review as compared to the new findings presented in this chapter. Chapter 5 also presents conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

There was an abundance of literature that established the context for this study. Many relevant elements have been collected and summarized in divergent categories. This review of the literature identified germane literature and relevant studies to provide a framework for this study.

#### History of Higher Education in America

Higher education was of considerable value to the colonists for religious study and for economic success. John Harvard was an alumnus of the University of Cambridge and benefactor to New College which was renamed Harvard in his honor. The Puritans founded Harvard College in 1636 to educate, sanction, and confer baccalaureate, master, and doctoral degrees. The colonists established 10 colleges and seminaries prior to the inception of the American Revolution. In 1779 the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was composed by Thomas Jefferson and accorded the cultivation of numerous protestant churches to multiply and prosper. A multitude of these denominations founded proprietary seminaries and colleges to educate their clergy. This was critical to ensure their clergy fully understood their denominational doctrines. Early American colleges were for white Christian males exclusively and enrollment was limited to 100 students. Colonial colleges produced a generation of American leaders and established traditions, conventions, and customs (Thelin, Edwards, & Moyen, 2009).

There was a bourgeoning growth of new colleges in the early 1800s. Over 200 degree-granting institutions of higher education were constructed, predominantly in capital cities. This afforded middle-class Americans opportunities to actualize their desire to pursue higher education; consequently, this accelerated the demand for qualified educators. American colleges

eventually acquiesced and admitted women to degree-seeking programs. This coincided with the advent of new special interest colleges that were established to educate doctors, lawyers, engineers, and scientists (Thelin et al., 2009a).

The United States Congress enacted the Morrill Act in 1862. The objective was to ensure that all American citizens would have access to higher education, not just the privileged few. This act was amended to encompass the former Confederate states in 1890 and allowed African-Americans enrollment privileges. The Morrill Act granted 30,000 acres of federal land per member to establish land grant universities. In spite of the land grant universities' presence, the need for trained workers to serve industry exceeded each university's capacity, forcing administrators to search for a viable alternative (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005).

In 1900 the presidents of 14 colleges created the Association of American Universities. Industrial expansion in America and philanthropic donations from wealthy benefactors created various organizations that developed national standards for higher education. This included the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Rockefeller General Education Board (Thelin et al., 2009a).

Community colleges were formerly known as junior colleges. The initial concept for a system of junior colleges was envisioned by some university administrators as early as 1890. Numerous 2-year private colleges prospered in the United States during this era. The University of Chicago operated both a senior and a junior college, but historians concur that Joliet Junior College in Illinois was the first junior college when it opened in 1901. This junior college was so successful that California created its own statewide system that established junior colleges as official branches of the state university system. By 1915 there were over 70 junior colleges in the United States and that number grew to more than 200 junior colleges by the early 1920s (Brint &



Karabel, 1989). There was some confusion over the nomenclature used by 2-year college institutions and usage would fluctuate between these terms: junior college, community college, technical college, and technical institute (Thelin et al., 2009b).

In 1921 the American Association of Junior Colleges was founded, creating a national voice for junior colleges. The Great Depression of the 1930s was the catalyst for the rapid growth of junior colleges in the United States at that time. Other periods of rapid growth for community colleges occurred when the baby boomer children of World War II veterans and returning Vietnam veterans started to enroll in community colleges in record numbers. Between 1970 and 1985 more than 450 new junior colleges opened around the country. Community colleges began offering programs for Native Americans and provided them with their first real opportunity for post-secondary education. By 1980 there were almost 1,200 community colleges in the United States serving over 4.5 million students. That represented over half of all students enrolled in institutes of higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

The baby boomers moved away from the major cities and relocated in the suburbs or the country thereby creating an increased need for geographically dispersed community colleges (Geller, 2001). This required evolution in three major areas: diversification of deliverable knowledge, diversification of a multicultural student body, and the diversification of course delivery (C. Kaufman, 2009). In 1957 the Tennessee Legislative Council produced the Pierce-Albright Report on Higher Education in Tennessee. The goal was to have a community college within a 30- to 40-mile radius of every Tennessean (Pectol, 2005).

Brint and Karabel viewed the American junior college as a diverted dream. From its inception, the junior college was founded on a paradox: junior colleges originally were designed to be a stepping stone to 4-year colleges. Brint and Karabel's study indicated that the junior

college's niche within the educational system evolved to providing vocational training. They were relegated to attracting a lesser-qualified pool of students that probably would not be able to transfer to higher institutions. Instead, junior colleges prepared students for middle-class occupations that limited their opportunities for advancement. The leaders of junior colleges eventually embraced the logic of vocationalism and expanded vocational training programs (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Dougherty (2001) stated that community colleges had not been praised for the key role they played in vocational education. Community colleges created opportunities for people who might not have been able to attend college at all. In 1990 community colleges had high dropout rates that created the perception that community college students were not capable of advancing in the educational system. Low expectations of community college students' success became a self-fulfilling prophecy. This demoralized many community college instructors who had been stereotyped as second-rate labor (Dougherty, 2001).

By the year 2000 community colleges became cultural, social, and intellectual hubs for their communities. Community colleges distinguished themselves from other institutions of higher education by their commitment to open access, comprehensiveness in course offerings, and community involvement. By 2002 there were over 6.5 million undergraduate students in community colleges nationwide as compared to 7.8 million students in 4-year colleges. The most popular programs in community colleges were registered nursing, law enforcement, radiology, computer technology, and dental hygiene. Community colleges had the tools to respond to the nation's educational needs (Vaughan, 2006).

The Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010 was the new statewide master plan for future development of public higher education in the state of Tennessee. It offered a new funding formula for Tennessee institutes of higher education based upon student outcomes. Instead of

funding community colleges for the number of students enrolled at the onset of each semester, the new funding formula will fund community colleges based on the number of students who completed their degree or certificate (Tennessee General Assembly, 2010).

### Noncredit Courses

The mission of noncredit continuing education has evolved over a period of time. In 1970 the mission of noncredit continuing education was personal enrichment, and in 1980 it was customized training. In 1990 the mission was information technology, and by 2010 it was the re-education of displaced American workers (Van Noy, Jacobs, Korey, Bailey, & Hughes, 2008). Community college administrators take a great deal of pride in proclaiming their inclusivity policy. Yet, there continues to be a significant population of disconnected youth who have dropped out of high school, low-income adults, and immigrants who still cannot enroll in degree-seeking programs. Many community colleges offer special courses that do not offer academic credit. These programs are advantageous to select portions of the population as an entrée into the educational system. Noncredit programs were attractive to this population because of their lower cost, accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness (Grubb, Badway, & Bell, 2010). There has been a growing number of administrators attempting to develop an academically acceptable method to transition students from noncredit programs into credit programs. One of the dilemmas encountered by academic administrators was the lack of verifiable noncredit student records. There is a distinct lack of standards for noncredit classes that contributes to its less than stellar reputation (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Noncredit programs have served millions of nontraditional students in a sustainable manner, but there has continued to be inconsistencies with national data (Voorhees & Milam, 2005).

Noncredit courses have been important because they provide workforce development, information technology training, and occupational training. Noncredit courses continue to be one of the greatest levers that community colleges have at their disposal to respond quickly to the needs of business and industry in their area. Academic administrators have recognized that they serve different student populations in different manners (Milam, 2010). It continues to be difficult to track noncredit student outcomes; however, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) formally recognized the value of noncredit education as essential to lifelong learning. SACS has also recognized continuing education units (CEUs) as legitimate rewards for course completion (SACS, 1994). There has been relatively little research and literature pertaining to the retention of nontraditional students in community colleges. Attempts to study noncredit education and nontraditional students have encountered resistance due to a variety of factors including methodological limitations, lack of priority for data collection, and a lack of perceived need to conduct such research (Milam, 2010).

Community colleges have been seeking better ways to serve the business community. One method is the formation of advisory groups to seek recommendations from professionals. These groups create fresh visions as they contribute ideas for new directions and new programs. They have been able to initiate a forum for community leaders to have formal input into the community college and the program offerings that should be developed (Hightower, 2009). Campus advisory boards are composed of citizens from the college service areas. Data have shown that advisory board members are likely to become potential consumers of continuing education. The social capital and leadership stability created by advisory boards enhance the positive impact of continuing education in the community (Oberman & Hill, 2008).

## Tennessee Government's Vision for Noncredit Programs

According to the 2006 report of Tennessee schools for the National Community College Benchmark Project, Walters State had more noncredit students than most community colleges in the United States. This indicated the administration was highly effective (NCCBP, 2006).

According to the Tennessee Board of Regents 2005-2010 Strategic Plan, the institutions should increase industrial contracts by 25%, which would indicate a commitment to serve the needs of industry in Tennessee (Rhoda, 2005).

According to the report of the public service vision committee of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), community colleges offered public service activities designed as not-for-credit instructional programs to individuals and groups external to the institution. This includes contract and customized corporate training, needs assessment, and training for industry. The committee further identified public service programs such as leadership, health, legal, and economic impact studies. They identified lack of funding as a fundamental weakness in the state's programs. Another weakness has been the lack of a uniform system of transcription of noncredit courses.

TBR recognized that noncredit continuing education was viewed as the poor stepchild of the academic institutions. Continuing education frequently served more students than credit programs, but usually such accomplishments were unrecognized and unrewarded. The report also stated that 75% of all current workers in Tennessee would need additional training and retooling in order to acquire or renew skills, certifications, or licenses. They noted that artificial and self-imposed barriers created a system that valued credit over noncredit instruction (Board of Regents, 2005). Demographic and economic changes in the United States created a monumental increase in the demand for short-term noncredit education. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics (2005), 15 million students enrolled in traditional college programs compared to almost 90 million students in noncredit continuing education. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics attributed the growth of noncredit continuing education to the rapid and ongoing evolution in technology, and transitional workers moving from one industry to another due to economic relocation. These changes had a dramatic impact on businesses in Virginia and the demand for more training. In fact, Virginia businesses served by noncredit continuing education increased from 1% to 36% (Magnum, 2008).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2005), demographics shifted in the population of students who participated in adult education activities. In every age group more students participated in work-related courses than in part-time degree or diploma programs. The same results applied to every ethnic group, level of education, household income, and employment/occupation (DOE, 2005). Hansen claimed that student demographics changed dramatically since the 1980s. The proportion of college students 25 years or older is greatly increasing. Many students have been seeking specific certifications instead of degrees to help them find new employment opportunities. Changes in student attitudes have been indicating a lack of engagement in the educational process. Only half of traditional college students believe that a college degree will increase their earning power (Hansen, 1998). College graduates have higher salaries, higher savings, better health, and longer life expectancy. By the year 2020 there will be 14 million more skilled jobs in the United States than there will be people to fill them. This gap can be addressed only by a joint effort of noncredit continuing education and traditional credit programs (Merisotis, 2007).

Most nontraditional adult learners have financed their continuing education through employee reimbursement programs, tax relief, savings accounts, family loans, and government

grants. Low-income and displaced workers have not had access to these financial resources. This problem was compounded by students whose families have never attended college courses. There has been a lack of academic preparation to enable nontraditional adult learners to be successful (Milheim & Bichsel, 2007).

The jobs of the new economy have been requiring technical skills, but the workers may not have needed a college degree. Trade schools, certificate programs, and workforce continuing education have replaced many college programs (ECS, 1999).

### Workforce Development and the Community College

Workforce development is a continuum and must be viewed as an ubiquitous investment and managed with vigilance. Job training programs have become universally available for rural and cosmopolitan citizens as a panacea for widespread unemployment. In 1988 the Nationwide Commission on the Future of Community Colleges advocated that all state colleges incorporate workforce training programs for the general public (Kasper, 2003).

There were three basic themes that were universally accepted by policymakers:

- Individuals need some form of postsecondary education and training in order to attain rudimentary financial self-sufficiency for the long term,
- America's community colleges have the capacity to provide skills and education for disadvantaged individuals in order to abate poverty,
- Individuals need skills that are in demand by local employers and could be provided by noncredit continuing education programs (Alssid et al., 2002).

Over the past 20 years three key indicators of noncredit workforce development at community colleges have been identified. Over 90% of community colleges have offered customized corporate contract training. Over 30% of community colleges have offered small

business assistance and incubation. The most recent development has been their involvement in local economic planning and development. This continues to generate interest in additional customized corporate contract training programs that have generated substantial income for many community colleges (Dougherty & Bakia, 1999).

Most Americans fall dramatically short of possessing the necessary skills to be competitive in the workplace according to McCabe (1997). In 1973 President Richard Nixon signed into law the Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration program (CETA) to address unemployment and poverty. CETA emphasized employment instead of training and failed to meet forecast projections when the law expired in 1982. The price tag for CETA was over \$53,000,000 (McCabe, 1997). CETA was replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA) that was initiated by President Ronald Reagan. JTPA redirected the focus from government generated jobs to the creation of marketable skills. JTPA training providers became mired in a sea of bureaucracy and red tape trying to administer programs. The net result was that only 1.5 million people received any training through this program. The price tag for JTPA amounted to \$20,000,000 when it ended in 1995 (McCabe, 1997).

Under the direction of President Bill Clinton, the Workforce and Career Development Act of 1996 became law. Those funds were designated for specific outcomes: 32% would go towards employment and training, 26% would go towards vocational education, 16% would go towards at-risk youth, 6% would go towards adult education and literacy, and 20% would be in a flexible fund to be used at the governor's discretion (McCabe, 1997). This program has created an amalgamation of over 100 government agencies conjoined with a block of funds available for each state. The success of this program has been a conundrum. There have been voluminous contradictions between rhetoric and performance as well as motives and enterprise, and the



actual funding has plagued this legislation. Senator Nancy Kassebaum spoke to the U.S. Senate on October 1, 1996, and has called the demise of the Workforce and Career Development Act the greatest disappointment of the year's labor committee efforts. Efforts to revitalize the legislation have encountered strong bipartisan opposition (McCabe, 1997).

The term *displaced worker* has been defined as any unemployed person from factory workers (who generally have very little formal education) to highly educated professionals. Federal and state policies have not been cognizant of the changing labor market. Layoffs have become permanent as companies went bankrupt. Cynical and demoralized displaced workers have competed against their neighbors for any available job opportunities. Personal finances have been decimated, insurance benefits have been eliminated, homes continue to be repossessed, and local economies have increasingly become distressed. It is generally recognized that providing training for these displaced workers to enable them to obtain long-term employment is of paramount importance (Van Horn, Rogers, Ridley, & Harrington, 2005).

### Economic Turmoil

A recession has historically been identified as a period of time when the gross national product has declined at least 2 months in a row as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). An authoritative definition has emerged to circumvent discrepancies in the previous model. NBER has reviewed the three dimensions of a recession: depth, duration, and diffusion across industries (Moore, 2002). Starting in December 2007 global economies have experienced the longest and deepest recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Cooke, 2009). Americans have endured 10 recessions since 1946, and each recession identified endured for 6 to 16 months (FRBM, 2009). Economists have declined to compare this recession with previous ones because their preferred primary indicator, gross domestic product, was only

reported on an annual basis. Economists have preferred monthly data such as employment statistics provided by each state. The decline in current non-farm payroll has been worse and has lasted longer than any of the recessions that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s (FRBA, 2009). Labor markets have continued to weaken. Drastic measures had to be taken to help families cope with the rising cost of living, soaring unemployment rates, massive home foreclosures, and depleted savings accounts (Isadore, 2008).

The impact on the United States financial markets has been cataclysmic and has impacted global economies. Sustainable financial expansion has required a productive labor force with technological skills to survive and thrive in the global marketplace. In 2009 President Barack Obama initiated a course of action to stimulate the economy and boost the productivity of American workers via his education and training policies. These programs have been designed to educate workers for new employment opportunities. Education continues to be the keystone for worker productivity and long-term economic development (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2009).

President Obama announced in July 2009 that \$12,000,000 in federal funds have been designated for community colleges to retrain displaced workers. Many government leaders have been puzzled by this allocation because they have assumed that community colleges historically have done a poor job of producing graduates. Less than 6% of the six million community college students have graduated with an associate's degree within 3 years. Forty-five percent of all community college students tend to drop out within 3 years, whereas 54% of students enrolled in 4-year institutions graduate within 6 years (Allen, 2009). Between the years 2002 and 2005 federal funding of 4-year colleges has continued to increase while funding for community colleges has decreased by 6% (Kadden, 2009). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of

2009 was enacted by Congress to provide economic stimulus for individuals and businesses, providing \$318,799,656 in funding to Tennessee as of December 10, 2009 (Recovery, 2009).

In February 2009 approximately 600,000 people were terminated – amounting to an average of 20,000 pink slips every day. This has been tantamount to 3.6 million jobs since December 2007 (Fabrikant, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau reported that there were 14,700,000 unemployed workers in the United States with another 2,200,000 unemployed workers excluded from the reports because they have become discouraged and have ceased looking for work (Labor Statistics, 2009). The Tennessee Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development announced that Tennessee's unemployment rate for April 2009 was 9.9% and surpassed the previous highest rate for the past 25 years. They have continued to neglect to report the 2.5 million workers who have full-time jobs, but whose earnings have fallen below poverty levels. American companies have continued to relocate to other countries thereby impeding many Americans' quest to find suitable work. Many Americans have failed to find gainful employment similar to the jobs they have lost because the most significant increase in unemployment has occurred in manufacturing, professional positions, and business services. However, there has been growth in education, healthcare service, and government jobs. In fact, many people have enrolled in community colleges and universities in order to obtain the skills required to enable them to find new jobs (Neely, 2009, p. 7).

The Tennessee State Chamber of Commerce has created a list of legislative initiatives required to generate jobs. They identified education as their top priority because they say that economic recovery continues to be dependent on an educated workforce (Wooley, 2009, pp. 2-7). In a report to the Governor of Tennessee, the Comptroller of the Treasury, John Morgan, stated that Tennessee's work force has not been educated enough to meet the challenges of a new

economy that values highly skilled workers. He has stated that a well-educated workforce continues to be more valuable than any other resource (Morgan, 2004). The Economic Report to the Governor of Tennessee by Matthew Murray at the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee proclaimed the state's adult education continues to be the worst in the nation. In the 1980s competition for jobs came from other states in the Southeast where workers had similar levels of education. In 2009, however, Tennesseans had to compete with workers from around the world (Murray, 2009).

In 1988 the Nationwide Commission on the Future of Community Colleges has recommended that all state colleges make workforce training a top priority (Kasper, 2003). The recession has forced American workers to look at these colleges as a desirable source of re-education that will enable them to recover from their economic hard times. Community colleges have historically experienced increases in enrollment during periods of high unemployment according to anecdotal statistics (Van Noy et al., 2008).

Community colleges have faced a political and economic crisis that began in 2008 as a consequence of flawed national and state economies. Revenue shortfalls continue to undermine critical support for essential services and have hindered long-term progress. Community colleges are supposed to serve the changing needs of the community (Duderstadt, 1997). President Obama's plan has created an improved infrastructure, renovations to existing facilities, and funds for higher education support to rebuild American businesses (Kent, 2009, pp. 1-4).

The community college has struggled with its image as a pathway to a better life. The displaced worker has to desire a new identity by synchronizing learning, earning, and living. Retraining has been essential to encourage displaced workers to bridge the gap from their existing reality to a new and better reality. New identities have been equated with increased

earnings. Displaced workers have been facing complex issues in order to choose a path that best suited their needs (Stein & Wanstreet, 2006, pp. 2-12).

By August 2010 some economists proclaimed the recession had ended. Home sales improved, leading indicators continued to improve, and unemployment claims decreased. Other economists fear that the U.S. is on the brink of double-digit inflation and higher unemployment (Arends, 2009). Recovery from the recession has been an arduous and lengthy endeavor. In Virginia 130,000 jobs have been lost during the recession but only 11,000 jobs were added between June 2009 and July 2010. There continued to be over 4.27 job seekers for every job opening in the southern region of the United States (Virginia, 2010).

The Virginia Community College System has conducted a study of the role noncredit education played in the economy of the state. The report estimated that 75% of the workforce required retraining to keep pace with technological innovations. Conclusions have indicated that noncredit continuing education programs have greatly increased workforce productivity. Increased employee productivity has created an exponential increase in the state's economic growth amounting to a projected value of \$122.1 million to \$258.8 million. Funding noncredit continuing education in Virginia continues to cost taxpayers \$17.3 million per year contrasted with an increase of productivity of \$190.4 million. The return on investment to Virginia's economy is almost 900% (Magnum, 2008).

#### The Impact of the Recession on the Community College

Economic turmoil has been manifested at the academic level; for example, in 1973, 24% of all Americans between the ages of 18 to 24 had been enrolled in college compared to 2009 when almost 40% of all Americans between the ages of 18 to 24 were enrolled in college. Government reports showed that community colleges have had the greatest growth in enrollment

(O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Research has shown an anecdotal perception that there has been a college boom, and the increase apparently exceeds all projections. Fry's research uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau (Fry, 2009). Nationwide 83% of all community college classes have reached or exceeded capacity (Community College Times, 2009). There has not been enough space to provide classes for everyone in need. Community colleges experienced greater stress than ever before (Strauss, 2009). There is a direct correlation between high unemployment and high enrollment at a community college. Displaced workers enroll in community colleges because it is a quick way to learn in-demand skills needed to find new jobs (McCamey, 2009).

In addition to displaced workers returning to community colleges, younger students have been enrolling in community colleges in record numbers. Many of those students have decided it made better economic sense to live at home and attend the local community college (Smith, 2009). Due to economic hardships, many students have not been able to afford tuition at most 4-year colleges because of increased tuition, textbooks, lab fees, and the cost of meals and housing. College tuition only covers about 25% of the cost of providing services for a full-time student. This has created the enrollment challenge: the more students an institution has, the more money it loses. Some college systems have turned away thousands of applicants (Tirrell-Wysocki, 2009).

Enrollment records have been shattered at 8 of the 11 state universities in Florida. In 2009 the University of Central Florida surpassed the University of Florida as the largest university in the state. Miami Dade College admitted 84,000 students in 2009, but retention has been low as frustrated students could not register for their required courses due to overcrowded schedules (Travis, 2009). Community colleges in Colorado had more applicants than qualified professors to cover classes in 2009. This has seemed to increase the perceived value of

community colleges (Poppen, 2009). Thousands of students were turned away from community colleges in New York in 2009 due to record breaking enrollment (Foderaro, 2009). Enrollment in Texas community colleges produced 1,000,000 students over previous semesters in 2009 (Haurwitz, 2009).

In 2009 California State University documented a record increase of 53% over 2008. California students have started enrolling in community colleges in Oregon because Oregon's college tuition has been substantially lower than California's, thus saving families of California students significant amounts of money (Mitchell, 2009). Most of the growth has occurred at Oregon's community colleges where students have discovered they could afford the lower tuition (Pardington, 2009).

#### Higher Education Responds

The leadership of college and university systems across the United States has been trying different strategies to cope with the impact of record student enrollment. The California administration has increased tuition and furloughed staff and faculty due to state budget concerns (Keller, 2009). Staff and faculty hours have been reduced which has resulted in an 8% pay cut. Tuition has been increased by 32%. California's budget for higher education has been cut by \$2,800,000. There has been a 20% decrease in financing for low-income families (Lewin, 2009). The leadership at the University of North Carolina has increased undergraduate tuition by only \$300. Annual tuition at UNC-CH has been \$5,625 compared to \$11,698 at the University of California (Ferreri, 2009). The highest in-state tuition in the United States has been at Penn State University at \$15,308. The University of Tennessee at Knoxville has published its tuition as \$6,855 (Marklein, 2009). The tuition at public community colleges has averaged \$2,544, which included a 7.3% increase over the previous school year. Over the past 10 years community

college tuition increases have been averaging 1.8% per year (Collegeboard, 2009). The Missouri higher education administration has been considering legislation to freeze tuition rates for in-state students and has been urged to close enrollment once classrooms are at capacity (Holley, 2009). A 1% tuition tax has been proposed in Pittsburgh. Eight university and college presidents have taken the position that this tax is illegal and serves as a disincentive to attract potential students to their universities (Zlatos, 2009, pp. 1-3). Utah government leaders have been considering raising state income taxes to help fund community colleges and universities. Increasing tax rates by .75% would have generated \$350,000,000 per year in Utah (Gehrke, 2009, pp. 1-2). The governor of Tennessee indicated he has been interested in increasing the role of community colleges including the creation of a better alignment of community colleges with 4-year institutions (Locker, 2009). Officials have been concerned that when federal stimulus money is discontinued in 2012 that the state higher education system will find itself in a deeper financial crisis (Brooks, 2011).

#### State and Local Policies Affecting Noncredit Funding

The backbone of economic development in America has been an efficient workforce trained by one of the state's educational institutions. Business and industry have been the primary customers for continuing education (Mack, 2006). The Tennessee Higher Education Commission has been mandated to create a statewide master plan to educate citizens better. The potential to generate better economic recovery is substantial. The irony has been that Tennessee has not funded noncredit continuing education activities (Rhoda, 2005).

Florida has differentiated noncredit continuing education in three categories: recreational, academic, and vocational. Vocational courses have been funded 10% by student fees and 90% by the state, academic courses have been funded 25% by student fees and 75% by the state, but



recreational courses have not received any state funds and must generate enough income to cover departmental expenses. Maryland has funded noncredit continuing education with FTE (Full-time Equivalent) funding formulas. Minnesota has paid a flat rate allocation to noncredit continuing education departments. Pennsylvania has continued to fund continuing education at the same rate as credit courses. Community colleges in Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, and Virginia have not received any state funding for noncredit departments and must generate enough income to cover operational expenses. States with higher funding for noncredit continuing education have provided vocational training for their citizens at much more affordable rates than other states, such as Tennessee, that require noncredit departments to be self-funded (R. Kaufman, 1994).

#### Forecasting Growth in Noncredit Enrollment

Several factors have affected community college enrollment including tuition, financial aid, curriculum, campus locations, marketing, admissions, and delivery of instruction. Other factors have included issues outside of the control of the college such as demographics, the economy, competition, and public policy, as well as social, cultural, and environmental trends. Numerous models have been tried and have been useful when conditions remained stagnant. During turbulent financial times the demographic mix has changed. The educational demands of a displaced worker, an emerging worker, a non-English speaking student, and a traditional student have varied so much that the forecasting models have become ineffective (McIntyre, 1999). Enrollment has had an impact on community colleges, business and industry, and the community itself (Mickey, 2005).

Demographic and economic changes in the United States have created a monumental increase in the demand for short-term noncredit education. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, 15 million students have been enrolled in traditional college programs as compared to almost 90 million students in noncredit continuing education. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has attributed the growth of noncredit continuing education to the rapid and ongoing evolution in technology and has included transitional workers moving from one industry to another due to economic relocation (Magnum, 2008).

### Organization Change Theory

Organization change has been categorized as either emphasizing organizational efficiency or emphasizing social change. Each type of change has focused on the outcome instead of the process. Burnes (2004) has identified three approaches to change – understanding that change is necessary, making the transition towards a new goal, and establishing stability once the change has been made. However, he has stated that resistance to change can be found anywhere within the system (Burnes, 2004). It has been difficult to change the historic vision of noncredit continuing education from being the poor stepchild of college institutions to a new vision of being a vital resource for economic recovery. Senge et al. (1999) stated that the vision for change in most organizations centers on compliance with command but not necessarily commitment because it has been the vision of only one person. They further stated that there are two motivational forces for change – fear and aspiration. They also suggested that people like change but do not like being changed. Forcing change usually results in resistance (Senge et al., 1999).

When faced with a dramatic and unexpected change such as the economic crisis that began in 2008, most organizations have had no other choice than to implement drastic revolutionary change. This has been in stark contrast to higher education's evolutionary change processes that have traditionally been unhurried and departmentally concentrated. In 2001

George and Jones identified two propositions: a) “resistance to change has occurred as the result of the rationalization of discrepancies” (p. 419) as evidenced by the discrepancies between credit and noncredit programs, and b) “resistance to change has occurred as the result of using schemas that have been resilient to discrepancies.” (p. 422) In other words discrepancies have led to emotional reactions that have disrupted the change process (George & Jones, 2001). Many college and university officials have not recognized the dramatic change in enrollment patterns. Frenzos stated in 2005 that college administration frequently reports high enrollment figures to let taxpayers know that the college has been fulfilling its obligation to serve the community. The American Association of Community Colleges has reported that, according to Frenzos, there has not been any information about noncredit enrollment on a national level. He also has claimed that the National Education Data Resource Center has not historically tracked noncredit course enrollment. According to Frenzos higher education officials in North Carolina and Wisconsin have reported that 70% of their enrollment has been in noncredit courses in industry certification programs. The increasing demand for noncredit classes has indicated a need for expansion so that community colleges can better serve their communities (Frenzos, 2005).

People have been the change agents and can facilitate productive changes when given the proper tools (Kotter, 2002). Kotter has identified an eight-step model for successfully implementing change: increase urgency, build a guiding team, get the vision right, communicate for buy-in, empower action, create short-term wins, do not let up, and make change stick. Each of these steps has enabled the people involved to see, feel, and make change happen.

#### Organizations that Support Workforce Development

The East Tennessee Development District is a voluntary association of municipal and county governments in 16 counties and 56 municipalities. They have provided planning and

development services for local governments to solve problems in economic development and growth. They have helped local governments plan for the future by coordinating priorities in economic issues and development (Bobrowski, 2010).

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has been among the top five respected organizations in American government according to its own research (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2011). Its mission has been to advance human progress through an economic, political, and social system based on individual freedom, incentive, initiative, opportunity, and responsibility. It provided national data to the local chambers of commerce (Donohue, 2010).

### Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature related to the complexities of noncredit continuing education from its inception in the early 1900s to the current economic recession. The literature has indicated that there has been a demand for workforce development that has exceeded the capacity of colleges. College enrollment trends have paralleled the ups and downs of economic cycles in the United States and have created budgetary crises for academic leadership. During this current period of severe economic recession, a record number of displaced workers have been in great need of retraining by state-funded colleges and universities at a time when state funding has been either reduced or eliminated. Funds that could have been used for retaining employees have been used to pay unemployment compensation to displaced workers. A productive, well-trained workforce has been essential to facilitate a sustainable economic recovery. Community colleges have been viewed as remediation agents for underprepared students who have been incapable of completing a higher education at a legitimate 4-year college. Noncredit programs in those community colleges have been viewed as the orphans of higher education and as the disenfranchised stepchildren of their own institutions.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

During periods of high unemployment displaced workers have enrolled in college to learn new skills (Kantrowitz, 2010). Noncredit programs have responded to changing economic and demographic fluctuations quickly (Fletcher, 2010). Business and industry leaders have questioned why noncredit programs have not been available to educate more displaced workers in the wake of the economic downturn (Voorhees & Milam, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the support provided by noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce in East Tennessee during the economic crisis that started in 2008. I interviewed economic development and chamber of commerce officials in a 10-county area served by Walter's State Community College. I reviewed their perceptions of the noncredit continuing education programs offered by the division of community education at Walters State Community College. The central question addressed in this study was: What role does Walters State Community College serve in partnering with business and industry in East Tennessee to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce? This research synthesized meaningful information regarding noncredit programs. This study provided a model for other community colleges to use in assessing the values of and potential for their noncredit program offerings.

#### Purposeful Sample

The target participants for this study included leadership from business and industry in the East Tennessee service areas of Walters State Community College and included the following counties: Hamblen, Greene, Sevier, Claiborne, Cocke, Hawkins, Hancock, Union, Grainger, and Jefferson. I attempted to interview one key member from a chamber of commerce

in each of these 10 counties in East Tennessee. The preferred participants were from the largest major population center in each county. Some counties had had one major population center with potential representatives available for interviews. Nine out of 10 interviews with leaders from the chambers of commerce provide a good base of data for this study. I made telephone calls to the leadership of each chamber in the largest population centers to request participation. I called leaders from the chambers of commerce of smaller population centers and confirmed a minimum of nine participants. The demographics, industrial base, and geographic idiosyncrasies appeared to vary dramatically from county to county creating unique experiences.

### Data Collection and Analysis

I traveled to each city to meet each chamber of commerce leader who had agreed to participate in this study. I asked to meet them in their offices where they had access to information that could support their answers to the interview questions. I agreed to meet chamber leaders at alternate locations if necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). All data collected were designated to be stored in the Office of Community Education at Walters State Community College for 5 years. I conducted the interviews by telephone when face-to-face meetings were not possible. I attempted to conduct all interviews during normal business hours. In the interviews, I asked each of the economic development and chamber of commerce officials in-depth, open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of the noncredit continuing education programs provided to their communities by the division of community education. Each interview was partially structured with freedom to modify the questions and order of questions. The interview guide is provided as Appendix C.

I used the constant comparison methodology by collecting data from the leadership of each chamber of commerce in the 10-county service area (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop a

grounded theory to provide modes to describe and explain sociological behavior (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Comparing and contrasting each participant's report with the interviews from other participants enabled me to identify tentative categories that reflected the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998). I probed for further clarification of answers to my questions as needed. This allowed my interviews with the participants to be flexible and adaptable to the differences in each community (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). I attempted to understand the experiences of the participants and reconstruct events concerning ways the citizens of their communities have experienced the economic recession, unemployment, and financial difficulties (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I delved into the experiences of citizens' reactions and how they were coping in order to shed new light on their problems. I conducted these interviews as extensions of ordinary conversations in an effort to make the participants feel as though they were partners in the research as opposed to being the subjects of the research. I listened carefully to hear and understand the meaning of the participants' answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I compared different sources, situations, and artifacts to look for recurring patterns, themes, and trends that could lead to developing the foundation of a hypothesis that could be further researched (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

### Research Questions

There has been a gap in the knowledge about continuing education programs and their impact on business and industry in East Tennessee. The participants selected for this research had unique perspectives regarding their specific communities. Their responses were studied in the context of their experiences with their constituents, the recession, and the community college. The research questions used an innovative approach to the exploration of the participants' views on economic development education in their regions.

The research questions that have guided this research were:

1. How can local business and industry partner with the administration of a regional community college to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce?
2. How does the recession impact the local communities?
3. How do chamber of commerce officials describe the skills and knowledge needed by employees in order for their organization to survive and thrive?
4. How do chamber of commerce officials describe the skills and knowledge that displaced workers need in order to keep or find new jobs?
5. How do chamber of commerce officials identify gaps between employee skill needs and employee skills?
6. What resources can a community college provide to the local community to help with economic recovery?

The partially structured interview questions (Appendix C) were broad in scope and allowed participants to elaborate on their responses. I searched for a deep understanding of their experiences by probing for context and asking about multiple, overlapping, or conflicting themes. I paid close attention to the specifics of meanings, situations, and history (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There was opportunity for follow-up clarification questions based on the responses from each participant. Follow-up questions were used to acquire in-depth information to develop a better understanding of an idea, concept, theme, event, or issue suggested by the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Each participant was asked for permission to tape record the interviews. If participants had preferred not to have their interview tape recorded, I would have taken handwritten notes.



Each interview was documented, but I did not identify the person being interviewed in any manner on tape or in the transcripts. Participants were interviewed individually and code names were assigned. The opinions of the participants have been considered real, meaningful, and appropriate according to their professions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Inductive analysis allowed categories and patterns to emerge from the data rather than being imposed on them prior to collection and enabled generalizing from a limited set of observed data. The goal was to interpret the constructed meanings of the participants' views of the economic impact that continuing education played in their communities. The data were sorted numerous ways to look for common themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

#### Ethical Protocol

A research plan was submitted to the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University. After approval, every effort was taken to guarantee confidentiality of the responses of each participant's interview. Special care was taken to ensure that no references in the study would enable a reader to ascertain a specific location other than the general geographic area of East Tennessee served by Walters State Community College.

#### Data Analysis

The grounded theory-constant comparative method was selected to identify phenomena of interest, concepts, and principles as a qualitative methodology because the data were constantly evolving during the research. Analysis continued until I understood each process or topic in each step of the study. Data gathering was ongoing and nonlinear throughout the data gathering process. I wrote memos about my observations immediately following each interview and personally transcribed every interview from the audio recordings and every memo of observations. I then sorted the data into meaningful analytical units.

I used open coding to break down, examine, compare, and categorize the data collected. I segmented the data and used inductive codes including symbols, descriptive words, or category names. I repeated this process looking for other groupings of similarities and coded them accordingly.

I used selective coding to delimit the study in order to focus on abstract concepts from the responses. Co-occurring codes identified data that overlapped. I maintained a master list of each code used in the data analysis. Based on the clarity and specificity of the responses, it was not appropriate for me to prepare a diagram as a tool to organize the data in categories of phenomena.

In order to construct a meaningful hypothesis, I used theoretical codes that described the most probable relationships between the core variables. This synthesis of probable relationships was the foundation for the conclusions achieved by this study.

This study focused on the spoken words (or symbols) of the subjects that represented certain meanings to them. Each symbol or word was analyzed in three parts: The word or symbol itself, to what the word refers, and the relationship between the word or symbol and the subject being interviewed. Data were managed according to coding schemes (Fisher, 1993).

My primary concern was to remain objective in my interpretations of the research because I had an interest in enhancing the perception of Walters State Community College as the training partner of choice for business and industry in East Tennessee. I exercised caution not to influence the respondents to answer questions in a manner that would validate my hypothesis. Influencing the answers of the participants is a form of researcher expectancy that states that researchers can inadvertently influence the responses to questions in various subtle ways (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991).

### Quality and Verification

The researcher used empirical research and the constant comparative method of data analysis to develop codes while conducting the research. This enabled me to discover similarities among the various groups in the research. I provided the participants with transcripts of the interviews for verification and validation prior to analysis. At the completion of the study, I will provide a copy of the completed study to each member who participated in the research. I will also offer to present the findings to each participant's chamber of commerce to help seek best practices from other communities, identify common issues, and provide ideas to ease the impact of the recession.

I validated the study by maintaining an audit trail and by documenting each step of the data-gathering process so another researcher could reconstruct the study in order for my findings to be accepted into academic literature.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the partnership role of noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce in selected communities during the current economic crisis that started in 2008. This included investigating the perceptions of the participants in a specific multicounty area that is served by a local community college regarding the sociological impact of workforce education. Specifically, the study explored their perceptions of the quality of noncredit continuing education programs offered by the community college. The goal of the study was to interpret the constructed meanings of the participants' views of the economic impact that continuing education plays in their communities. Analysis of this data should provide a framework for local chambers of commerce and community colleges to partner more effectively to revitalize the workplace during an economic crisis.

In order to optimize the results of this study, I focused on one underlying question: What role does Walters State Community College serve in partnering with business and industry in East Tennessee to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce? This study may also provide a model for other community colleges to use in assessing the values of and potential for their noncredit program offerings.

#### Selection of Participants

This study was designed to conduct one-on-one interviews with 10 chamber of commerce officials in a specific multicounty area that is served by Walters State Community College. The target participants for this study included leadership from business and industry in the East Tennessee service areas of Walters State Community College in the following counties: Hamblen, Greene, Sevier, Claiborne, Cocke, Hawkins, Hancock, Union, Grainger, and Jefferson.

The participants' chamber experience ranged from 2 to 29 years. Most of the participants were actively involved in their positions full time and the others were part-time administrators. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the president, chief executive officer, or director of economic development from 9 of the 10 largest chambers of commerce in the 10 counties served by the community college. Nine out of 10 officials agreed to be interviewed. The participants were selected based on their experiences in their communities enabling them to be information-rich regarding perceptions of Walters State Community College as a viable partner. The participants' job-related experiences with the chambers of commerce ranged from 10 to 27 years.

Each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. Seven of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participant's office at their respective chamber of commerce. This choice of location enabled them to feel comfortable and secure in their office. Three of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. The participants volunteered to participate in this study. Prior to each interview, I explained the informed consent process and responded to any questions they had. The study participants stated they understood and they signed Informed Consent Forms.

Prior to each interview, the participants selected pseudonyms for themselves, their chambers, and their community in order to protect their anonymity. I used an audio recorder to record each interview. I personally transcribed each recording and assigned code numbers to each transcript to provide additional protection of each participant's identity. I delivered each transcript back to each participant for review and corroboration. This verified the accuracy of each transcript. To further ensure their confidentiality, each of the participants was assigned a code from C1 to C9. These codes were randomly assigned and are in no way connected to the

demographics, location, name, or level of importance of any of the counties. The codes did not list the county names in alphabetical order.

It is important to note that the participants have been faced with unique circumstances that have affected local economies irrespective of the national economy. Two of the participants' primary industry was tourism. The other seven participants' primary industry was manufacturing. These unique circumstances, from different demographic areas, are reflected in the responses of the participants. The opinions of the participants were considered real, meaningful, and appropriate according to their professions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### Results of Interviews

The responses of each of the participants were compared and contrasted to other participants responses to identify tentative categories. Some of the participants were very verbose and opinionated about certain issues in their area. Others were very willing to respond to the questions in the interview. One of the participants was reluctant to share information at all. Not all questions were answered by every participant. Their responses were studied in the context of their experiences with their constituents, the economic downturn, and the community college. Their responses reflected their views on economic development education in their regions. The digital recording of their responses was stored in a secure location at Walters State Community College. Specific common themes have been identified and are presented below.

### Emerging Themes

I analyzed interview data and documents using the constant comparison analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify the major themes that were significantly indicated among all nine chambers of commerce. This process was initiated by coding interview transcripts line by line. This process generated a list of 12 codes that were refined, combined, and organized to

produce categories of common themes. The initial data analysis was focused on identifying the major themes that were common to all nine of the subjects interviewed. The next phase of the data analysis focused on identifying any divergent themes that were unique to any one or two groups (but not three groups).

Twelve common themes emerged regarding a desired partnership between the community college and the communities served by the 10 chambers of commerce. The data are presented in order of the 12 themes that emerged:

1. Communication
2. Working relationship
3. Workforce development
4. Areas of improvement
5. Economic impact of the recession
6. Prognosis for recovery
7. Employee skills and knowledge
8. Management and leadership skills and knowledge
9. Awareness of training; incumbent and displaced worker's needs
10. Relocating company criteria
11. Impact of noncredit training on local economy
12. Partnership between participants and community college

The 12 themes could be further refined and condensed to two fundamental issues: communication and awareness.

## Communication

The majority of the participants stated their perception that communication between the community college, business and industry, and the chamber of commerce was of foremost importance. Ironically, communication seemed to be the weakest area. Throughout most of the interviews, the participants repeatedly stated they did not know about noncredit programs from Walters State and were not aware of any classes that had been delivered in their communities. The majority of participants stated they thought that better communication between the community college and business and industry in their community was essential. Participant C1 gave this reason for viewing communication this way. Participant C1 explained:

I think it is critical that our educational institutions be in constant communication with business and industry in this county to identify their specific training needs as they struggle in this difficult economy. The community college and technology center must be able to provide services to enhance the skill levels of displaced workers and others seeking employment to the point that they become a newly employable asset to the companies in this region.

Participant C2 stressed the importance of communication and further elaborated on the lack of knowledge about some of the programs available from Walters State Community College. The participant stated the need to develop a system to improve communication. Participant C2 said:

It starts with communication. We have to develop a system between this chamber, the economic development council, and Walters State Community College to share information and resources. If we don't start talking with each other more, we will miss a great opportunity. For instance, I did not know that Walters State Community College provided skills training for people to help them get jobs.

Another participant stated that communication was important and put the responsibility of improved communication on the community college itself. Participant C5 said, "As far as the college is concerned, they should get in touch with each individual business or send out a survey, possibly, to see which services are needed."



In contrast to that response, another participant, C6, also stated that improved communication between their chamber of commerce, business and industry, and the community college was so important it was the chamber's responsibility to initiate improved communication with all of them. Participant C6 stated:

We have a communication tool in place that we put together that we call education and workforce development. This fall, we are going to hold a summit involving industry leaders, educational leaders at all levels including Walters State to enhance our communication. Walters State is on our executive committee.

### Working Relationship

The participants stated they had prior experience working with business and industry, the chamber of commerce, and Walters State Community College. They reported having an excellent working relationship with Walters State Community College, especially with degree-seeking program offerings. Many of the participants were not aware of the noncredit class offerings at Walters State. Participant C1 said:

We have had a very positive experience with the community college in this county. They have been especially receptive to working with business and industry in our community to identify the availability of specific workers with specific skills, and more importantly, to be able to craft customized training programs. This includes recruitment of people to enroll in those programs to become employable after they have completed their training. The community college also provides the opportunity for our citizens to enroll in supplemental training to enhance their skills and do a better and more productive job in the workplace. Walters State Community College has a proven track record of success identifying and quantifying specific skills training and curriculum that can meet the needs of business and industry.

Participant C2 said that there was not an awareness in the community of the noncredit community education training class offerings. The participant acknowledged the value of such programs to workforce development. The participant was very aware of the credit and degree programs offered at Walters State Community College and said the working relationship with the dean of the local campus was strong. Participant C2 said:

Actually, it has been wonderful and has enlightened our board of directors. Walters State Community College noncredit has been providing a series of seminars once a month for local business and industry. I wasn't even aware that Walters State Community College was available to do this. We have received very favorable responses from our people in the seminars. Like most businesses in this county, those people are very busy trying to sustain their businesses. Once they found out about the quality of the seminars, attendance picked up. In addition to that, the instructor from Walters State Community College established rapport with our membership director which was excellent. We knew we could depend on Walters State Community College division of noncredit community education. The Walters State Community College dean of the campus in our county has worked with the chamber and educated us about how Walters State works within our community.

Participant C8 stated there was a strong working relationship and excellent communication with the college. The participant said that high school students in the community valued the presence of the community college in their area. Participant C8 is in a county focused more on tourism than manufacturing. The statement was based on the demographics in the community, the primary industry in the community, and the topological constraints.

Participant C8 stated:

There's a really strong relationship between the college and local business and industry in our county. I think there has been a lot of dialogue between them. It's become a situation where they really tried to help each other out if a need was identified. This communication has brought business and industry closer to working with the community college. There has been a lot of effort with displaced workers who are at the level that they can consider going to college. They want to go to Walters State Community College. They feel like it is a solid institution. They feel proud of earning a credential from the college.

In contrast to that response, I received this statement from participant C7. This participant connected the working relationship, communication needs, and student perceptions in a succinct manner. This participant said the perception of the college-age students in the community was partially due to a lack of communication with those students.

Participant C7 said:

We have some students who go to Walters State, but they act like they are embarrassed that they go there. We have to change their perception that this is a stepping stone to a four-year college. This is where they can get a degree. I think people are not aware of everything that is available. Walters State needs to do a better job communicating to the people all of the things you have available. People need to understand that it is there for everyone. But some folks think negatively about a two-year college. They don't like the fact that Walters State doesn't have dorms.

Participant C3 elaborated more on the relationship with the credit and noncredit departments of Walters State Community College. This was interesting because most of the participants stated there was not awareness of the activities of the noncredit department in the counties even though the chamber had frequently sponsored noncredit programs from the community college. Participant C3 stated:

We have actually had experience with both the credit and noncredit areas. In talking about Walters State in general, we work very closely with the workforce investment board and the workforce investment act, the center for workforce development, and the career center. I think we take advantage and get involved in every aspect of what Walters State has under its umbrella that I am aware of. I think we have used every service in the past.

Overall, each of the participants reported a good working relationship in spite of poor communication. Participant C9 stated, "WSCC has always worked very well with us in the past. That has been a great partnership from a public and private standpoint."

### Workforce Development

Most of the participants had specific perceptions regarding their needs for workforce development training in their specific communities and the availability of those types of programs offered by the community college. They had different levels of awareness of training offerings but had very specific perceptions regarding revitalization of business and industry in their areas. Participant C3 said the role of the chamber of commerce is helping business and industry find the workforce development training needed in the county. This participant stated

that economic development was an ongoing process as technology continues to advance.

Participant C3 stated:

In our experience and the way we look at assisting our residents in our area and our region, we talk a great deal about job skills. So whether they need a degree or non-degree program, it really doesn't matter to us. We are looking for a skill or a specific set of skills to take. As we are working with business and industry in our area, we are constantly talking to them about what they really need. Having worked in this area for quite a while, lots of our businesses will get very specific. It is ongoing. In fact, we are working with four of our companies right now, and one of the first things we talk about is either on-the-job training or the incumbent worker programs. We are constantly looking at the changes in the economy because no matter what your skill set is, it is going to change and the requirements you are going to need to work are going to change. Therefore, as our manufacturers are bringing in new technology, new skill sets that they are looking for, and new training that they need, we are constantly talking to Walters State. We may need to add a skill that simply did not exist the year before.

Participant C4 was more guarded when responding to this question. The participant said there were many variables that could affect the needs and the outcomes and wanted to find a way for the community college to partner more closely with the local economic development board and business and industry. Participant C4 requested business and industry, the chamber, and the community college be more proactive in asking industry what type of workforce development programs that employees need. Participant C4 stated:

That is a loaded question. There are all kinds of parameters that take place, and I hope can take place in the future. However, I do know that local business and industry, because of the different job skills and knowledge required, need a better, diverse, and trained workforce. I would perceive that a local community college like Walters State could work hand-in-hand with the local economic development people of that community in reaching out to the industry and being able to go in to them and find out what type of job skills companies need in their particular facility.

Participant C6 elaborated more on the relationship with the noncredit department at Walters State Community College and how it is helping build a stronger relationship. This participant acknowledged the proactive approach from the noncredit community education person from the community college. Participant C6 stated:

We have a local contact at Walters State Community College division of noncredit training programs. That person came to me and said, “Hey listen, we need to talk,” and since that time we have made two or three calls together to local companies that Walters State is trying to develop programs for.

Participant C9’s perceptions were based on the unique needs of that specific county which is driven by tourism dollars. The focus was on hospitality and guest services. The participant expressed a desire to see more of those types of programs offered in their community.

Participant C9 stated:

What needs to happen is for the college to offer courses on hospitality and cleanliness; things of that nature need to be developed somehow between our colleges and higher education institutions in conjunction with chambers and local government within different areas.

Participant C5 spoke about specific workforce development needs that differed from the response given by participant C9. This participant was more interested in workforce development training that included medical training programs. Participant C5 stated, “We do have some companies who utilize WSCC quite a bit for different kinds of training. The nursing program has been very instrumental with our hospital and doctor’s offices. I would definitely recommend that you continue that.”

Participant C9 had the perception that, as the economy improves, the need for workforce development will increase. This was based on feedback received from business and industry in the community. This participant also indicated that the workforce must have the skills to do many different things as factories institute lean manufacturing principles. Participant C9 stated:

This community has gone through a significant time of economic recession. Some companies went out of business while others moved offshore. Either way, a significant number of people have been laid off or lost their jobs. Many industries in our area have survived or are beginning to recover. Companies who are expanding are now looking for competent, skilled employees. Many of our industries are back at full strength already, but they have had to become more efficient in order to survive. They are actively seeking people with a diversification of skills who are qualified to do multiple tasks, or operate multiple systems and equipment within those companies. In that regard, it is important to

have institutions like the community college and the appropriate coursework available to help employees gain specific skills and education.

### Areas of Improvement

Most of the participants expressed satisfaction concerning their working relationship with Walters State Community College. They offered varied suggestions of areas needing improvement by Walters State Community College, the economy, business and industry, students, or displaced workers. Participant C1 provided a positive response regarding the current relationship with Walters State. When pressed for areas of improvement, this participant provided some keen insight into the needs of this community. This participant stated a need for the community college to develop ways to instill better work ethics in the students that would transfer to the workplace. This was perceived as a major need for workforce development in this area. Participant C1 stated:

What has not worked well is a more difficult question because I personally have been very pleased with what Walters State Community College has been able to provide. I have worked with other chambers of commerce in other states and other areas. The program at Walters State Community College is better than any I have experienced. That is a good thing. I can't really think of any areas of improvement at this time. If I could suggest one thing, it would be to educate students in the importance of having a good work ethic. It should be included in any and all courses. Students can learn how to operate machines, but are they going to be willing to show up every day and be willing to work? The younger generation does not seem to have the same thoughts about employment and what it means to be a good employee as older generations who seem to have a good work ethic.

Participant C2 linked the areas of improvement back to the importance of good communication. This participant expressed a desire to improve the working relationship with the college in order to communicate better with constituents. Participant C2 stated:

We definitely need to improve our communication. In addition to that, there is a website called JOBS. We need to coordinate that with Walters State Community College, the chamber, the economic development board to build up a network of people who will utilize that web site and list their skills and the type of employment they are seeking.

Companies who have job openings could post that information on that web site. That is just one example of things we could be doing.

Participant C4 also linked communication to the areas of improvement. Improved communication with the community college would create a higher awareness of program offerings that this participant could then communicate to the citizens. Participant C4 stated, “We do need to become more aware of that and the process Walters State has available there and make that available to our community.”

Participant C3 linked the need for improvement to the economy. This participant’s perception was that the economy had to improve first before workforce development could grow. Participant C3 said:

Basically, the economy needs to improve so we can take advantage of more services. In this economy, we are looking, basically, at the manufacturing sector because they are working with fewer and fewer employees. The average manufacturer has fewer numbers at an average site than we did 10 years ago and a lot less than 20 years ago. So, a lot of our employees have to have multiple skill sets because they are going to be asked to do multiple jobs. We have to find a way to better leverage those.

Participant C5 took the approach of linking the areas of improvement to some specific needs of the county. This included keeping the community college affordable, offering specific types of programs, and delivering these training programs in the community instead of requiring the students to drive a long distance to the community college campus. This participant also acknowledged financial gain to the community if these programs were offered. Participant C5 said:

Basically, continue to keep enrollment fees down. It is a very affordable college, and it makes it worthwhile for students to stay here in this county. They can stay here and complete the basics before going on to a four-year college. Continue with the training programs that are in hand, such as the nursing program. We are working with the college to add more programs and classes in this county. One of the things we need is a dialysis program. They spend an inordinate amount of time and effort at the hospital shipping patients to Knoxville to get treatment. I told the administrator of the hospital that it is a no-brainer. We need to get a dialysis machine in here. Get the people trained. You won’t

have to transport them and spend the money for that. Medicare will cover the service if the patient is diagnosed with renal failure. It is guaranteed income. And it is not cents on the dollar either. That is better than some of the insurance we have right now. I believe they have one dialysis machine up there right now. It is a money maker. It is sad to say you can make money off of that, but it is needed.

Participant C6 stated there are different educational needs for students who are not college-bound. The perception of this participant was that many of the college-age students in the community were not motivated to go to any college. This participant maintained that what needed to improve included communication skills, awareness, and opportunity. Participant C6 stated:

Our challenges are to convince kids in high school that welding is a viable career that they can enjoy a good living. We are talking about kids that are not college-bound. That is a living they could have with great benefits and retirement plans. They could start their own company some day. That is a communication issue we are trying to deal with right now.

Participant C8 expressed concerns about dislocated workers. This participant recognized that displaced workers generally need to return to the workforce rapidly. These workers are in need of different skills in industries that are hiring workers. Participant C8 stated, “We need to look at issues beginning with the dislocated workers that allow them to get through quickly and efficiently with a credential so they leave with something that is valuable in the workplace.”

Participant C9 stated a concern for the needs of small business contrasted to larger manufacturing companies. This participant is in a community that is not conducive to large manufacturing businesses and industry. The greatest potential for growth is in small businesses.

Participant C9 stated:

From a future standpoint, I think, based on the current economic climate, we need to be looking a little harder on how we can develop small business-oriented courses that can train those that are opening their own small businesses to be able to survive through this economic climate and to prosper.



## Economic Impact of Recession

The participants provided perceptions of the economic recession and its impact on the specific communities. They shared unemployment figures and ways business and industry have responded. Based on the responses, the unemployment rate in the 10 counties served by Walters State Community College ranged from 6% to 16.5% depending on seasonality of the hospitality industry.

Most of the participants stated that economic recovery had already started or was about to start. Participant C1 explained the ramifications of the downturn in the economy in that specific county. That community has lost numerous jobs due to companies either going bankrupt or moving out of the country. This participant discussed the types of businesses that were affected the most and those businesses that seemed to be able to hold on. Participant C1 stated:

We currently have a 12% unemployment rate in this county. We have lost almost three thousand jobs that have gone away and probably will not come back. No doubt, it has hit us hard, particularly because the housing market went away. We had a number of industries in this community that supported the housing market. This includes a number of different products and services. The furniture industries have moved offshore almost completely. That greatly affected this county. The wooden truss companies have been negatively affected. Foam and bedding companies have been severely depressed. A lot of companies suffered, and consequently were forced to lay off many, if not all, of their employees. They have experienced slow down and many are experiencing rebound. One of the things we are finding, as new jobs become available, it is becoming more difficult to find potential employees who can pass a drug screen. There are jobs available, but people don't have the advanced skills in order to be qualified for those jobs. Potential employees also need to have a good work ethic and positive attitude to be employable. The plastics industry seems to be doing well in this county. Automotive and automotive components companies are doing really well. People may not be able to buy a new house, but they can afford to buy a new car. Automobile purchases continue to survive in this county. This county has a lot of food preparation and food products companies which are doing extremely well. This covers a wide spectrum from bakeries to poultry processing.

Participant C2 had some different perceptions of the economy in that specific county. The unemployment rate is based on the seasonality of the tourism industry in the East Tennessee

region. This participant stated that local tourist destinations had not been affected as much as manufacturing companies. Participant C2 said:

The unemployment rate here has been around 8% on average. Unemployment is usually higher in the off season and lower in the prime season. In the winter it may soar up to 12% to 15%. We saw some higher unemployment figures during the height of the recession. We also got back to 6% during the month recently. Like everybody else, we cannot say that it hasn't affected us. We have been more fortunate than most because we are a tourist destination and very accessible by automobile. Our losses were in the single digits and not in the double digits like most of the rest of the country. We are actually up to about even now and had some gain. So we are very fortunate. Local businesses are experiencing mostly flat sales. The larger attractions with higher ticket prices are struggling, but smaller attractions with lower ticket prices are doing quite well. Tourists are staying fewer nights than they used to. These tourists are determined to come here and have their vacation. They are going to do that for their family and themselves; they just are not going to spend as much money as they used to. Grocery stores are doing great because people are eating in more and eating out less frequently. Tourists are still coming to town to enjoy their vacations. The mom and pop restaurants, the businesses who were already struggling are really suffering. We have seen a number of small storefront businesses downtown close their doors.

The county served by Participant C3 was affected greatly by the economic recession according to the response from this participant. The participant said there was double-digit unemployment in the county. This participant provided a hypothetical situation about a possible new employer who wanted to hire a large number of trained employees for welding jobs. The larger issue is that there are few trained welders in the job pool. This participant said that the county must have a well-trained available workforce if expected to attract new business and industry. Manufacturing businesses and industry are the primary employers in this community. This participant expressed value for workforce development training and formal academic degree education. This participant also expressed a relationship between education and the median income of employees. Participant C3 said:

Our unemployment is hovering about 13% right now. The problem you are dealing with is the numbers. We don't have the numbers of people in the workforce. We don't have the numbers of people with proper education. That makes it difficult for employers to recruit. It also makes it difficult to attract larger companies who would need to hire a

larger number of employees. A larger company may want to higher 100 welders, as opposed to a smaller company who might only need 20. I don't think I could find 100 welders overnight if that large company located here. We don't have the inventory of available workers in this community because the numbers don't exist. We are changing just like everyone one else in the region and in the country. The manufacturing sector has taken a real hit. We have lost three million jobs nationally in the manufacturing sector. The productivity continues to go up which means employees are being displaced but the remaining employees are being asked to do more. We see that locally. There are two things we are doing. We are trying to provide better employees for those manufacturing jobs because they are becoming technical and more demanding for skills. Just general labor doesn't exist anymore. They don't want people who just show up and do whatever they are told to do. In fact, a lot of our jobs are requiring certifications. Employers expect employees to have specific certifications. They want people who will actually show up. Unfortunately, some employees think that they work a three day week or a four day week on a regular basis and then they are done. Most of our businesses work on a fairly reduced workforce these days because they do have to do more with less. We do hear that quite a bit from lots of our folks. To take displaced citizens and give them something they can actually take into the job marketplace and sell to a business. We are looking for something of that nature. As we continue to see the change in manufacturing, things are going to change. The new growth areas will be healthcare, government, education, and retail. The growth is going to be in all of those other sectors that are not manufacturing. We have to transition people from thinking that service jobs are bad jobs due to the fact that service jobs are actually 88% of all the jobs in this country. So, we have to train the folks for what is going to happen in the next wave of the economy. Everything that a company does is performed by its workforce. Companies here are experiencing tremendous turnover. They are having difficulty filling those jobs, because we don't have the qualified or certified people available in our workforce. At some point, for them to be successful, they have to make a decision whether to stay or go. We had a situation like that recently where a major employer moved from this county to another county in order to find a more qualified workforce to choose from. That is a good example of how it is easier to recruit from a larger, more metropolitan area than in a rural area. There is greater access and a greater number of people who want to work. It is shocking that they can drive just 20 miles and go back 20 years. Those are the issues that rural areas deal with. If you look at our census numbers, our educational attainment numbers tend to be weaker than most of our surrounding counties. Therefore, we don't have the number of high school graduates that some counties have. We don't have the number of college graduates. We don't have the number of citizens who have advanced degrees. That puts us at a disadvantage because the research we look at, such as median family income or per capita income, is tied to education. You can look at every county across the state and compare their educational attainment to their per capita income. Counties with higher educational attainment have much higher median income. Counties with lower educational attainment have much lower median income.

Participant C4 stated different perceptions based on the demographics of the area. This participant stated that the county had an available workforce already. This participant said this

attracted some new business and industry into the county. Three new businesses in the community created 1,000 new jobs. This has helped offset the companies that have terminated some of their employees. Participant C4 said:

Our unemployment rate is about 10.7% at this time. That number has been improving every month. We have a very employable workforce. Over 38% have graduated from high school and most of them have either attended college or have achieved some type of degree. We have a couple of industries and contract companies that are terminating employees. This county is in the process of attracting with new industry. In fact, we have had new industry coming here. We have one new industry that manufactured their products in the European market and then had to export it to America. They have discovered, because of the cost of transporting their products to the United States, it is cheaper to produce it here and distribute from here. We have an example of that. We have had a local distribution center come here because of the facility we had available. We have another wholesale company that has located here. So the bottom line is that over the past three years we have located three new companies here, one per year, which has put about one thousand people to work. That has been a good thing. At the same time, we have had some other companies lay off almost that same number. So we have been kind of flat in that area. Had it not been for the successes we have had in those little niche markets, we would have been in a much worse situation than we are.

Participant C5's perception of that specific community was more typical of other participants. This participant gave some specific examples of types of industries most affected in the community. There is no growth in business and industry in this specific county. The most prosperous company in that community has a large military contract that has kept that company in business. Participant C5 said:

The unemployment rate is about 12.2%. During non-recession periods, it was between 5% and 6% as a general rule. We have been pretty fortunate. Some of our companies did have a slowdown but are back up to full force now. It has not hit us as hard as it has hit some of the other regions of the country. It has slowed down considerably. The furniture industry has been affected. One of our companies employed over 1600 people. Now they are down to around 900 to 1,000. We have not had any major layoffs. It has been sporadic. Growth is basically nonexistent right now. There are people just barely hanging on right now. We have a diverse amount of industry here including furniture, medical, automotive, and textile. We have the only textile east of the Mississippi that does knitting, bleaching, dying, and sewing. They are strictly operating off of the military. As far as the economy is doing with them, if they weren't doing business with the military, they would definitely have problems, also.

The county served by participant C6 has also experienced significant problems due to the economic downturn. The unemployment rate in this county was very high because of the loss of so many manufacturing jobs in that specific county. This participant also expressed concern that students who do not perceive themselves as college-bound are opting out of math and science classes in high school. This is a concern because math and science is extremely important to people entering into manufacturing careers as technology continues to advance. Participant C6 stated:

We have had extremely high unemployment rates last year in the 16.5% range. The new figures which will be released soon will be about 12% to 12.5%. It has been more dramatic here probably than in most of the other counties because we are tied so much to manufacturing. About 28% of all of our jobs are directly in manufacturing. Probably, another 10% are indirectly tied to manufacturing. We are seeing some light at the end of the tunnel. It has had an impact on us. What we are seeing, not just locally, but nationwide, is the trend that kids who are not college-bound are opting out of math and science requirements during their junior and senior years of high school. That is a problem. We are aware of it, but we don't know what the solution is. We have a company that needs 60 employees right now who cannot find enough trained welders. The company wants us to help them get the word out to the community that applicants need not have to have welding experience to become a welder. If you have the aptitude, they will train you for that job. If you have the desire and aptitude, we will personally train you and pay for all of the expenses to train you for that job. This has established a whole new paradigm for us.

Participant C7 had the perception that the downturn in the economy had less of an impact on the county than most other counties and that the specific county was not affected by the economic downturn when it first happened. This participant stated the community had been insulated from the factors that created the economic downturn. This county also has a number of small businesses that are very independent and choose to have operating hours based on their own individual scheduling needs. This participant shared some creative ideas that were implemented in the county to help stimulate economic growth. Participant C7 stated:

Unemployment is at 9% in this county. Fortunately for us, it was kind of slow hitting us. I don't know if we were hit or not. It was slow coming in. We didn't really feel the big impact until January of this year. What has happened here is that a lot of the businesses have taken this opportunity to do some expansion or fix-up/clean up. The result of that is that they did not lay off many employees. Some of them cut back to a four-day work week or volunteer time off. One of the things they did was take the time to do maintenance types of things that they have been putting off. In the long run, what has happened is that many businesses are hiring. They are not doing tremendous hiring. They are picking up an employee here or there. We have had some industries that were devastated. The car industry took a big hit. We have a lot of automobile service products produced for cars such as brakes and fluid lines. We had one company that went from 300 employees to less than one hundred. They picked up a new product line and are almost back to full capacity. We had another company that was bought out by a foreign company that is in the process of hiring 50 new employees. Our retail stores and smaller businesses got hit a little harder. They have been struggling a little bit. We have been trying to find ways to help them. We have started these car shows on the second Friday of each month. A lot of our smaller restaurants were not staying open at night. They were only open from 11 to 3. They have started staying open on the car show nights. We were kind of laughing last month. It was tremendous. I have checked with those businesses to see if this was the direction we needed to go. They were closing their doors and were completely sold out of food. I think that being creative and coming up with ideas helps. That entrepreneurial spirit makes you look at what you are doing right now and makes you think outside the box and ask: What can we do? How can we help? After the first few car shows, they recognized the potential. We don't even have to ask them now. They are checking their competition. What we have to do is think outside the box to see how creative we can get. Our car shows are a good example of that entrepreneurial spirit. One of the problems we have with small businesses here is that they don't want to keep regular business hours. If they don't feel like working today, they just stay home while their store is closed, turning away customers.

Participant C8 viewed East Tennessee as a region and commented on the effect of the economic downturn holistically. This participant indicated that the Walters State service area historically has a higher unemployment rate than the rest of Tennessee. Participant C8 stated:

We are at about 9.6% to 9.8% region-wide at this time. It should improve over the next 24 months. During a recession, the counties in the Walters State service area have stayed a few points above the state average in unemployment. We have never been at the state average. We have always been worse. We haven't been terribly worse, but we have always been worse. That goes up and down to a certain extent when you have dislocated workers. There are some counties that consistently have high unemployment. It is not all rosy everywhere. We have had a really big hit with automotive. You could see it in many areas. Then all of a sudden, we have seen some signs of life. We manufacture a lot of automotive parts here. The automotive companies seem to be coming back. Furniture has been going down for a long time. Someone in Knoxville bought two of our furniture

plants, so some furniture is surviving. There is some talk about the Chinese dollar being devalued so they can sell furniture in the USA better. Some of our counties may look pretty good until you look at the city. The city has higher unemployment than the rural county. You have more Hispanics relocating to the city areas. They are not locating in the suburbs. When you see things like that, you really have to think about and plan for how you will get people to come out of a recession. Progress is doing a stutter step where it moves ahead and then falls back a little. There should be a recovery start to occur in the near future but there could be another recession in a few months.

Participant C9 talked about how the downturn in the economy has affected that specific area. This county's economy is based primarily on tourism. Unemployment rates are affected by tourist seasons. Most of the businesses in this community are sole-proprietorship small businesses. This participant had the perception that most of the entrepreneurs do not possess the business acumen to manage their business during economic downturns. Twenty of the small businesses have gone bankrupt during 2011. This participant is actively searching for ways to educate small business owners in ways to save their businesses. Participant C9 stated:

We are pretty much average in our unemployment. It has hovered around 12% - 14% throughout the year. That is a non-seasonal range. During the season, it drops below 10%. It becomes a challenge to find workers to fill those types of temporary jobs during the season. The problem that we see is that we have seen such growth over the past thirty years in our community that the past three years of economic downturn and the fact that it is causing visitors to rethink the way that they vacation, how they vacation, how much money they spend for their leisure time; it is forcing us to have to rethink how it is that we market to them. I know that, basically, our county has weathered pretty good, much better than some of the rural areas. The small business owners that are surviving this recession are the ones that have enough knowledge in the area of providing their business with an overall business plan and marketing plan, etc. Those are the ones that are surviving. The ones that have not survived from the recession – just in 2011 alone, we have seen over 20 small businesses go out of business. Those were the small mom-and-pop businesses. They were basically living hand-to-mouth, and out of their cash register. When things slowed down, they did not have a backup reserve to fall back on. That has been a huge impact on the small businesses that market to tourism. The ones that have survived have either been the small businesses who had the knowledge to create their own business plans and have financial reserves to help during the times that we are living in, or some of the larger franchise businesses have been taught that when they started their franchise. You can no longer live hand-to-mouth, out of your cash register during this economic crisis. You can't run down to your local bank anymore and get a line of credit to get you through until your next busy time because bank regulations have become so stringent that they no longer do those kind of loans.

### Prognosis for Recovery

Every participant was keeping an eye on trends to indicate whether the economic downturn was entering a phase of recovery. Each of the participants viewed the timing of a recovery differently. Most of them were optimistic. Many were cautious and all of them recognized the challenges they must overcome as the economy recovers. Others expressed some concern of a double-dip recession on the horizon. This participant witnessed growth and expansion in the community. Participant C1 stated:

We have had a lot of rebound. We are speaking in the middle of the 2011 year. There are several companies planning to expand and add employees which will help, but it is not going to happen overnight. In addition to those industries, we have been contacted by numerous new companies interested in moving to this area. The future is bright unless we slide into a double-dip recession nationally.

This participant has witnessed an increase in retail sales in that specific community.

Overall, this participant has not experienced any immediate growth in business and industry.

Participant C2 stated:

We are encouraged. We don't see any immediate growth in any major way. We do see a leveling out of the losses. We think that most of the businesses are trying to hold their own, and I think they are doing that. Our retail stores are starting to sometimes have flat sales up to 5% increases last year and maybe a 3% increase over the year before. We are starting to see incremental, small changes.

Participant C3 said there was exponential growth in technology being used by business and industry and said there was an effort to be proactive in preparing for the future economy. A knowledge-based economy will require a lot of input and analysis. Participant C3 stated:

The challenge is to look at what businesses need to survive and thrive in the "future" economy. I think that our economy is a knowledge-based economy. There is a lot of input and data that needs to be understood and analyzed. If we are going to thrive in the future, then we need to understand how to use information technology to manage business and industry.



This participant expressed a view that the global economy is going to create many new issues that business and industry will have to manage. This participant expressed a desire to strengthen the relationship with Walters State Community College in an effort to prepare for those issues. Participant C4 stated:

I think in this global economy there is going to be all kinds of needs and issues that are out there. I think our economic development team and our community need to do a better job in trying to form those relationships the community college or four year college.

This participant has implemented new techniques to prepare teachers with methods to instruct students for manufacturing jobs by provided field trips for teachers to visit actual manufacturing business and industry in their community. This creative approach is a paradigm shift for that specific community. Participant C6 stated:

Today, we have 36 teachers doing an in-service day at a local manufacturing company. It's almost the same teachers year after year because they are instructing students who will not be going to college. They are going to exit school and, hopefully, join the workforce. I think these teachers have a better understanding of how to prepare these students for careers in our community.

This participant also shared the perception that small business was a key factor in providing and sustaining jobs in their community. Participant C9 stated, "The best thing we can do in order to provide more jobs for people that need them is to make sure our small businesses stay in business and that they grow so they can continue to hire more people."

#### Employee, Management, Leadership Skills, and Knowledge

The participants shared their perceptions of the skills and knowledge that management, leaders, and employees of business and industry need in order to survive and thrive. Seven of the participants are from communities whose primary industry is manufacturing. Two of the participants are from communities where tourism is the primary industry. There was a broad range of ability, skills, and knowledge presented by the participants based on experiences in the

specific communities. This participant had witnessed a need by business and industry for employees with many different skills because of lean manufacturing initiatives and had specific comments about managers in those companies. This participant said there is a need for workforce education in computer and software skills. Participant C1 said:

Employees could become more productive by having multiple, diverse skills. Companies who become leaner have a greater chance of surviving this recession and rebounding. Good listening skills are critical. We need to emphasize the basics. One of the things I hear a lot in this county is that many people are not happy in their jobs. They say people in positions of authority have no people skills in terms of being able to effectively communicate without seeming bossy, authoritative or, in some cases, tyrannical. Managers need to be taught how to lead in a good way – firm and assertive – but with compassion. If Walters State Community College has courses or coursework that could help with those kinds of things, it would really help. The Demming approaches to quality management principles would be beneficial to teach to companies to guide their workforce. We need to teach people how to nicely deal with the people that work for or with them. That is a necessity. They may be a very productive manager by being a tyrant, but the chances are that the very team that works for them could be more productive if the manager wasn't a tyrant. They need management and leadership skills, communication and listening skills, and basic computer and software skills. They need general management and leadership skills. There is a difference in leading a team and telling people what to do. The managers need to stay current with all of the office software products including visual presentations, spreadsheets, database management, and so forth. Managers also need to learn better presentation skills to communicate with employees and customers in this day and age.

This participant's perceptions were more based on future needs as technology and the global economy keep changing. Some of the requisite skills for the future economy included problem solving skills, taking the initiative, and instilling strong work ethics. This participant had the perception that more advanced leadership skills are important in that specific community. This participant said this is a systemic problem and should be addressed across the country in every community. Participant C2 stated:

I think they need to look toward the future. I think technological skills and computer skills are important. Problem solving skills are important. I have noticed that with some of this generation – I don't mean to stereotype anybody – that one of their characteristics is that they can do anything you put in front of them, but sometimes they won't take the initiative to try and take it one step further. They don't take the initiative to say they have

finished the task and ask about what else they could do. How can I make this place better? How can I improve on this? I would like to see more of that if we are going to stay strong. We need that type of attitude. They need to learn how to take the initiative and have strong work ethics. They need something more advanced than Management 101. They need general technology and computer skills. If they received that type of training all over this state and all around the country, we as a nation could get back on track to where we need to be. I think the problem is systemic. I believe it is all over America. I think we need to focus on science and technology and become a strong nation again. Mainly, looking forward to the future and be realistic about our place economically.

This participant had the perception that people need to learn how to learn new things. The view was that change is constantly evolving at an accelerated pace. Workforce development needs to bring workers up to a baseline level of ability, skills, and knowledge so they will not be so far behind. Participant C3 stated:

From my perspective, more than anything else, what is missing is the ability of learning how to learn. I don't think there is a particular process. I think it is the understanding that change is constant. You don't just learn something, and then you know everything you need to know for the next 50 years. That is one of the issues for us, whether it is students currently in school, or people who are already in jobs, because everything we do is changing. Every program we use on a computer is changing. The pace and the acceleration of change is only going to get faster. It is becoming easier and less expensive to make those changes. The concern I have is those displaced workers who are falling behind quicker and not being trained on a regular basis. The issue I have is trying to provide those folks some kind of baseline training in some method so they don't fall behind as quickly as they have been. We need to be individual and creative about what we do. We need to encourage and show people how they can become more entrepreneurial. We have had the Small Business Administration come out and offer courses. Unfortunately, some of our people do not embrace the intellectual side or the classroom side to those programs. They seem to prefer the hands-on approach. That may be the answer, but we don't know. We are trying to grow the quality of the workforce. It is difficult, because it comes back to the chicken or the egg. Which comes first? It is difficult to tell workers to go out and get training so they can get an advanced job if we can't recruit companies to come to this area. As businesses go forward, they don't want to have to spend their own money to educate their workforce. It makes it more difficult when you are sitting in a rural community and our folks have to drive great distances to go to a college. Distance learning is difficult here because we don't have the broadband coverage in rural areas and we don't have widespread computer ownership. The rural areas are going to fall behind a little quicker. My concern is that we are not playing on a level playing field. That would be the gap for us. There definitely is a gap between rural and non-rural areas. Basic computer courses, language courses, things that would help

people think differently about how they can earn a living. Arts and crafts classes would be good . . . handmade items. We are looking at every avenue we can locally.

This participant has witnessed business and industry leaders' concerns about the lack of specific skill sets in the employee base. Technology is advancing and manufacturers are converting their operations to include robotics and mechanized processes. These are skills that are and will be required for sustainable growth. This participant has also witnessed a lack of trust, vision, and teamwork with employers and employees working towards a common goal. This participant expressed concern that business and industry leaders do not have the financial resources available during this period of economic downturn to pay for workforce development training for their employees or themselves. In this rural community not every household has a computer or access to the internet for online training programs. This participant stated a need for leadership skills training in that specific community. This included developing trust, communication skills, and technology skills with computers and programs. The needs for workforce development are changing very quickly and require lifelong learning. This participation made the observation that you cannot have economic development without education, and vice versa. Participant C4 stated:

I was with business and industry today and they were expressing their disappointment in the lack of some of the skill sets that they need. A lot of their equipment operators need to be able to operate robotics and do measuring. They are having difficulty in finding some of that skill set. I would think that economic development and community colleges – and even technical colleges should partner more and go forward doing that. Business and industry need to work with the local community college in trying to help train the current workforce that they have. They also need to provide opportunities for training and raising the skill sets, on whatever that may be, for new employees coming in. I think in America, the lack of trust and vision and working together for a common goal has basically started to deteriorate. I think we have got to provide some type of education and training on just being able to work together and what leadership and working together means. I am hearing throughout this community that “leadership skills” – and just the skills of being able to work together – and some trust factors are greatly needed. I think we need to find ways to provide leadership, communication skills, and trust classes among business and industry employees. We also need to provide these skills training

with people out in the community. I just came from an industry where they were talking about robotics and that kind of skill sets, being able to read and measure and that sort of thing. Another industry is a distribution company who has forklifts with computers on them. The types of skill sets needed are rapidly changing. I think you are going to see the need for some new skill sets in that direction. Who knows what other things will be coming up in the future? You can't have economic development without education and you can't have education without economic development. They go hand-in-hand. The more that education and economic development do to work together and focus on what can help us locally is just going to spread regionally and nationally and make our country a better place to live, work, and play.

This participant also had the perception that technology skills are greatly needed in that specific community. Math and science knowledge is also of critical importance. This participant has the perception that business leaders do not possess the fundamental skills of business finance. This community has taken the approach of sending school teachers to visit business and industry to see what skills are needed and what skills are missing. Participant C6 stated:

We need the technology skills. Obviously everyone needs to be computer literate. Technology has changed so dramatically in the manufacturing sector. We now have machines combined with computers, and other kinds of innovations. Ten years ago, a potential employee that might be a senior in high school with very little literate skills could come and get a job. Today, they have got to have more math and more science. They must have math and science in their background. Many of these business owners don't have the basic skills to write a business plan they could present to a bank if they needed money for expansion. What the teachers have learned when they go to these in-service days and spend the day with the plant managers and the owners is impressive. They are learning the technology skills that companies need, and the skills they are not seeing. That addresses some of the gap issues by actually being out in the field kicking the tires – one-on-one.

This participant recognized the difference between an entrepreneur who starts a small business and a business manager who understands how to sustain and grow a small business. This participant also expressed a need for small businesses in that area to learn how to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter properly. This participant has witnessed business and industry struggle to find employees with skills that companies need in order to survive. This participant spoke about the missing skill sets as a precursor to companies having difficulty

finding qualified managers. In essence, higher achieving students will graduate from high school and leave the community to go to a 4-year college. When they graduate they do not come back to this community. They find jobs elsewhere. The students who are not planning to attend college refuse to take math, science, and computer classes that would help those students get jobs at the local factories. Many of the companies have agreed to pay for employees to attend training classes but will not give them time off from work to take those classes. The distance between the community and the community college is too far for students to drive. Management and leadership for companies in that specific community must be promoted from within, and the core workforce does not have the skills and knowledge to be promotable. Participant C7 stated:

Our people don't need to learn how to start a small business; they need to learn how to sustain a small business. That is one of the problems we have with small businesses here. They don't want to keep regular business hours. If they don't feel like working today, they just stay home while their store is closed, turning away customers. I have had some business clients here and was bragging to them about this great restaurant we have in town. I walked them down the street and there was a sign on the door: closed – taking the day off. One of the pitfalls is that people don't understand the plusses and minuses of owning a business. I think we have to find ways to educate some of the older businesses on how to do a Facebook page or Twitter. Social networking is important. It is important to have a web site. It is important to maintain that web site. They really need some training classes to teach them the skills. The classes must be simple to learn. One of the things in our community is that a lot of industries want to promote from within. One of the things that happens is they have trouble finding employees from within that have the skills that they need. Then they try to find some training program that is suitable for them. Then they either have to let them off from work, or they are going to have to drive quite a distance. Most of the employees they are looking at are not financially able to take off from work, or they don't have the time to stay away from their families or job to travel so far away. I think one of the biggest things to look at is to try and partner some way where there can be classes offered in the community. Then we offer them for our high school children at some of the different high schools. I think we need to look more for adult opportunities. They need math, science, and computer skills. We actually taught a "manners" class to high school students. We were telling them things they had never heard before, such as open the door for your girlfriend, which fork to use, and not texting or talking on the cell phone while on a date. They do not realize that they are being rude. They did not want to leave after the class was over. They were asking a lot of great questions. In our business meetings, people will answer their cell phone and talk louder than the person giving the presentation. Many of our young people are moving away from this county after they graduate from high school. Companies are having trouble

finding the people they need because the people who are staying are not the ones who go to college. Some may go to the technical schools. But they have told us that their enrollment is down. I don't understand why.

Participant C7 has witnessed a need for soft skills training including work ethics, honesty, and being conscientious. This participant also stated that workers need to be able to pass drug tests. This participant has a unique insight to the training needs of management and leadership in local business and industry. The perception of this participant was that most managers and leaders do not have any idea what kind of training is needed. This participant agreed with most of the other participants that math and science training is important. However, the plant managers do not really know what they want or need, so they cannot explain it to the Human Resources manager. Participant C8 stated:

Every time we do a survey, business leaders claim their employees need soft skills. They need to come to work on time, they need to work all of their hours, they need to not take excess leave, they need to pass their drug test, and all of those things. Most of our industries have production workers. That is their base. They need a consistent, reliable, and honest workforce. It is difficult for employers to tell what they need. They can't really define what they want. I don't think they would still be in business in the area if they couldn't hire the people they need. If you are talking to HR managers or chamber of commerce people, they do not necessarily know exactly what training is needed. They have heard it second hand from a plant manager. Are they just trying to fill a position or are they looking to the future. Production lines are becoming more automated – more computerized. Definitely computer skills are things dislocated workers need to work on. Their math skills are a little low. We are hoping that training in those areas will help them develop the basic skills. They need reading, writing, and arithmetic . . . and computer skills. That will give them the edge over other unemployed workers. All of your questions about needs are something we struggle with a lot. Welding is a good example. We have employers say that say they cannot find welders. We do know that welders are produced by the technology schools in this area. Then we find out that the employers want welders who can also do specialized welding. They are looking for workers who have specific skills in a particular industry.

### Available Training Sources

The participants have multiple resources available for education and training. The participants shared perceptions of the training sources available in their community. This participant gave some specific examples of training sources that were familiar.

The response from participant C1 was:

There are many courses provided by the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce. The courses are provided by private consultants, four-year institutions, technology centers, and other non-profit groups. This would include forklift safety certificate preparation courses. Many courses are also available online over the internet so employees can complete them at home, on their own, to upgrade their skill levels.

This participant acknowledged a lack of knowledge about the training sources available. The response from participant C2 was:

I have to say that I have been speaking very bold words there and I don't have a lot of knowledge to back those up. I have realized that I did not have a good knowledge at all about what Walters State Community College had to offer, and it's just down the street from me. So, some people could say, they need to do a better job of getting the word out of what they could do. I do believe that because of my position in the community, I should educate myself as to what you could do. I need to spread that word to my membership. That's what I need to do. I think the common citizen doesn't have that responsibility to search out that information on their own.

This participant had a broader view of training sources available at this time. This participant has experienced the need to stay on the leading edge of available workforce education in an effort to provide the greatest amount of resources to business and industry. The response from participant C3 was:

When we look at training, we look at both the state department of economic development and the department of labor. The state department of economic development has a training assistance program where we can actually look at the talking head part of training. The instructor could be from inside a company or an expert in the field. It could be a vendor who sold a specific piece of equipment or installed the equipment. We look at three alternatives there. In terms of other training sources, we look at the department of labor, including WIA. We look at on-the-job training so we can get people ramped up in the early stages. This includes basic orientation and safety rules. The other piece that I think impacts not only companies that are spending money, but also Walters State or



anyone else doing training assistance, is the person who is already in a job who is beginning to see that the job skills they have are out of date. Therefore, we've seen numbers of people who have been to college and by the time they graduate, 50% of the information they have learned is obsolete. Information and technology is changing that quickly. Training is an ongoing and constant situation. We are seeing that as we are working with businesses that are bringing in more technical information, so there is a second set of training simply to determine what that piece of equipment or process is. From our standpoint, that is what would happen next. We have to stay on the cutting edge where we are actually leading training.

This participant has recognized a need to develop a closer working relationship with Walters State Community College. This participant also recognized other colleges but did not specify those with which they wanted to partner. The response from participant C4 was:

With our community we probably need to develop a more cap and gown relationship if Walters State Community College is open to sitting down with us and assessing our needs at the same time we are assessing your needs so we can see where we can walk more hand-in-hand together. By the same token, that is with the community college. We have some other colleges around and we need to do that with them also.

This participant acknowledged the Tennessee Technology Center as a source of workforce development training in addition to the resources from Walters State Community College. The response from participant C6 was:

We have the Center for Technology here to provide training. We have Walters State representatives working with us to help attract new industry to the area. Our contact from the noncredit programs frequently goes out with us to meet with local companies. They provide a different niche for that money and training. I think we have a lot of tools here and we are using them. We need them.

#### Awareness of Training

Walters State Community College noncredit programs have been delivered to business and industry in all 10 counties served by the community college. Because communication was number one on the participants' list of most important issues and was included in the areas needing to improve, it was significant to study how well these programs have been communicated to the leadership of the various chambers of commerce. This participant gave a

response similar to the other participants which was that they had a limited awareness of the courses but did not have any knowledge of the outcomes. When asked about Walters State Community College noncredit courses offered in the community, the response from participant C1 was, “Yes they have, but I do not have firsthand information it. I suspect it was beneficial, but I don’t know the results.”

This participant had a similar response to participant C1. This participant was aware of some of the noncredit courses that were delivered as chamber of commerce sponsored events, but they were not aware of the customized corporate training that had been delivered in their specific community. The response from participant C2 was:

Yes, I know that they do a lot of training for businesses. I wasn’t aware of that before although I had heard of it. I knew some businesses had gotten help from Walters State Community College, and I have been here when you personally have come here and given seminars on different topics. That has helped tremendously. What I was not aware of is that you can help individual businesses with specific problems that they have – not just Business Principles 101.

This participant gave a similar response. There was a distinct lack of awareness of the noncredit programs available to business and industry in that community. The response from participant C3 was:

Not specifically. I have talked to some people who have used Walters State services before in various areas. I suspect it was very good. We have always had a very supportive relationship with Walters State. The partnership, business and industry, the city, and county are all very supportive of any credit or noncredit training that would help improve the quality of our workforce.

This participant echoed the same response. The response from participant C4 was: “I am probably not as aware as I should be. I have heard that Walters State has been providing different training and other skill set classes. I don’t really know what the results were.”

This participant had the most knowledge of noncredit community education programs offered by Walters State Community College. The response from participant C8 was, “It is an

advantage to have a complete set of educational programs. We promote the technology center, both sides of Walters State, both credit and noncredit. The chambers promote it that way, too.”

This participant was aware of some of the noncredit programs available. That specific county had partnered with Walters State Community College to provide specific noncredit courses for business and industry in that specific community. The response from participant C9 was, “Yes, they have partnered with the chamber for specific programs.” The remaining participants did not have any awareness of noncredit community education programs.

#### Incumbent and Displaced Workers’ Needs

The participants shared perceptions about specific skills and knowledge the currently employed workforce needs in order to keep jobs or find new jobs. The responses were not different than the responses about the needs of displaced workers. This participant grouped incumbent and displaced workers in this response elaborating on the cost of workforce development nationally and acknowledging that advances in technology make training and retraining important to business and industry. This participant has witnessed a need for basic skills training including reading skills, math skills, and blueprint reading skills. This participant also acknowledged the need for training in attitude, work ethics, flexibility, and teamwork.

Participant C1 stated:

The amount of money that American businesses spend to train their employees for skills they should have learned by the ninth grade is staggering. I read this report thirty-five years ago. At that time it was over nine billion dollars. It is much more than that now. Employers realize they must constantly be training and retraining their employees in order to stay competitive. It is not just the employer that has the responsibility to provide this retraining. The employee must accept responsibility to take advantage of what companies and the communities are offering. It seems that many people have lost their desire to improve their skills. They just want to go home and sit down. They need basic skills including reading skills, math skills, and blueprint reading skills. These are the kinds of courses that unemployed people should be taking to improve their skills while they are out looking for a job. Displaced and incumbent workers should take computer basic skills. I believe there are things that would make them more valuable and

employable. In this day and age, becoming better qualified in social media and web page design is important. Attitude is more important than abilities. If a person has a basic education and is able to learn is an attractive candidate for a job. Companies need good employees and are willing to pay better wages if they have a good productive employee. Good work ethics says that a person is open to the possibility of being trained in some new skill that will make them more valuable to their employer. If a person becomes more valuable they will be rewarded with pay raises and promotions. It doesn't just happen. That person will be rewarded with more pay, or they will take those skills somewhere else where they will pay more for those skills. I think it is important for a prospective employer to see that a displaced worker has not been wasting their time while they have been out of work. The employer may ask a job applicant, "So you have been out of work because your company moved to China? That was 10 months ago. What have you been doing since then?" An employee who can answer that they have gone back to school to improve their skills by taking courses from the community college is more employable than the person who has just been lying around the house while waiting to get a job. This tells the employer that they might want to take a chance hiring this ambitious person. It is the employee's choice. We no longer have jobs for life. Skills become outdated as technology advances. People who cannot, or will not become retained with new skills will find it difficult to get a job with good pay. They need to have better reading and comprehension skills because they are having problems understanding and following directions. There are many people in our community who cannot communicate – speaking, writing or reading in the English language, Basic mathematics skills, knowing how to use a calculator, navigating a computer. They need logical problem solving skills and logical mathematics skills.

This participant recognized the need for spot training in specific areas. Courses that are short-term and provide an industry accepted certificate are urgently needed. This participant gave some specific examples of some of the courses offered by Walters State Community College noncredit community education that would be beneficial to citizens. Participant C2 stated:

They need short-term skills training. Walters State Community College offers short certificate programs that take less than a year to complete that gives people new skills so they can go out and find new jobs. I've talked about technology and science, but the truth of the matter is that when your family is hungry or when you needed a job yesterday, that reality just doesn't hold up. So the fact that a person could go to Walters State Community College and be trained to be a dental assistant, phlebotomist, or certified nurse assistant is amazing. I did not know that at all. I do know there is a great need in the medical field. We have a hospital right next door. I think Walters State Community College is teaching critical skills.

This participant had the perception that workforce development training should start during secondary education in high schools. Participant C3 stated that over 50% of the

knowledge attained during 4 years of college is outdated by the time the student graduates. This participant had a keen insight into promoting displaced worker training for jobs that do not exist yet. This community wants to attract new companies to relocate in that specific county. Potential companies want to know if there is an available, trained workforce already in the community. This participant wondered how to train unemployed workers for possible jobs in the future if they cannot convince some company to relocate in their area. Participant C3 stated:

We need to focus on education and secondary education. Then we need to try to grow the number of folks going to post-secondary education. They need to attain a 2-year or 4-year degree, or at the least get a certification through the noncredit department. That way they can walk into a potential employer with some kind of certificate that shows you know what you are doing. That makes you marketable to employers. As businesses go forward, they don't want to have to spend their own money to educate their workforce. Computer skills are essential because every program we use on a computer is constantly changing and being upgraded. Employees need baseline training in the fundamental skill sets business and industry require. By the time someone graduates from college, over 50% of the information they have learned has expired. This is especially true regarding information systems and technology. Employees need to improve their attitude and work ethics. Many employees in this area don't think they need to work more than a three-day or four-day week. Some work less than that during hunting or fishing season. They should be trying to develop skills in healthcare, education, or retail to improve their opportunities in the future. They will become better employees for manufacturing companies if they can learn technical skills and industry certifications. We are fortunate that the population in this community is still growing. There are many communities across the state of Tennessee that has lost population over the last 10 years. How do you combat that, when you don't have many workers, either qualified or not qualified? We are trying to grow our economy, our workforce, and the quality of our workforce. It is difficult to tell folks to go get trained so they can get a job when we can't recruit companies to locate in this area. I believe regional economic development is going to have to take place to compensate for this problem. We will all succeed together or we are going to all fail together. It is as simple as that.

This participant had some different perceptions of what was needed with observations revolving around small business owners. In addition to business finance, this participant recommended additional training in technology, social media, and customer service in addition to some other soft skills. Participant C7 stated:

We need to look at business finance for small business. This would include basic accounting or bookkeeping. We have small business owners who don't know how to compute sales tax. I think classes on customer service would be an excellent opportunity. It's also important to know and promote your own community. I think they need technology skills, social media skills, and how to be positive about the things they do. Customer service is important. They need the soft skills: employee work ethics such as attendance and punctuality. Business owners need to have written procedures to be organized and communicate with their own employees. Work ethic must be instilled in everyone.

This participant and most of the other participants gave similar lists. Participant C4 stated that, "Computer skills, robotics, leadership, team-building, and trust are a few that come to mind. Technology skills are important."

### Relocating Company Criteria

Most, but not all, of the participants were tasked with attracting new business and industry to their community in order to create jobs for their citizens. They shared their perceptions about workforce development and training as a criterion for businesses looking for a desirable community in which to locate their business. The two communities whose primary industry is tourism are not actively trying to recruit new business and industry to relocate in their community. Participant C1 stated:

I would like to say available workforce development training makes a difference, but basically companies want to know that schools are available. Sometimes they may want to see a list of curriculum. Five years ago, a large company came to town. They looked and visited WSCC and talked with a lot of our staffing agencies as to the availability of workers with higher skills. They were careful to look at both the technology center and the community college to make sure they had a track record of successfully training people to be competent with specific skills so the company felt reasonably sure there was an employable workforce in the community. WSCC has been good at that as well as the technical schools to customize training. Is that the only reason they came here? . . . no, is it an important reason . . . yes. And in the end they located here. An existing company in our county is going through a major expansion. They held a meeting with TBR, WSCC, and the technology center to make sure they could identify potential employees and provide the required training necessary for the jobs they would have available. This company deals with a product that is very precise, and there is no room for error down to a ten-thousandth of a degree of measurement. It is not something you could see with the naked eye. The employee would have to use the computer to determine if it was within

the tolerance range. There was discussion about using WSCC, the TTC, and vendors to set up specific training on proprietary systems they will be using. The local company had to document all of this information to present to their parent company to determine if they would be allowed to continue with the expansion plans. This company had been pleasantly surprised at the ability of WSCC and the TTC to meet their needs.

This participant acknowledged many factors that business and industry consider before deciding where to relocate. Business and industry frequently look at available skills, available housing, and access to transportation. Participant C2 stated:

I have talked some with the county economic development council who handles new corporate business which moves to the area. I think one of the concerns of a business considering locating here is the lack of particular skills by the workforce. It may be because there are not a lot of manufacturing jobs around here. Also, there is a lack of housing around here so that creates a problem in transportation. But I have heard from them that there are skills that the workforce needs to learn before a company would consider locating in this county. On the other hand a large business just relocated here from another Tennessee county and they seem to be doing very well. There are more transient citizens in this county than the surrounding counties. But we do not have the housing or transportation to attract a more permanent population. The easiest thing to do is to train the people who live here already.

This participant gave a specific example of a company that relocated into a specific community. This participant had witnessed the process that occurred. Participant C3 stated:

A large employer from this area relocated to a different county because they had a better selection of skilled workers available. Very specifically, the lack of a qualified workforce is a factor. The problem you are dealing with is the lack of significant numbers. We don't have enough qualified people in the workforce. That makes it difficult for employers to recruit a workforce. How can you attract larger companies to an area where they could not fill their jobs?

This participant had the perception that workforce development training is a major factor in the decision-making process for a company looking to relocate. Participant C4 stated:

The work force and the skill set of the work force is definitely important. Companies are always looking for, not just the skill set, but what type of training and things are in place for employee development. So back to where I was saying, if we had a local college or community college that provided the types of classes and training and development for the workforce already set up and in place, with successful training, and with companies already having the benefit of that, it would definitely enhance our ability to recruit new

industry to the area. It's kind of like putting your money where your mouth is. You have to have the kinds of things they are looking for already in place.

This participant gave an overview of the process used by the chamber of commerce to put together a package to a potential company considering relocating to that specific area. Participant C6 stated, "We put a group of 10 to 12 people around the table from utilities, local banks, and the mayor's office to talk to companies about relocating here. Everyone makes a presentation about who they are, what they do, and what they can provide for that company."

#### Impact of Noncredit Training on the Local Economy

The participants focused on the theme of noncredit program offerings and the possible impact on their local economy. Most of the participants had already acknowledged that they possess little or no knowledge of noncredit programs delivered or available in their community. Despite their lack of knowledge of what was available, they each had specific knowledge of what was needed in their community. Based on the concept that if their needs could be met by the noncredit community education programs at Walters State Community College, what could the impact be on the local economy? This participant had a more global view of the community college in that specific community. Participant C1 stated:

The economic impact of a community college is significant. They employ a large number of people and help generate revenue for the county in terms of property taxes and sales tax. They are essential partners to business and industry by providing a skilled labor pool. Any programs that put people back to work and help companies be more productive will have a positive impact on this county. It puts more money in circulation, increasing the buying power of our citizens. It will be years before the overall effect can be studied and measured.

This participant could not respond because of the community's different needs.

Participant C2 stated, "I don't really know the answer to that question because this chamber is more focused on tourism."



This participant acknowledged the value of workforce development as a stimulus to economic development in that specific community. Participant C3 stated:

The chamber/partnership, business and industry, the city, and county are supportive of any credit or noncredit training that would improve the quality of our workforce which would help them find jobs and possibly attract new companies to locate in our community. We would like for Walters State Community College to have a campus in our community to train our citizens, help us develop a qualified workforce, and attract business and industry to our area.

The rest of the participants did not provide specific answers.

#### Partnerships between Participants and Community College

The participants stated they wanted a stronger partnership with Walters State Community College in order to help their constituency find and keep jobs, attract new industry, and provide more services for the citizens. Participant C1 had some specific ideas for taking action to build a stronger relationship between the chamber, community college, and business and industry.

Participant C1 said:

Walters State Community College should spend some time and work with the local Chamber of Commerce to identify a mailing list of plant managers and HR people (which changes constantly). We should have a bimonthly or quarterly newsletter to e-mail out showcasing upcoming classes they might be interested in. I am talking specifically targeting them so they can post these classes on the workboards of these organizations. That is easier than doing a glossy publication and mailing it out. An e-mail distribution list would be best. We have most of that information available. We could build it into a mailing list. There is also a local HR association. All businesses do not participate in that . . . But get their mailing list first and then we could finish completing the list. We have a staff person who could help with that.

This participant noted the irony that we are back where we started, improving communication between the chamber, community college, and business and industry. Participant C2 said:

We are back to where we started. It all comes down to communication. There has to be a way that the community college can get in touch with local businesses and their associations to spread the word about available business and industry training programs.

This participant also acknowledged the need for improved communication. Participant C3 said:

Number one is to make us aware of the opportunities available to us. We do know about a number of services and offerings at Walters State; we need to know more about other programs that would help our community recover and grow. Canned programs may not be best for us at this time. We may need something customized specifically for our community that will interest them and make them want to participate.

This participant acknowledged the relationship between the representative from Walters State Community College and the chamber itself. Participant C6 said:

Let's speak specifically about the person we interface with from the noncredit division of Walters State. We take that person with us when we make calls on companies where we have identified a need for training that is a little bit different than what the state does. We will use that person when the time comes when a company wants to relocate here to be part of a group that will address what they can bring to the table. That is how we partner with the noncredit department at Walters State.

Participant C8 confirmed the need for improved communication, saying, "You are doing the right thing by talking to all of the chambers of commerce. They are the key to this whole equation. Besides training for the unemployed, incumbent workers also need training to upgrade their skills." The rest of the participants acknowledged that a stronger relationship is desirable but did not offer any specific suggestion as to how to accomplish that.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Nationwide, more students were enrolled in noncredit continuing education programs than were enrolled in credit, degree-seeking programs. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), 15 million students enrolled in traditional college programs compared to almost 90 million students in noncredit continuing education. This is consistent with enrollment trends at Walters State Community College.

The data collected also validated the findings of Voorhees and Milam (2005) who had stated that business and community leaders questioned the administration of community colleges regarding the scarcity of noncredit programs to educate displaced workers in the wake of the economic downturn. This validated the viewpoint of Brint and Karabel who pointed out that the niche for the junior college was to provide vocational training to a lesser qualified pool of students who would not be able to transfer to a 4-year institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

The noncredit continuing education programs provided workforce development training to participants from all 10 counties of the Walters State service area. Walters State workforce development programs have delivered more noncredit workforce development training contact hours than any other Tennessee Board of Regents community college in the state. This is consistent with the mission of noncredit continuing education – to re-educate displaced American workers (Van Noy et al., 2008). Noncredit programs were attractive to this population because of their lower cost, accessibility, flexibility, and responsiveness (Grubb et al., 2010).

This study established numerous links between Walters State Community College noncredit continuing education programs and business and industry in a 10-county service area as a resource in revitalizing the workforce during the economic crisis in East Tennessee.

Specifically, this study explored the perceptions of local chambers of commerce and community and economic development leaders in the Walters State Community College service area regarding the level of service provided by the college and the role they would prefer Walters State Community College to perform.

The perceptions of the participants provided reference material for continued study and research. This research could synthesize meaningful information regarding noncredit programs where literature has not been available. The quandary encountered by academic administrators has been the lack of verifiable noncredit student records. The lack of standards for noncredit classes has contributed to its poor reputation (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006, pp. 53-62). Noncredit programs have served millions of nontraditional students in a sustainable manner, but there has continued to be an inconsistency of national data (Voorhees & Milam, 2005). The data provided by this study provided some insight in an area where there has been a scarcity of information.

This study has provided a model for other community colleges to use in assessing the potential for their noncredit program offerings. The questionnaire used by this study provided an excellent source of information and included insightful perceptions by the participants. The responses provided by the participants regarding their perception of the important role noncredit continuing education should have could provide enhanced credibility for noncredit programs. This could provide a catalyst to recognize that noncredit continuing education should not have been viewed as the poor stepchild of the academic institutions. The achievements of the noncredit continuing education programs have historically been unrecognized and unrewarded. The Tennessee Board of Regents reported that 75% of all current workers in Tennessee would need additional training and retooling in order to acquire or renew skills, certifications, or

licenses. They noted that artificial and self-imposed barriers created a system that valued credit courses over noncredit instruction (Tennessee Board of Regents, 2005).

Twelve major themes emerged from the analysis of the participant responses collected by this study: importance of communication, working relationship, workforce development, areas of improvement, economic impact of recession, prognosis for recovery, skills and knowledge, management and leadership skills, available training resources, knowledge of Walters State noncredit programs, incumbent workers' needs, displaced workers' needs, relocating company needs, impact of noncredit training on local economy, and partnership between participants and community college.

### General Findings of the Study

In this section each of the individual research questions was addressed to ensure the findings from the study were portrayed accurately.

#### Research Question #1

How can local business and industry partner with the administration of a regional community college to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce?

- a. What has been your experience partnering with Walters State Community College in the past?
- b. What has been your experience partnering with Walters State Community College recently?
- c. What has worked well?
- d. What needs to improve?

This study focused on the perceptions of the economic and development leaders in 9 of the 10 counties served by Walters State Community College. The participants indicated that they were interested in partnering with the noncredit departments to accomplish the goal of helping displaced workers. In order to meet this goal the respondents stated that communication is critical. The perceptions of the participants could serve as a catalyst to implement the changes they stated they would like to see. According to Kotter (2002) people have been the change agents and can facilitate productive changes when given the proper tools. Kotter identified an eight-step model for implementing change successfully: increase urgency, build a guiding team, get the vision right, communicate for buy-in, empower action, create short-term wins, do not let up, and make change stick. Each of these steps enables people to see, feel, and make change happen.

Kotter stressed the importance of communication in his eight-step model. There was a preponderance of responses from the participants indicating ineffectual communication from the community college. These data were unexpected because the Office of Noncredit Continuing Education had partnered with some of those chambers of commerce in the past to provide business education courses in their own communities. The perception of a lack of effective communication may explain why Voorhees and Milam (2005) stated that business and industry leaders questioned why noncredit programs had not been available to educate more displaced workers. This is in contradiction of the fact that Walters State Community College has enrolled more noncredit students than credit students for the past 3 years.

There was an overwhelming demand for improved and comprehensive communication to be initiated by the community education department of the community college. This was somewhat perplexing because most of the respondents said they had excellent working

relationships with the college in the past as well as the present. In fact, every one of the respondents acknowledged the for-credit courses for degree-seeking students as being beneficial to their community. An inordinate number of participants responded “I don’t know,” when asked about noncredit programs in their communities. There were instances when the noncredit department partnered with some of the local chambers of commerce and the leadership was not aware that it had occurred.

Several of the participants have initiated activity with the community college to improve their relationship and communication. Others said it was the responsibility of the community college to initiate the communication. According to George and Jones (2001) the resistance to change occurs because discrepancies have led to emotional reactions that have disrupted the change process. It is apparent that there are discrepancies in determining how to change the processes and procedures that could improve communication between the community college and the community leaders.

The respondents acknowledged a number of things that they considered were working very well. Some of the respondents praised the college’s proven track record for serving business and industry in their communities. Some of them acknowledged being partners with the noncredit department at Walters State, and others expressed satisfaction with the success of Walters State’s noncredit programs.

When asked, “What needs to improve?” the overwhelming response was, “Communication.” This was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Some of the participants also said they would like to see an improvement in the economy, lower tuition, and expanded programs. Most of the participants requested to be a conduit for information to be communicated to business and industry in their communities. The prevailing request was for

Walters State Community College to provide detailed noncredit course information to them directly, and they indicated they would use various methodologies to distribute the information to their membership. According to Stein and Wanstreet (2006, pp. 2-12) the community college has struggled with its image as a pathway to a better life. Improving communication could be a vital component to improve the community college image.

### Research Question #2

What is the current economic impact of recession in your community?

- a. What are businesses in your area experiencing?
- b. What types of businesses are surviving or thriving in your area?
- c. Why are those businesses surviving while others are not?
- d. What types of businesses are eliminating jobs or going out of business?
- e. Why is that happening?
- f. What are the unemployment figures in your county?
- g. What is the prognosis for your community over the next 12 to 24 months?

The data collected indicate that each county was impacted by the economic recession.

The range of unemployment among the 10 counties served by Walters State Community College was between 6% and 16.5% depending on seasonality. The participants were proactively searching for ways to have a positive impact on the local economy and acknowledged the value of Walters State Community College in the region. They asked for specific workforce development programs to be offered in their respective counties and identified specific training needs within their communities. The overall theme was that Walters State Community College credit and noncredit programs can have a positive economic impact on their communities. By the year 2000 community colleges became cultural, social, and intellectual hubs for their



communities. According to Vaughan (2006) community colleges distinguished themselves from other institutions of higher education by their commitment to open access, comprehensiveness in course offerings, and community involvement. Community colleges have the tools to respond to the nation's educational needs.

The demographics between the 10 counties vary dramatically between tourism and manufacturing business and industry. The counties that were affected the most at the beginning of the recession seem to be recovering faster than other counties. Industries that supported the automobile and housing industries had the largest reductions in workforce. Communities whose primary industry was tourism were not affected as much.

Some of the more remote counties, where plastics and chemical companies are located, evidently were not affected as much by the recession. Tennessee is a global leader in chemicals and plastics employing 52,000 workers at more than 800 companies. Their exports have more than doubled over the past 10 years amounting to \$5 billion dollars (Fuller, 2012).

According to an article in the Tennessee Economic Development Guide, Governor Bill Haslam's Jobs4TN program accounted for 86% of the new jobs created in Tennessee by existing Tennessee companies. The article stated that a key component in Tennessee's economic success is its roster of colleges, universities, and technology centers that collectively educate 220,000 degree-seeking students across the state. The article does not mention noncredit education programs or participants (McMeekin, 2012).

Many of the participants stated that quite a few of the businesses that had shut down during the economic crisis that started in 2008 were already struggling financially before the recession occurred. The economic downturn hastened the demise of companies already faltering. The participants stated their optimism for economic recovery in the near future.

### Research Question #3

What skills or knowledge do the leadership and employees of business and industry need in your area in order to survive and thrive?

- a. What leadership or management skills will help?
- b. What technology skills will help them?
- c. What other skills do they need?
- d. What could happen if they receive this training?
- e. What may happen if they do not?
- f. What training sources are currently available?
- g. Have Walters State Community College noncredit workforce development/community education representatives providing any leadership or skills training in your area to help meet the needs of these businesses and workers?
- h. What has been the outcome?

The overwhelming responses to these questions focused on the critical need to improve the management and leadership skills of the people in those positions. The participants were very specific in stating that there was a need for more advanced training than Management 101. They stated very strongly that managers learn how to build teamwork in their companies as opposed to just telling employees what to do.

Most of the participants stated that the employees of these companies are not happy in their jobs because of the lack of professionalism by management teams in their companies. Some of the participants went as far as referring to some of the managers as tyrants. Some were of the opinion that many of the managers do not have a clear vision of the future and have a difficult time managing change. Other skills that were identified by the participants included:

communication skills, listening skills, team building, coaching, and developing trust. In addition to management skills, the participants also suggested that regional managers need to improve their technology and computer skills including visual presentations, spreadsheets, database management, math, and science.

One recurring theme was the perceived need for business and industry leaders to become more entrepreneurial. This was also identified as an urgent need for small businesses in the 10-county service area.

In at least one community the participant stated that businesses in those counties were having difficulty recruiting qualified managers and supervisors for their companies. Their perceptions were that the better high school students were going out of state to go to college and not returning to their home community. That left a pool of poorer performing students who, in all probability, did not take advanced math or technology courses. This pool of high school graduates does not possess the ability, skills, or knowledge to be considered for manager or supervisor positions. The prognosis is for this trend to continue.

#### Research Question #4

What skills or knowledge do displaced or incumbent workers in your area need in order to keep jobs or find new jobs?

- a. What skills do they need to acquire or improve?
- b. What different skills should they develop?
- c. What may happen if they develop the skills they need?
- d. What may happen if they do not develop the skills they need?
- e. What sources of skills-based training are currently available?
- f. How are they paying for training?

- g. Have Walters State Community College noncredit workforce development/community education representatives providing any training in your area to help meet the needs of these workers?
- h. What has been the outcome?

The participants took the opportunity to speak very candidly regarding these questions. The consensus was that the company and the worker share a joint responsibility to be trained and retrained. One of the participants stated that American businesses spend over nine billion dollars a year to teach their employees skills they should have learned in the ninth grade. Therefore, there is a need to improve secondary education in public schools to bring workforce skills up to a basic level. A participant also stated that 50% of all knowledge that is taught in a college is no longer valid after a student graduates due to the exponential growth in technology.

Other specific skills that were repeatedly mentioned include: robotics, computer skills, communication skills, trust, work ethics, computer skills, math, science, blueprint reading, and welding. Some of the participants also suggested that small business operators need to learn business finance, accounting, marketing, customer service, and social media. The participants shared the perception that all managers, leaders, and employees need to improve their attitudes and work ethics. There was a general consensus among the participants that business and industry must adapt to the changing economy and technological innovations if their companies are going to survive.

Walters State noncredit community education has taught leadership courses in every one of the counties represented by the participants. The participants were not aware that the training had occurred nor the results of the training classes.

### Research Question #5

How well does the existing workforce possess the skills they need to perform their jobs?

- a. What are the gaps between the skills they need and the skills they have?
- b. Provide an example of a gap between the skills workers need and possess?
- c. Are essential skills a factor when businesses are considering relocating their company to East Tennessee?
- d. How do they compensate for the lack of required skills?
- e. Do workforce development programs offered by providers of noncredit continuing education affect the local economy? If so, how?
- f. Do these programs influence company decisions about where to locate? How many companies have located here because of workforce development training programs? How many employees?
- g. What are examples of companies who did not relocate in your area because of the lack of skills of the available workforce?
- h. Are there other economic impact factors the local community college noncredit continuing education programs have in this region? If so, what are they?

Research questions 5a through 5h were similar to questions 4a through 4h and the participants stated they had already answered the questions. The participants stated a need to conduct a gap assessment between rural and nonrural areas, technology gaps, skills gaps, and opportunity gaps. Many of the participants already have committees working on identifying gaps.

When asked if a well-trained, available workforce was a deciding factor when companies were considering relocating to East Tennessee, the responses varied. Some of the respondents

stated that they would like to think it made a difference but really could not identify a specific incident when it was a factor. Other participants stated strongly that it made a difference to companies considering relocating to East Tennessee.

All of the participants were in agreement that when companies inquired about training for their incumbent or future employees, they did not want to have to pay for the training themselves. They were looking for grants and no-cost training programs as part of the package to entice them to relocate to Tennessee.

#### Research Question #6

What resources could Walters State Community College division of noncredit community education/workforce development provide to the local community to help with economic recovery?

- a. How can Walters State Community College noncredit community education identify the core curriculum/content required by local employers?
- b. How can Walters State Community College noncredit community education help attract new business and industry to your area?
- c. How would you recommend Walters State Community College noncredit continuing education improve communication with business and industry in your area?

The responses to these questions were universal. The participants said staff from Walters State Community College noncredit programs should communicate more with business and industry in the community and promote course offerings available in the community, customize business and industry courses to meet the needs more closely and lessen the gap, collaborate more with the chamber, and be more visible.

The participants thanked the interviewer for conducting the sessions. The participants stated that it was a good start to improve communication with business and industry in the community.

### Conclusion

The data from this study indicated 12 common themes. The 12 thematic topics shared a conjoined fundamental core: communication and awareness. As the data from this study indicated, the nine leaders of economic development and chambers of commerce essentially did not have any knowledge of the adult continuing education programs being offered or delivered in their communities before or during the economic crisis that started in 2008 despite the fact that the community college has more noncredit students from their communities than degree-seeking students.

The Office of Noncredit Continuing Education has become an invisible college within its service area. Business and industry leadership does not know or remember that noncredit programs exist and are available to individuals as well as business and industry within their communities. This issue is compounded by the lack of verifiable national data regarding business and industry noncredit continuing education program delivery.

The data suggest that the participants are knowledgeable about the community college for degree-seeking students. Many of the participants did not make a distinction between credit and noncredit programs. Most of the communication between the community college and business and industry is about credit programs. The data suggest that the leadership of the various chambers of commerce would like to receive regular communication from the WSCC Office of Community Education so they could redistribute it to their membership. They stated they would like to have easy access to a web site that would showcase all of the available programs.

The data suggest that the Office of Community Education for Walters State Community College should be more proactive by communicating with regional chambers of commerce and local business and industry in order to facilitate improved communication. The communication should include information about all noncredit course offerings available in each community. The communication should also advise leadership from the local chambers of commerce about successful completion of noncredit course participants in their community to improve their awareness. The data also suggest that the leadership of the local chambers of commerce would like to have a closer working relationship with the Office of Community Education at Walters State Community College. This could include working together to create a gap analysis for each community in order to identify the specific training needs of business and industry in each community.

The data suggest that Walters State Community College has a definite role as a workforce revitalization partner in East Tennessee. The leadership of the various chambers of commerce expressed an interest in developing a closer working relationship with the Office of Community Education to improve workforce development, identify training gaps, provide essential skills to management and employees, provide training as needed to attract new business and industry to relocate in local communities, and provide essential training for small businesses to help them become more stable and viable. In order to accomplish their recommendations, both the leadership of the chambers of commerce and the Office of Community Education must collectively become more proactive in sharing information with each other as well as local business and industry leaders.



### Recommendation for Additional Research

The following recommendation for further research is based on the synthesis of data collected from the participants from 9 out of 10 counties served by Walters State Community College. The data from this study represented a microcosm of communities in East Tennessee and the relationship with one community college. The participants represented communities that were unique demographically and geographically, yet the underlying two themes of communication and awareness resonated from all of the data collected.

1. The synthesis of data collected from a microcosm of communities in East Tennessee and their relationship with Walters State Community College suggested that there was a perceived role of noncredit continuing education as a workforce revitalization partner. The data suggested two barriers negating the effectiveness of this partnership: communication and awareness. This may or may not be universally applicable to other colleges in other communities. Further research could synthesize meaningful information regarding noncredit programs in other communities and identify additional barriers between colleges and business and industry. Continued study may also provide a qualitative planning tool to assist universities and community colleges as they seek to improve their relationships with business and industry in their service areas. Further study could focus on how colleges communicate with the leadership from their local chambers of commerce.
2. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2005), 15 million students were enrolled in traditional college programs compared to almost 90 million students in noncredit continuing education. This indicates there is a significant number of students and communities affected by noncredit continuing education programs. There are not any

standards governing community college or university noncredit programs. This introduces a significant number of variables between communities, business and industry, and noncredit students. Further studies could provide a gap analysis in other communities to identify universal needs and provide further recommendations to identify the role of noncredit continuing education as a workforce revitalization partner in each community.

3. Further study could clarify the role of noncredit continuing education as a workforce revitalization partner for business and industry in other communities. Every state funds noncredit programs differently, if at all. It appears that most noncredit departments at community colleges in the United States are structured differently making comparisons more difficult. Further studies of other regions including the community colleges serving those regions could contribute to the limited literature available about noncredit continuing education.
4. The Tennessee Board of Regents has implemented significant improvements in the noncredit continuing education offices in the 13 community colleges in Tennessee. The chancellor and the vice-chancellor have taken an active leadership role in defining the role of noncredit continuing education in Tennessee. Community Colleges will receive funding for noncredit continuing education classes offered to business and industry. The Tennessee Board of Regents has created a committee to structure and standardize noncredit programs in Tennessee. This committee has started the process of creating brand awareness, standardizing course offerings, and creating a common website for each noncredit department to share. This committee has been scheduled to meet quarterly. As new policies and procedures become identified and implemented in Tennessee, further study could synthesize data to measure the impact of these and other changes.

### Recommendation for Practice

The data collected suggest numerous recommendations for improving the working relationship between Walters State Community College Office of Noncredit Continuing Education and local business and industry. These recommendations could form the basis of a model that could be duplicated at other community colleges in conjunction with business and industry in their communities.

The foremost recommendation was to develop a more comprehensive communication process between the community college, the chambers of commerce, and business and industry. It was the consensus of the participants that business and industry are the real experts when identifying training needs. The community college, in partnership with the local chambers of commerce, should initiate and perform a gap analysis to compare the actual performance of business and industry with their desired performance. The gap analysis would identify weaknesses in business policies, processes, and procedures including internal control, efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance with industry standards. This would clearly communicate the needs of business and industry in each community to the chambers of commerce and the local community college.

Based on the results of the gap analysis, business and industry leaders could work with the community college to structure a training plan customized to meet specific needs. Staff from the community college can communicate what is available and what can be developed to meet the needs of business and industry. The training programs may be for-credit or noncredit depending on the needs of business leaders. This would greatly improve the horizontal communication between business and industry, the chambers of commerce, and the community college.

The participants suggested that vertical communication is essential to create a true partnership. Business and industry needs should be communicated to the college executive council and the Tennessee Board of Regents to ensure that all parties have a clear vision of the needs and wants of business and industry. The community college should evaluate the needs of business and industry in conjunction with the resources available to each institution.

All parties must make a concerted effort to suppress perceptions and assumptions about each other. True communication must be based on the facts presented by the gap analysis. The participants must identify the desired outcomes and make a commitment to design, develop, and deliver training to help revitalize the workforce in the communities. Once a true partnership has been established, follow-up communication will enable all parties to continue to modify and refine the needs of business and industry based on actual performance.

The community college, as well as the chambers of commerce and business and industry, has limited resources. All parties should make an effort to prioritize their needs and take into consideration that there are many stakeholders in each community. Business and industry provides jobs for all sectors of the community, keeping the economy strong. The shareholders of business and industry usually desire a higher rate of return on their investment. Many times this forces companies to relocate to another community or to another country. Each business has suppliers and customers who depend on each other to stay in business. It is important to note that most of those stakeholders have children who will be college-bound one day. If the community college can create a powerful relationship with all of those stakeholders, they may encourage their children to attend the local community college instead of going to a university in a distant city.

The participant suggested that the offices of noncredit continuing education should work together as a functional unit so they can share resources and provide enhanced services to the various companies in the state. This could include branding continuing education as an important resource to business and industry. A shared web site devoted to noncredit continuing education could be an effective tool for interaction with business leaders. The research has shown that there are artificial and self-imposed barriers that have created a caste system that values credit classes over noncredit classes. It is a fact that there are more students enrolled in noncredit programs than in for-credit programs in the United States. These statistics should be leveraged to create an organization that is so professional, qualified, and dynamic that it would be the training provider of choice for business and industry. A unified continuing education program could develop strategies and tactics to enhance partnership with business leaders. An improved collaboration between for-credit and noncredit divisions in the community college could create an even stronger value to business and industry.

One of the strengths of noncredit continuing education is the ability to create a new course or customize an existing course without having to get approval from the board of regents, higher education commission, or SACS. Frequently business leaders want an immediate fix once they have identified a problem. New classes for-credit can take approximately 2 years to receive approval. Business leaders will not wait that long.

The research has shown that funding or a lack of funding can be a major factor in the success or failure of this model. Through improved communication community colleges can partner with business and industry to revitalize the workforce. A revitalized workforce can improve the local economy which could increase state tax base revenues. Increased tax revenues could cover the operating expense of a unified noncredit program.

The research showed that 75% of all workers in Tennessee need additional training just to stay current with the demands of their jobs. New technology and systems are creating the need for additional training. The baby boomers are retiring, and companies are in need of offering management development programs to protect their own futures. These companies are faced with the rising cost of procuring the training they need. College leaders should be searching for state and federal grants to help provide funding for noncredit programs (Board of Regents, 2005).

It will be important for noncredit continuing education to be adaptable to meeting the needs of business and industry quickly. When new training programs are required, the noncredit department can develop a pilot program to evaluate its effectiveness. Proven programs could then be shared with other community colleges without going through a formal evaluation process.

Most community colleges in the United States offer noncredit continuing education for business and industry. Some programs are extremely successful while others struggle to survive. There has not been a standard model for noncredit continuing education departments in Tennessee nor in the United States. Various participants suggested that there should be a system for all of the community colleges to communicate with each other to share best practices.

In some states there is competition between the various college noncredit departments. This creates a scenario where colleges do not want to share information that would help a competing college. Conversely, there is a competition between noncredit and for-credit programs in many college systems. That competition is based on what the institution wants instead of what business and industry wants.

There is a great need for business and industry to receive essential training programs in order for them to survive and thrive. It is up to the community college to become the catalyst for change for the good of each community.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Informed Consent Form

My name is Joe Combs, dean of community education at Walters State Community College. I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University where I am working on my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is The Role of Noncredit Continuing Education as a Workforce Revitalization Partner.

#### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to examine the partnership role of noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce during an economic crisis. The target population of this research is leadership of the local chambers of commerce or other county executives in East Tennessee.

#### DURATION:

I would like meet with you for approximately 20 minutes to ask you questions concerning how a community college division of noncredit education can partner with business and industry in your county to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce.

#### PROCEDURES:

I will be interviewing participants from 10 counties in East Tennessee. My research will look for commonalities, trends, and themes. I will record our interview, but will not identify you or your county in any manner. I will use a code word that only you and I will know. This method is completely anonymous and confidential. In other words, there will be no way to connect your name with your responses.

#### ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES:

If you are unavailable to meet face-to-face, we could arrange to conduct this interview over the telephone.

#### POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no identifiable risks for you, your organization, or your county. Some people may feel uncomfortable speaking in front of a microphone. I will attempt to make the recording device as unobtrusive as possible. Only you and the principal investigator will have access to the recordings.

#### POSSIBLE BENEFITS:

You may experience increased awareness of partnership opportunities with local community colleges which could help facilitate economic recovery in your community.

#### COMPENSATION:

This is no compensation for participating in this research.



FINANCIAL COST:

There are not any financial costs anticipated to you as a participant in this research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. You may quit by calling Joe Combs whose phone number is 865-940-1090. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study. In addition, if significant new findings during the course of the research which may relate to the participant’s willingness to continue participation are likely, the consent process must disclose that significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to the participant’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the participant. In addition, if there might be adverse consequences (physical, social, economic, legal, or psychological) of a participant’s decision to withdraw from the research, the consent process must disclose those consequences and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the participant.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at 423-585-2676. The chair of my research committee is Dr. Eric Glover. You may reach him at 423-439-7566. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at 423-439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and I will have access to the study records. The recordings will be locked in a secure location at Walters State Community College for five years and then destroyed.

You will receive a copy of the informed consent form for your records.

_____	_____
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	DATE
_____	_____
PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT	DATE
_____	_____
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR	DATE
_____	_____
SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)	DATE

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Leadership of Local Chambers of Commerce

My name is Joe Combs, dean of community education at Walters State Community College. I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University where I am working on my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is The Role of Noncredit Continuing Education as a Workforce Revitalization Partner.

The purpose of this study is to examine the partnership role of noncredit continuing education in revitalizing the workforce during an economic crisis starting in 2008. The target population of this research is leadership of the local chambers of commerce or other county executives in East Tennessee. I would like meet with you for approximately 20 minutes to ask you questions concerning how a community college division of noncredit education can partner with business and industry in your county to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce.

I will be interviewing participants from 10 counties in East Tennessee. My research will look for commonalities, trends, and themes. There are no identifiable risks for you or your county. I will record our interview but will not identify you or your county in any manner. I will use a code word that only you and I will know. This method is completely anonymous and confidential. In other words, there will be no way to connect your name with your responses. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and I will have access to the study records. The recordings will be locked in a secure location at Walters State Community College for five years and then destroyed. The dissertation I am writing will add to the literature about county partnerships with community colleges in East Tennessee. The research might present new ideas which may be beneficial to you in your county.

If you are unavailable to meet face-to-face, we could arrange to conduct this interview over the telephone. Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at 423-585-2676. The chair of my research committee is Dr. Eric Glover. You may reach him at 423-439-7566. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at 423-439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

You will receive a copy of the informed consent form for your records. You will also receive a transcription of your own interview so you can verify the accuracy of the content.

Sincerely,  
Joe Combs  
Dean of Community Education  
Voice 423-585-2676 • Fax: 423-585-2679  
E-mail: [joseph.combs@ws.edu](mailto:joseph.combs@ws.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide

The following questions have guided this research:

1. How can local business and industry partner with the administration of a regional community college to prepare displaced citizens to become members of a successful employable workforce?
  - a. What has been your experience partnering with Walters State Community College in the past?
  - b. What has been your experience partnering with Walters State Community College recently?
  - c. What has worked well?
  - d. What needs to improve?
2. What is the current economic impact of recession in your community?
  - a. What are businesses in your area experiencing?
  - b. What types of businesses are surviving or thriving in your area?
  - c. Why are those businesses surviving while others are not?
  - d. What types of businesses are eliminating jobs or going out of business?
  - e. Why is that happening?
  - f. What are the unemployment figures in your county?
  - g. What is the prognosis for your community over the next 12 to 24 months?
2. What skills or knowledge do the leadership and employees of business and industry need in your area in order to survive and thrive?
  - a. What leadership or management skills will help?

- b. What technology skills will help them?
  - c. What other skills do they need?
  - d. What could happen if they receive this training?
  - e. What may happen if they do not?
  - f. What training sources are currently available?
  - g. Have Walters State Community College noncredit workforce development/community education representatives provided any leadership or skills training in your area to help meet the needs of these businesses and workers?
  - h. What has been the outcome?
3. What skills or knowledge do displaced or incumbent workers in your area need in order to keep jobs or find new jobs?
- a. What skills do they need to acquire or improve?
  - b. What different skills should they develop?
  - c. What may happen if they develop the skills they need?
  - d. What may happen if they do not develop the skills they need?
  - e. What sources of skills-based training are currently available?
  - f. How are they paying for training?
  - g. Have Walters State Community College noncredit workforce development/community education representatives providing any training in your area to help meet the needs of these workers?
  - h. What has been the outcome?
4. How well does the existing workforce possess the skills they need to perform their jobs?
- a. What are the gaps between the skills they need and the skills they have?

- b. Provide an example of a gap between the skills workers need and possess?
  - c. Are essential skills a factor when businesses are considering relocating their company to East Tennessee?
  - d. How do they compensate for the lack of required skills?
  - e. Do workforce development programs offered by providers of noncredit continuing education affect the local economy? If so, how?
  - f. Do these programs influence company decisions about where to locate?
  - g. How many companies have located here because of workforce development training programs? How many employees?
  - h. What are examples of companies who did not relocate in your area because of the lack of skills of the available workforce?
  - i. Are there other economic impact factors the local community college noncredit continuing education programs have in this region? If so, what are they?
5. What resources could Walters State Community College division of noncredit community education/workforce development provide to the local community to help with economic recovery?
- a. How can Walters State Community College noncredit community education identify the core curriculum/content required by local employers?
  - b. How can Walters State Community College noncredit community education help attract new business and industry to your area?
  - c. How would you recommend Walters State Community College noncredit continuing education improve communication with business and industry in your area?

## VITA

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