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**EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION IN HOW  
TRUSTEES OF NEW JERSEY'S STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
EXPERIENCE THEIR FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES:  
A MIXED METHODS STUDY**

by

Brittany Ann Williams-Goldstein

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
Rowan University  
July 16, 2018

Dissertation Advisor: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

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## **Dedications**

I dedicate this research to the human spirit, she is a tremendously ineffable thing. I shared this process with my husband, Adam, whose encouragement and good humor never ceased; with my parents, John and Carol Ann, who continue to inspire me as a lifelong learner; with my friends and colleagues who genuinely inquired, “What are you researching?”; with the mentors and educators who found me, for their belief in me often exceeded my own; with my two children Desmond Ellis and Simone Felicity whose joie de vivre make the enchanting wonder of the research process seem, at times, like a throwaway parlor trick; and with the late Adrienne Rich whose poetry and prose have been both a comfort and fuel throughout this whirlwind of discovery.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Abstract**

Brittany Ann Williams-Goldstein  
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION IN HOW  
TRUSTEES OF NEW JERSEY'S STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES  
EXPERIENCE THEIR FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES:  
A MIXED METHODS STUDY  
2018-2019  
Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.  
Doctor of Education

The purpose of this sequential explanatory study was to examine, through the lenses of sensemaking theory and professional authority, the relationship between how largely non-educational professionals in New Jersey experience their fiduciary responsibilities as trustees of the state's public colleges and universities and to what extent their professional orientations influence their oversight. Trustees draw from a continuum of orientations to navigate their responsibilities and chief among them are professional orientation, institutionally-rooted orientation, and orientations as members of traditionally underrepresented populations. Trustees frequently engage in deferential activities with their fellow board members whose professional or other orientations provide needed context for their decision making. Trustees also rely on informal engagement with their institutions as a vehicle through which they make sense of their responsibilities. This engagement, as well as opportunities to apply their professional orientations to their duties as fiduciaries, contribute to trustee satisfaction but are limited in frequency. Implications for policy, practice and research are discussed.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Higher education institutions in the United States are under heightened scrutiny as evidenced by increased federal and state regulation as well as calls for accountability by various vocal constituents (Hall, 2012; Peyronel, 2003). Students, parents, legislators, accreditors, employers, and the media express public dissatisfaction with higher education, they are demanding more for less and holding institutions to a standard of transparency never before seen in the sector. Beyond the faculty and the presidents of these institutions, who carry a significant responsibility to respond to such demands, the governing boards of colleges and universities also now find themselves charged with an increasingly demanding portfolio. These boards, largely comprised of volunteer members with little professional experience in education, find themselves increasingly tasked with demonstrating to the public the scrutiny with which they exercise their fiduciary authority (Bastedo, 2009; Blumer, 2003; Houle, 1997; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010).

A glance at just three recent headlines reveals the scrutiny under which public higher education operates and the complex environment in which its boards of trustees are required to govern. An article titled “Alabama State University Board Abruptly Suspends President” (Knott, 2016) reported that the University president failed to maintain the confidence of the board which led to her abrupt suspension. Another example, “Penn State is fined \$2.4 Million for Clery Act Violations” (Zamudio-Suaren, 2016) noted that the University was fined an additional \$2.4 million for Clery Act violations just four years after its board had entered into an agreement with the NCAA in 2012 to pay \$60 million in fines for Clery Act violations involving child sex-crimes.

Finally, “The Legal Settlement that Helped Put the U. of Louisville’s Board in Limbo” (Kelderman, 2016) details the attempted overhaul of the University’s board by the Governor of Kentucky after a series of institutional crises ranging from racial discrimination to antitrust violations. These headlines are harbingers of a new normal in which institutions of higher education (and their governing boards), once revered, are no longer immune to economic, societal, or political influence (Rabovsky, 2012; Thelin, 2004). The institutional boards in the preceding examples have been at the center of internal, regional, and national conflicts. However, tantamount to those conflicts is the harsh reality that these same colleges and universities and their thousands of sister institutions are also simultaneously subject to the regulatory and market pressures of globalization.

### **Higher Education and Globalization**

In 2000, the World Bank’s Task Force Report on Higher Education, identified higher education as a central component in a government’s ability to respond to globalization. Described largely as the coming together of business, trade and economic activities between and among nations towards social unification and homogenization, globalization has accelerated in recent years due, in large part, to advances in technology and communications (Foskett & Maringe, 2010). For higher education, globalization has meant, among other things, new imperatives for colleges and universities to serve a knowledge-based economy (Deem, 2001; Robertson & Keeling, 2008). This has required institutions to promote student and staff mobility and to reconsider the role of institutional oversight (Foskett & Maringe, 2010; Kezar & El-Khawas, 2003). In their book “Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education: Theoretical, Strategic,



and Management Perspectives”, Foskett and Maringe (2010) assert that student and staff mobility, both geographic and professional, fosters innovation, internationalization, and, in turn, economic prosperity.

Commenting on the impact of globalization on higher education governance, Kezar and El-Khawas (2003) asserted:

For performance systems to be effective, they must draw on expertise at the various levels of the system. External stakeholders, especially those with national or state-wide responsibilities, are well positioned to be aware of changing public pressures with respect to effectiveness, efficiency, or outcomes. Internal university stakeholders—both faculty and administrative officials- may misjudge or not be sufficiently attentive to such external trends. (p. 97, as cited in Eggins, 2003)

With respect to institutional oversight, globalization has also shifted the manner in which higher education is assessed in the United States. While the sector’s now widespread performance monitoring system remains framed in traditional peer accreditation and assessment models, it is increasingly wedded to many external statutory, compliance, and reporting requirements (Kezar & El-Khawas, 2003; Spellings, 2006).

### **External Pressures on Higher Education**

Also driving the shift to external accountability of higher education is the 2002 passage of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX). SOX became federal law in response to a spate of corporate scandals at companies like Enron and WorldCom (Seaman, 2009). It was sweeping legislation that established new standards for corporate accountability and sought to improve financial reporting for publicly traded companies (Seaman, 2009).

With respect to institutional governance SOX has meant, in pertinent part, “closer scrutiny and questioning of institutional transactions and relationships by board members sensitized to a new environment of corporate responsibility in general, as well as the obligations of trustees in particular” and “more vigilant enforcement and oversight by state agencies, the Internal Revenue Service, and other regulatory entities with jurisdiction over financial integrity and other aspects of nonprofit organizations” (Goins, Giacomino & Akers, 2009, p. 63). In a message to its campus, DePaul University (n.d.) noted:

(Due to SOX) many colleges and universities may face closer scrutiny for institutional transactions and relationships by board members; greater enforcement by state agencies, the IRS and other regulatory groups; increased reviews of transactions and financial statements by institutional auditors; and greater oversight of the auditors themselves.

While most institutions of higher education are like DePaul and are not publicly traded companies, the sector has been strongly encouraged and advised to adopt and implement many of SOX’ principles and practices (National Association of College and University Business Officers, 2003).

### **Governing Higher Education**

DePaul’s cautionary message has been heeded by many institutions across the country-- to this end, SOX has forced governing boards to be held to increasingly stringent standards of accountability, risk assessment and management, and reporting (Dreier, 2005). Consumer demands, media calls for transparency, as well as the impacts of globalization and SOX are all indicators of a sector that has transitioned from an

isolated ivory tower to a highly monitored public resource. This general shift to external accountability has meant added pressure on institutional governing board members (trustees) to provide their colleges and universities with objective expertise and to respond to public calls for transparency and accountability (Burke, 2005; Ramaley, 2006).

**Trusteeship in New Jersey.** A 2015 survey found that 69.9% of trustees on governing boards of public colleges and universities are appointed by the state governor or legislature and only 10% of them report having ever been employed in education (Association of Governing Boards, 2016; Downey-Schilling, 2012). Trustees of New Jersey's state colleges and universities are among that 69.9%, they are appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the senate (N.J.S.A 18A:64-3, 2014). State law specifies that, among its many powers and duties, a college board of trustees in New Jersey has the authority to determine the institution's curriculum, to borrow money, to direct and control its expenditures, to set policy, to hire and evaluate the college president, and to fix and determine tuition and fee rates (N.J.S.A. 18A:64-6, 2014). Despite this complexity of a public trustee's duties, statute is silent on the qualifications and skills required of trustees to navigate that complexity (N.J.S.A. 18A:64-6, 2014; N.J.S.A. 18A: 64-3, 2014). Other resources do exist though to support New Jersey's trustees.

New Jersey is home to the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU) and the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC). These two organizations represent the state's nine senior public colleges and universities and the state's 19 community colleges, respectively. The organizations function largely as

advocacy arms with the media, legislature, and public for their respective sectors (NJASCU, 2006; NJCCC, 2015). Both organizations also have vehicles for trustee development and engagement. NJASCU's Trustee Reference Guide, last updated in 2006, notes "the governance, control, conduct and management of the state colleges and universities remain vested in each institution's board of trustees" (p.1). The Reference Guide goes on to reiterate trustee's statutory duties and, like statute, it too is silent on any trustee qualities or backgrounds that may favor trustee or board effectiveness. Similarly, the NJCCC publishes its own trustee manual. The NJCCC's Trustee Information Manual is similarly focused on the statutory duties of the trustees but does go a step further by describing some qualities that foster trustees' service as advocates. The Manual emphasizes, for example, the value of a trustee's ability to build relationships and to influence legislators (NJCCC, 2015).

**Criticism of New Jersey system of governance.** Concurrent with the ongoing absence of any statutory criteria for trusteeship and an overwhelming majority of trustees nationally lacking direct professional experience in education, New Jersey has seen its share of controversy involving the oversight of its colleges and universities. A 2005 report in *The New York Times* found the (now defunct) University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey was illegally overbilling Medicaid for more than ten years (Kocieniewski, 2006). In 2014, New Jersey's Kean University was castigated by legislators for purchasing a \$219,000 conference table (Jaschik, 2014). In 2015, Stockton University of New Jersey made headlines when Moody's Rating Service downgraded its bond rating noting the institution's failure to execute an ambitious expansion strategy and apparent weaknesses in the University's risk management and oversight practices

(Cooney, 2015). While the aforementioned incidents may be isolated, they do reflect, in part, a system whose oversight has been heavily criticized. For example, the 2007 report “Vulnerable to Abuse: The Importance of Restoring Accountability, Transparency and Oversight to Public Higher Education Governance”, which was conducted by the State of New Jersey Commission of Investigation (COI), found:

Essentially, these institutions (state colleges and universities) are islands unto themselves. The statutory and administrative architecture under which they and other state colleges operate is characterized by the complete absence of any mechanism to ensure internal accountability, independent external oversight and proper transparency. That is because when the state granted them across-the-board autonomy more than a decade ago, dismantling the cabinet-level Department of Higher Education and eliminating virtually all meaningful elements of state involvement in safeguarding the taxpayers’ sizable investment in this system, the vital exercise of operational oversight, accountability and transparency wound up on the cutting room floor with all the rest of what was described at the time as needless, suffocating bureaucracy. (Edwards, Flicker, Hobbs, & Marintello, 2007, p. 2)

As described, “Vulnerable to Abuse...” revealed severe vulnerabilities in the oversight of the state’s colleges and universities. These known vulnerabilities, in addition to the state’s lack of criteria for trusteeship, have contributed to challenges in governance. For example, while a trustee’s authority is strong and clear, his professional experience exercising such authority is, at best, cloudy. This environment is prime for further exploration that may reveal weaknesses, strengths,

and influences in trustee decision making as well as recommendations for more effective fiduciary practices that empower trustees and their institutions to respond to heightened calls for transparency.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the wide breadth of trustee authority, intensified public scrutiny of colleges and universities, heightened accountability of governing boards, and a punctuated history of lapses in institutional oversight, there remains relatively little known about the professional orientations of the thousands of individuals across the country who volunteer their time to ultimately govern colleges and universities as members of institutional boards of trustees (Convey & Haney, 1997; Kezar, 2006; Sample, 2003). This study was developed to address this concern within the context of New Jersey.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this two-phased, mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to examine, through the lenses of sensemaking theory and professional authority, the relationship between how non-educational professionals in New Jersey experience their fiduciary responsibilities, largely understood as their legal duty to act solely in the institution's interests (Downes & Goodman, 2014), as trustees of the state's public colleges and universities and to what extent their professional orientations influence their oversight.

This study followed a sequential explanatory design and included two strands of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The design was implemented in two distinct phases. The first phase involved collecting and analyzing quantitative data gleaned from a survey

of New Jersey public college trustees. Based on an anticipated need to further understand the quantitative data, the second qualitative phase was shaped by it and sought to explain and explore the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). This second phase included semi-structured interviews. Essentially, this study examined the results that emerged from merging quantitative survey data of public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties with qualitative interview data focused on the trustees' sensemaking processes and professional authority.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to address the following series of research questions:

1. To what extent do trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties?
2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles?
3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?
4. What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Higher education is an industry brimful with its own brand of specific terminology. The language used in higher education historically was influenced by social service and/or non-profit etymology (Gaston, 2014; Osorio, 2004). In recent years, these

influences have expanded to include the business and for-profit sector (Gaston, 2014). Herewith are definitions of key terms used in this study.

**Fiduciary.** The Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities (hereafter referred to as the Association of Governing Boards), a national organization representing the governing boards of more than 1200 colleges and universities across the country and abroad, defines a trustee in higher education as a fiduciary (Association of Governing Boards, 2015). As fiduciaries, trustees hold in trust the assets of the institution over which they govern; these assets include the institution's human, capital, financial, and reputational resources (Downes & Goodman, 2014; Balch, 2008).

In order to more fully understand the fiduciary's role in higher education, Payette (2001) posited the following definition:

Fiduciary responsibility is the legally enforceable duty of trustees, the president, and officers of the corporation to fully abide by the corporation's by-laws as well as applicable federal and state laws; and, regulations of accreditation commissions, collective bargaining agreements, professional associations and organizations the institution has committed to uphold. The board is responsible for communicating these responsibilities to the trustees and officers and the trustees and officers are equally responsible for familiarizing themselves with the requirements and to exercise common sense and due diligence in carrying out their responsibilities. Neglect of duty or indifference is no shield from liability in matters pertaining to fiduciary responsibility. Liability under fiduciary responsibilities can be collectively assessed or individually rendered depending on the circumstances of each



case. An important element of fiduciary responsibility pertains to the avoidance of conflict of interest by trustees and officers resulting from the special position of trust placed on trustees and officers of the corporation.

(Payette, 2001, p. 18)

Payette's (2001) definition, an amalgam of the Association of Governing Boards' language and other sources, demonstrates the complexity and the significance of the trustee as fiduciary. The Association of Governing Boards adds that while trustees may be highly influential as individuals, they have no actual authority unless they are taking action, in many cases, as a formal quorum of the board with which they belong (Association of Governing Boards, 2015).

**Trustee and board.** Trustees in higher education in the United States are also referred to as "board members", "institutional governors," and "regents" -- these titles vary from state to state and from system to system. "The venerable term 'trustee', used by most of the 1,200 institutions in the Association of Governing Boards member database, captures the idea of reliable citizens (and not the government) who are entrusted with holding an institution's cross-generational future in their hands," notes an on-line Association of Governing Boards resource (n.d.).

For the purposes of this study, hereafter the term "trustee" shall refer to any individual, elected or appointed to his post, who is a member of a governing board of a college or university and shall support the description put forth by Payette (2011). In addition, the term "board" shall refer to any governing entity comprised of more than one trustee with the explicit responsibility and authority to hold in trust the assets of a college or a university which it oversees.

**Professional orientation.** The Professional Role Orientation Instrument (PROI) is a 40-item survey originally developed by Bebeau, Born, and Ozar to demonstrate the different professional role orientations among dentists (Bebeau et al., 1993). In recent years, it has been used and adapted slightly for other professions (Barron, 2015; Swisher, Beckstead, & Bebeau, 2004). The PROI defines professional authority via two scales: authority and responsibility (Bebeau et al., 1993). While this study does not use the PROI as a survey tool, it does rely upon Bebeau et al.'s (1993) definition which notes that (1) 'authority' "refers to the degree to which a person sees the self as knowledgeable, a good judge of outcomes, respected, and deferred to for expertise" (p. 27) and (2) 'responsibility' refers to one's commitment to others.

**Fiduciary duty.** Finally, there are three key fiduciary duties of college trustees that are generally described as the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Payette, 2001). First, the duty of care includes paying full attention to one's duties as a board member; setting aside competing personal or professional interests to protect the assets of the institution; stewardship of financial assets, institution reputation, human resources, and capital assets (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Blumer, 2003). Blumer (2003) adds that the primary responsibility of trustees across the non-profit sector is to preserve transparency and trust. Second, the duty of loyalty requires that trustees put the interests of the institution before all others and it prohibits board members from acting out of self-interest (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Bastedo, 2009; Leslie & Novak, 2003). Third, the duty of obedience asserts that a trustee's obligation is to advance the mission of the college and

that trustees will act in a manner that is consistent with the mission and goals of the institution (Association of Governing Boards, 2010).

While there is some debate over the prominence of the duty of obedience in light of external demands on trustees from politicians and the public (Balch, 2008; Bastedo, 2009), that debate does not extend to painting the duty of obedience as unimportant. As the media sharpens its focus on higher education and key stakeholders turn to boards of trustees for accountability, considering how our college and university trustees foster institutional answerability and navigate their fiduciary responsibilities becomes increasingly important.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, the trustee experience was examined through a dual lens of sensemaking theory and professional authority.

**Sensemaking theory.** Broadly understood as the process through which individuals turn to their personal and professional frameworks to make sense of their roles and arrive at decisions (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), sensemaking theory has been applied to institutions of higher education and other sectors to illuminate how individuals navigate the complexity therein (Andersen, 2009; Degn, 2015; Flitter, Riesenmy, & van Stralen, 2012; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Kezar, 2013; Smerek, 2013).

Maitlis (2003) found that scholars “understand relatively little about how heterogenous sets of sensemaking parties interact in ongoing and quite ordinary sensemaking processes over extended periods of time” (p. 23). Specific studies on the impact of sensemaking on governing bodies that Maitlis would describe as heterogenous

have largely focused on corporate boards navigating their social responsibilities (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Fassin & Van Rossem, 2009; Golob et al., 2014), but there is no current research applying sensemaking theory to governing boards in higher education.

Balch (2008) asserts that college and university trustees are generally laypersons with no background in academia and that such a status may predispose them to objectivity in their decision making. In order to appreciate how trustees with largely non-education professional backgrounds serve their institutional boards, further inquiry focused on how trustees' actual professional backgrounds legitimately inform their decision making was conducted. This theory is explored in more depth in Chapter Two.

**Professional authority theory.** Professional authority, or the power/dominance often associated with professional expertise (Friedson, 1994), is regarded by researchers Schinkel and Noordegraaf (2011) as a form of “symbolic capital, the substance of which is constantly at stake in power-driven contexts, both internally and externally” (2011, p.67). A 2015 study conducted by the Association of Governing Boards concluded that nearly 62% of trustees on public governing boards were employed in business or professional services (i.e. accounting, law, or health care), and only 10% of trustees had been employed in education (AGB, 2016). The growing professionalism on public college boards is, in part, due to the fact that most college presidents are traditional academics and have come to rely on their boards for professional expertise (Brown, 2014). It may also be, in part, a byproduct of a recent “wave of scandal” across the non-profit sector that has necessitated greater levels of specific expertise on public boards (Blumer, 2003, p. 42).

In order to wield power, professionals must maintain autonomy and, according to Savage and Robertson (1997), such autonomy dictates, “no one except another professional... can challenge the day to day decisions of a professional. It legitimizes judgment without managerial oversight” (1997, p. 12). Placing the board’s collective independence at risk can also mean calling into question an individual trustee’s professional autonomy. Bastedo (2009) observed that trustees who claim some expert professional competency (i.e. management, finance, law) are dominant forces on their board, adding, however, that they also tend to monopolize decision making.

While Savage and Robertson (1997) assert a model in which professional authority can go unchecked, it is perhaps more pragmatic to consider that model as applicable to governing boards if it is balanced with Starr’s (1984) theory which notes that professional authority relies on others dependency on the professional’s superior competence. Therefore, explored further in Chapter Two, a greater understanding of the trustee experience is cultivated through this study by considering these individuals as both professionals being granted authority as a product of their expertise and as dependents relying upon their peers for professional counsel in demonstrating their responsibility for others. As such, professional authority serves several important functions (fostering of self-awareness, autonomy, and board effectiveness) for individuals as they navigate sensemaking processes.

## **Significance**

This study examined the results that emerged from using quantitative survey data of public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data focused on the trustees' sensemaking processes and professional authority. Findings from this study may (1) contribute to the scant body of literature focused on trustees' professional orientations, (2) inform statutory language and nomination processes regarding trustee selection and criterion, (3) reveal institutional-based strategies that may strengthen trustee satisfaction and, in turn, overall board effectiveness.

**Research.** College and university trustees across the country are frequently tasked with publically exercising prudent and ethical decision making practices (Huisman & Currie, 2004) yet there remains relatively little known about these individuals (Convey & Haney, 1997; Kezar, 2006; Sample, 2003). The dearth of research on trustees and, specifically, their orientations requires attention.

Coombes, Morris, Allen, and Webb (2011) assert that previous research on non-profit boards has been severely limited due its focus on "observable descriptors such as size, diversity, and ratio of inside to outside director" (2011, p. 832) and argue instead that data on non-profit trustees' and boards' behavioral orientations can reveal more about a board's capacity to be entrepreneurial and resourceful. Brown (2005) also advocated for research that looks deeply at the behavioral orientations of trustees individually and of boards as a whole, asserting in his research that the backgrounds of board members play an important role in their oversight. This research aims to

meaningfully contribute to the limited body of research on the orientations of college and university trustees.

**Policy.** It is important to note that the oversight that boards provide has shifted over time in response to the fluctuations informing higher education's social contract with society (Thelin, 2004). These fluctuations, influenced by historical events like World War II, legislation such as the G.I. Bill, and economic paucity, have thrust institutions even more recently into practices and decisions that reflect an increasingly business-driven ethos and market-driven model (Zumeta, 2011). This focus on responsible and business savvy institutional decision making, however, has not yet been reflected in public policy as it pertains to identifying criteria or professional competencies required of public college trustees. To date, no state or governor's office in the United States has made explicit any requirements of public college trustees (Pusser & Ordorika, 2001). This research aims to inform policy makers about the current lack of criteria and provide data to inform future discussions regarding the potential benefits of enhanced nominations processes and explicit trustee qualifications to foster good governance.

**Practice.** In higher education governing boards a prevalence of trust and mutual faith in the professional capacity of trustees and institutional administrators is essential to good governance (Tierney, 2006; Vidovich & Currie, 2011). Further, a deficiency of such mutuality has been found to cause severe disruption and inefficiency (Tierney, 2006). To these ends, this research also aims, in part, to present findings that assist institutions in implementing practices that leverage a trustee's professional competencies and, in so doing, enhance trustee satisfaction and foster good governance.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2006) note that the limitations of sequential explanatory design are that it can be time-consuming and heavily resource reliant, however, its advantages include its straightforwardness and the opportunities it presents for the detailed exploration of quantitative results. First, this study targeted a small population and included a small sample size within a confined geographical range. All participants were selected from within the state of New Jersey and all were appointed to their positions as trustees. While the homogeneity of the population was limiting, the verisimilitude among the sample allowed for rich thick description and the subsequent emergence of shared themes and findings among both data strands.

Second, while a wide range of institutional types are present within New Jersey, much of the state's institutions are in suburban settings and many of the trustee participants live within those areas, therefore findings do not represent a great geographic diversity of perspective. To these ends, however, as part of the research design, the available demographics of the participants are described. This information is intended to provide the reader with a contextual understanding of the participants' characteristics. A further limitation is that this demographic data was limited to self-reported data collected during the research process and, finally, that participants may have been pre-disposed to having generally positive experiences as trustees.



## **Organization of Dissertation**

This study followed a traditional dissertation style. As a sequential explanatory study that moved from a quantitative to a qualitative phase, this research transitioned from a post-positivist to a social constructivist paradigm. It sought to explore the role professional orientation plays in how public college and university trustees navigate their fiduciary responsibilities. This dissertation consists of five chapters. This first chapter sought to situate the research problem in the context of the larger social issue of accountability in public higher education. It briefly described the purpose of the study, significance, related theories, and limitations and delimitations of findings.

Chapter Two further describes this study's theoretical framework and reviews literature related to the history of the layperson trustee, the many roles of trustees, their responsibilities, and the context within which they govern with particular attention given to New Jersey. Chapter Three describes the rationale for the study's sequential explanatory design and all related methodology. Chapter Four communicates the study's overall findings. Chapter Five features discussions, implications, and the conclusion of the study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The role of the college trustee has long been associated with eminence, power, and privilege, but in recent years it has become subject to greater levels of scrutiny (Blumer, 2003; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In order to understand the responsibilities and the challenges facing today's trustees, this chapter begins by describing the evolution of the North American college trustee and the persistence of lay board governance. It then explores trustee independence as a factor in lay board governance and the decision making therein. Trustee independence is discussed through the lens of trustee as consultant/arbiter. Following is an outline of the fiduciary duties of trustees and an analysis of the literature that discusses trustee preparedness with respect to these duties.

Today's public college trustees are held to high standards of accountability. While there is substantive research on the duties of governing boards and the impact of accountability in higher education governance (Huisman & Currie, 2004), there is, conversely, very little research on how trustees actually navigate their governance duties in a climate of heightened answerability (Bastedo 2009; Fox Garrity, 2015; Longanecker, 2006). This analysis highlights previous studies in which sensemaking theory and professional authority have been applied to governing bodies and the results and shortcomings therein.

#### **The Evolution of the Trustee and the Persistence of Lay Board Governance**

The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were eras of pivotal development with respect to the North American higher education system and the lay board model of institutional governance that emerged then largely persists today (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin,

2004). As the eastern United States was colonized, European settlers began to embark on the establishment of higher education institutions. These institutions were largely modeled after the storied Oxford and Cambridge systems. As such, the institutions featured some of the tradition and curriculum of their European counterparts. Like the Oxford and Cambridge systems, the new American institutions were also not immune to regional and societal influences including religion and political will (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). During this time several institutions were founded, among them were the eight institutions which currently bear the Ivy League distinction and the College of William and Mary. While these nine institutions were somewhat distinct in their religious affiliations, they shared similar governance structures which were marked by a blend of public and private control in which lay boards and institutional presidents had considerable fiduciary authority (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

“The concept of legal governance vested in lay boards of trustees helped shape American higher education into arguably the most accessible and publicly responsive system of higher education in the world,” wrote Longanecker (2006, p. 95). Lay board governance in North American higher education was sustained throughout the emergent and industrialized eras and persists today (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). During the industrial era, the separation of church and state grew more pronounced and the purpose of higher education expanded to foster economic competitiveness. As a result, colleges predominantly originated as civil corporations in which the legislature issued a charter, described the parameters of the college therein, and appointed trustees (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Numerous state colleges were established during this time via civil corporation and the vast majority of them featured lay boards comprised of wealthy and prominent

men with strong political and aristocratic affiliations (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2004).

**Lay board governance and the quandary of trustee independence.** In addition to civil corporation, highly bureaucratic structures and dramatic curricular growth emerged in higher education during the industrialized era as did the complex university (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These changes required governing board members to take on new and more defined roles as mediators between the legislature and the college, as fundraisers, and as financial managers of their institutions. These shifts signaled an increasingly business-oriented board (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2004) and this business orientation remains prevalent today (Association of Governing Boards, 2016).

***Trustee appointment as a factor in independence.*** The lay board model of governance in higher education is replete with advantages and disadvantages. Trustees are indeed laypersons with generally little to no professional background in academia (save for perhaps once being a student) (Balch, 2008; Longanecker, 2006), yet, despite their unfamiliarity with the complex organizations over which they govern, lay person boards, according to Balch (2008), are objective and thusly well-positioned to balance intellectualism with practicality. Balch's (2008) claims of beneficial objectivity, however, are not without limitations. Trustees in most public college and university systems are selected by their state governor or legislature (Cohen & Kisker, 2010) and, as such, they are often implicitly expected to steward the gubernatorial agenda which can, at times, conflict with their respective institution's agenda (Bastedo, 2009; Legon, Lombardi, & Rhoades, 2013).

Noting the trustee's responsibility to his appointing authority, Cohen and Kisker (2010) elaborate further on the trustee's role in actually having to represent multiple constituencies:

The people selected (to serve as trustees) may be major contributors to political campaigns or they may be selected to represent certain constituencies. Thus they are beholden to more than one master: the authority that appointed them, the different sectors of the public that they putatively represent, and the institution themselves. (2010, p. 388)

Cohen and Kisker's assertion that governing boards have become more business-oriented and that trustees have multiple masters is also illuminated by Bastedo (2009), Fox Garrity (2015), Tierney (2006), and Longanecker (2006). For example, Longanecker asserts:

The state governors or legislatures appoint many if not most public higher education board members to their positions. For these members, the job of governing can be quite complex. Trustees are legally responsible for their institutions and can develop a strong affinity for them; yet they also are responsible to those who appoint or elect them—whether the governor, the state legislature or the voters. (2006, p. 96)

While substantiating that there is indeed a lack of research on trustee independence in decision making, Longanecker (2006) also asserts that trustees are expected to make decisions that are in the best interest of their institutions but that are also in concert with external demands by the public and the legislature. Ultimately, trustees are laypersons (with multiple competing masters and generally no professional

experience in academia) responsible for making significant institutional decisions as fiduciaries. This reality prompted exploration into how a trustee's professional competencies may inform his decision making and assist him in navigating his fiduciary responsibilities.

*Trustee professionalism as a factor in independence.* Noting a trustee's duty to balance the interest of the public and the interest of the legislature, Bastedo (2009) recommended the establishment of non-partisan commissions to screen trustees for background and ability. Dill and Helm (1988) also argued for professional competence over democratic representation in the composition of governing bodies. Commenting on the broader not for profit sector, Cornforth (2001) asserts that board recruitment processes must be focused on finding the right skills in trustees, rather than just enthusiasm.

To date, however, no state or governor's office in the United States has made explicit any professional competencies required of public college trustees. In fact, a 2001 case study found the only element typically shared among appointed trustees is their past history of financial contributions to their respective governor's political party or campaign (Pusser & Ordonika, 2001). In light of this lack of criteria for trustee appointments and the inherent conflict that may exist between a trustee's duty of loyalty to his institution versus his appointing authority, it is compelling to explore further the factor(s) that do impact independent decision making among trustees. So, while there is little research describing the role of the trustee's professional competency in his decision making, research that does exist argues that professional competency is indeed a vital element in understanding *how* trustees experience their fiduciary duties (Arshad et al.,

2013; Bastedo, 2009; Brown, 2014; Cornforth, 2001; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Longanecker, 2006; Webb & Abzug, 2008).

### **Trustee as Consultant and Arbiter**

Not for profit organizations (hereafter referred to as NPOs) have multiple stakeholders with diverse social, economic, and political needs (Connolly and Kelly, 2011) and, consequently, their boards often represent “unique combinations of individuals” that bring personal knowledge, skills, and experiences together to make decisions through what Coombes et al. (2011) describe as “unique interactions” ( p. 833). Such unique combinations of individuals and interactions among governing boards are not uncommon. In fact, NPOs routinely have difficulty attracting trustees with appropriate experience. As a result, public trusteeship is often marked by a regular blurring of roles, according to Donovan et al. (2014), in which trustees take on multiple roles as a result of being unclear as to what is expected of them (Donovan et al., 2014). In higher education, the ambiguity surrounding trustee preparedness and trustee responsibility helps contextualize how trustees sometimes simultaneously approach their trusteeship as consultants and arbiters.

**Trustee as consultant.** Leaders in higher education have, for some time, looked outside of the academe for strategic consult in managing their increasingly complex institutions. External strategic and professional consultants have serviced higher education for many years and have thrived largely because of the sector’s rapidly changing landscape and its continuous need to address emergent trends and concerns in order to remain financially solvent (Pilon, 1991). Pilon asserts:

...attorneys, accountants, architects, and accrediting agencies represented the most common early uses of consultants by colleges and universities. These professionals brought (and continue to bring) specialized expertise to the campus, enabling clients to deal with specific problems and to authenticate institutional assertions regarding academic integrity and financial health. (Pilon, 1991, p.6)

Pilon concludes, “Because of the expense in terms of human energy as well as financial commitment, it is essential that colleges and universities continue to hone their abilities to use the talents of those who offer to serve them” (1991, p.13). In furtherance of Pilon’s conclusion, the emergence of colleges and universities as entities increasingly marked by a business orientation has led to the heightened professionalization of institutional trustees. In much the same way that consultants have served the sector as experts and have lent legitimacy to institutional decisions, so too do today’s trustees. More recently, Brown (2014) found that while larger institutions generally have more resources and can hire consultants to provide them with professional advice and guidance, smaller institutions may not have such resources or expertise and rely more heavily on their trustees for such counsel.

Further consideration of the trustee’s role as consultant to his institution is reasonable for two primary reasons. First, the vast majority of appointed trustees have professional backgrounds. Second, the concept of trusteeship is rooted in a trust-based relationship between trustee and organization. “Many governing board members ...possess extensive personal managerial experience. Trustees have built careers as successful managers in the business or non-profit sector, and they pride themselves on



their managerial acumen” according to Longanecker (2006, p.102). Much data supports Longanecker’s assertion. In 2010, roughly 62% of public trustees on higher education boards were employed in business or professional services (i.e. accounting, law, and medicine) (Association of Governing Boards, 2010). In 2015, this predominance of trustees as professionals had remained steady (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). While “trustees who understand the fundamental operation of the university are rare” they may know a lot about business and some university functions (Legon, Lombardi & Rhoades, p. 29, 2013) and their advice on managing the business of the university is perceived by some to be invaluable to the institution’s success (Brown, 2014).

The dynamic of trustee as organizational consultant is not unique to higher education. NPOs have also become more reliant on board members with professional backgrounds for two reasons: (1) recent waves of scandal in the NPO sector created environments in which the primary responsibility of the trustee is now, more than ever, to preserve trust and transparency (Blumer, 2003); and (2) professional trustees are assumed to be more capable when assisting the organization in understanding the increasingly complex and regulated environment under which NPOs operate (Arshad et al., 2013). Arshad et al. (2013) explains how the concepts of public trust and trustee professionalism are wedded to one another:

...board members with professional backgrounds are expected to be concerned with maintaining and enhancing their reputation. The reputation of professionally qualified board members is associated with their membership in professional bodies. In general, they are obliged to comply with professional commitments and are more likely to direct their

organization to engage in activities considered as accountable by the various stakeholders. (2013, pp. 1023-1024)

According to Arshad et al. (2013), then, a trustee's professional background can also inform his ethical orientation. By specifically applying the findings of Arshad et al. (2013) to the public higher education sector, we are introduced to a fourth constituency to whom the college trustee may feel beholden: (1) the appointing authority, (2) the public, (3) the institution, and now (4) the trustee's professional network or community. This latter group will be discussed later in the context of professional authority.

*The "trust" in trusteeship.* In addition to a trustee's professional capacity to serve as consultant to his institution, a reigning ethos behind trusteeship points to a central dependence on trust between two or more parties to foster decision making that is in the public good (Bastedo, 2009). Tierney (2006) notes:

Governance is supposed to protect institutions from short term political trends, ensure stability, and guard the institution from intellectual fads or inappropriate control of the institution by single-interest groups. By ensuring the stability and well-being of the institution, the state also ensures the ability of higher education to satisfy the public good. (2006, p. 54)

While this concept of serving the public good in trust has long been a cornerstone of good governance in the NPO sector (Blumer, 2003), it has not been widely applied to higher education (Tierney, 2006).

In a case study of four universities in the United States, Tierney (2006) described trust in governance as both (1) an iterative process comprised of a series of exchanges

between and among parties and (2) as an end in itself. Trust in higher education governance can be viewed through several frames, one of which Tierney (2006) defines as faith. This frame pushes us to think more deeply about the fragility of trust in governance and its considerable dependence on faith (or lack of it) in the capacity and competence of others (Tierney, 2006; Vidovich & Currie, 2011). In higher education governing boards, a prevalence of mutual faith in the professional capacity of both trustees and institutional administrators is essential to good governance while a deficiency of such mutuality has been found to cause severe disruption and inefficiency (Tierney, 2006).

**Trustee as arbiter.** The trustee's role is indeed more complex than that of just consultant or advisor to the College administration. In fact, some trustees might scoff at such a description. Trustees, as noted earlier and described more fully in the pages that follow, have a significant range of authority (Balch, 2008; Rovio-Johansson & Liff, 2012). To this end, trustees are also required to serve as arbiters, routinely taking formal action, as a quorum, on substantive matters including but not limited to: the hiring, termination and promotion of personnel, the approval of major capital projects, the acceptance of grants and gifts, the evaluation of the president, the setting of tuition and fees, and the management of legal matters (Bastedo, 2009).

Brown (2005) advocated for research that looks deeply at the behavioral orientations of trustees individually and of boards as a whole, asserting in his findings that certain types of backgrounds of board members play an important role in how they exercise their fiduciary authority. Trustees who are donors to the institution are more inclined to engage in matters concerning the institution's financial health (Brown, 2005).

Trustees who are tenured faculty are more inclined to investigate the long term impacts of board decisions, and student trustees are more likely to focus on the short-term impact of board decisions (Brown, 2005). While Brown's (2005) findings do not explore the sensemaking processes of trustees, they are useful in that they illuminate how even a trustee's positional status or orientation (as donor, faculty, or student) can influence his oversight. Four years later, Bastedo (2009) furthered that a trustee's professional competency and associated expertise both are valuable tools in his ability to influence board oversight. In fact, trustees who claim expertise in areas such as management, finance, and law were found to be dominant forces on their boards, often asserting that their professional expertise leads to better board decision making.

Coombes et al. (2011) echoed the calls put forth earlier by Brown (2005) and Bastedo (2009). Coombes et al. (2011) lamented that previous research on NPO boards had been severely limited due to its focus on "observable descriptors such as size, diversity, and ratio of inside to outside director" (p. 832). They championed, instead, the need for data on non-profit trustees' and boards' behavioral orientations, noting that such data would reveal more about a board's capacity to be entrepreneurial and resourceful in its decision making (Coombes et al., 2011).

***Trustee preparedness and satisfaction.*** Previous research asserts that board professionalism and trustee preparedness contribute to overall board accountability (Arshad et al., 2013) and trustee satisfaction (Michael, Schwartz, Cook & Winston, 1999). In their study of more than 600 higher education trustees across sectors (public university, private four-year, community/technical college, and medical college) Michael et al. (1999) found that public university trustees reported the lowest overall level of

satisfaction with their trusteeship. The low satisfaction level was, in part, attributed to the fact that public universities have broad missions and complex operations which, in turn, make their trustees more likely to experience “competing and conflicting demands” (Michael et al., 1999, p. 188). The study went on to find that public university trustees favored enhancing trustee satisfaction by “matching new trustees to institutional needs” and establishing a “systematic process of identifying trustees’ skills, competencies, (and) interests before appointment” (Michael et al., 1999, p. 184).

There is very little research, however, on *how* purposeful measures such as skill assessments of trustees, trainings, and even strategic committee appointments aimed at aligning these professionals to specific fiduciary duties may yield trustee satisfaction and in turn, effectiveness (Michael et al., 1999). Dika and Janosik (2003) found that although trustees play a primary role in ensuring quality and effectiveness in higher education in the United States, “research on (the) selection, training and effectiveness of public higher education governing boards is limited” (p. 273).

Ultimately, the literature is relatively silent on the association between a trustee’s professional competencies and the satisfaction of his trusteeship; it is more robust on the issue of trustee’s fiduciary responsibilities and the considerable influence that trustees can have, even outside of those duties, on their institutions.

### **The Fiduciary Duties of Trustees and Trustee Influence Therein**

As noted earlier, boards of trustees are the statutory leaders of their colleges and universities and, as such, they have considerable decision making authority over their institutions (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Fox Garrity, 2015; Payette, 2011). For example, board authority includes the oversight of significant financial and capital

assets (Balch, 2008; Fox Garrity, 2015). Nearly three decades ago, the majority of United States colleges and universities were home to annual operating budgets in excess of \$100 million and capital plants valued nationally at more than \$300 billion (Rush & Johnson, 1989). Many boards of trustees also have ultimate decision making authority over institutional mission that includes but is not limited to programmatic approvals, policy making, and preserving institutional autonomy (Fox Garrity, 2015).

There are three key fiduciary duties of college trustees which are generally described as the duty of care, the duty of loyalty, and the duty of obedience (Association of Governing Boards, 2015; Payette, 2001). The clarity with which a board exercises its authority and carries out these three duties has been identified as a key element in board effectiveness (Klausner & Small, 2005; Rovio-Johansson & Liff, 2012).

**Duty of care.** First, the duty of care includes paying full attention to one's duties as a board member; stewardship of financial assets, institutional reputation, human resources and capital assets; and setting aside competing personal or professional interests to protect the assets of the institution (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Blumer, 2003). This latter responsibility, while stated clearly, is surrounded by a murkiness of sorts because trustees (as noted earlier) often have multiple and diverse masters (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

**Duty of loyalty.** Second, the duty of loyalty requires that trustees put the interests of the institution before all others and it prohibits board members from acting out of self-interest (Association of Governing Boards 2010; Bastedo, 2009; Leslie & Novak, 2003). The National Council on Nonprofits (2015), an advocacy organization that is host to the largest network of NPOs, declared that the single most important policy for any NPO

board to adopt and uphold is a conflict of interest policy, adding that such policies should address the duality of interests that board members often confront.

**Duty of obedience.** Third, the duty of obedience asserts that a trustee's obligation is to advance the mission of the college and that trustees will act in a manner that is consistent with the mission and goals of the institution (Association of Governing Boards, 2010). While there is some debate over the prominence of this last duty in light of external demands on trustees from politicians and the public (Balch, 2008; Bastedo, 2009), that debate, as noted earlier, does not extend to painting the duty of obedience as unimportant. A primary responsibility of trustees across the NPO sector is indeed to advance good governance through the preservation of transparency and trust (Blumer, 2003).

**Trustee influence.** As noted in the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, the scope of a trustee's formal responsibilities is broad and the range of a board's collective authority is great (Association of Governing Boards, 2010; Coombes et al., 2011). Pursuant to the depth and breadth of the trustee/board portfolio, the influence of trustees on organizational legitimacy and effectiveness is also substantive. For example, NPO boards are largely trusted to maintain institutional mission and protect stakeholder interests (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001). In so doing, member trustees must establish trust-based relationships with stakeholders and the public (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005; Klausner & Small, 2005). Herman and Renz (2004) concluded that, among NPO boards, such trust-based relationships can also significantly impact organizational effectiveness by directly influencing the behaviors of personnel within their organizations.

**Outsider advantage/disadvantage.** Because many NPO board members are often from outside of their organization's industry, researchers assert that they are thusly able to more "effectively monitor strategic decision making with objectivity and detachment" (Coombes et al., 2011, p. 848). Complementing this argument of objective legitimacy, a study of more than 8,000 trustees of NPOs found that most board members, despite their industry outsider status, eventually came to represent their respective organization(s) and, in turn, to symbolize its legitimacy (Abzug & Glaskiewicz, 2001).

Despite having multiple masters and considerable influence, trustees are expected to serve their institutions as objective consultants, arbiters, and stewards. The complexity of the trustee's role, coupled with the breadth of his fiduciary duties, requires thoughtful examination of the trustee experience.

### **Theoretical Framework: Sensemaking and Professional Authority**

Despite the wide breadth of trustee authority and heightened accountability of higher education governing boards, there remains relatively little known about the experiences and professional orientations of the thousands of college trustees across the country (Convey & Haney, 1997; Kezar, 2006; Sample, 2003). Understanding how college and university trustees draw from their own professional experiences and backgrounds to foster institutional legitimacy and navigate their fiduciary responsibilities requires an understanding of trustees' sensemaking processes and professional orientations.

**Sensemaking and the trustee.** Broadly understood as the process through which individuals turn to their personal frameworks to make sense of their roles and arrive at decisions (Weick et al., 2005; Bentley, 2016), sensemaking theory has been applied to



institutions of higher education and other sectors to illuminate how individuals navigate the complexity therein (Andersen, 2009; Degn, 2015; Flitter, Riesenmy, & van Stralen, 2012; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Kezar, 2013; Smerek, 2013). Specific studies on the impact of sensemaking on governing bodies have largely focused on corporate boards navigating their social responsibilities (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Fassin & Van Rossem, 2009), but there is no research which applies sensemaking theory to governing boards in higher education.

Degn (2015), however, presents provocative findings on the manner in which senior management (non-trustees) makes decisions in Danish colleges and universities. She describes a composite of managerial decision makers who have traditionally academic professional backgrounds. These backgrounds, however, due to external calls for accountability, are described as hindrances. Managers that are now routinely tasked with making “higher education institutions more customer-oriented, responsive and competitive,” struggle in large part because the charge is new to them and they are entrenched in a business-as-usual framework (Degn, 2015, p. 902).

Degn’s analysis demonstrates that, by looking through the sensemaking framework, a trustee’s lack of background in academia may actually buoy his capacity to construct meaning and arrive at decisions that are not limited by familiarity with the sector. Again, Balch (2008) echoes this sentiment, asserting that a trustee’s status as a non-academic may predispose him to objectivity in his decision making. In order to advance the assertion that trustees with non-academic professional backgrounds are at an advantage in serving their institutional boards, this study inquired further in to how their actual professional backgrounds may legitimately inform their decision making.

**Professional authority and the trustee.** Professional authority, or the power/dominance often associated with professional expertise (Friedson, 1994), is regarded by researchers Schinkel and Noordegraaf (2011) as a form of “symbolic capital, the substance of which is constantly at stake in power-driven contexts, both internally and externally” (p. 67). As noted earlier, trustees are subject to the push and pull of multiple masters and are largely non-academics making decisions over academic institutions. The theory of professional authority provides a lens through which trustees may derive power, influence decisions, and navigate their fiduciary responsibilities.

In a survey of nearly 500 trustees of college/university boards, Michael et al. (1999) described the composition of such boards as largely professional, noting that 58% of participants had earned terminal degrees or master’s degrees in their respective fields. Between 2004 and 2015, studies conducted by the Association of Governing Boards concluded that, on average, 61% of trustees on public governing boards were employed in business or professional services (i.e. accounting, law, or health care), and, on average, only 10% of trustees had been employed in education (AGB, 2010, 2016). The significant professionalism on public college boards is attributed, in part, to the fact that most college presidents are traditional academics and have come to rely on their boards for professional expertise (Brown, 2014). It is also, as noted earlier, a byproduct of recent scandal across the NPO sector which has necessitated greater levels of specific expertise on public boards (Blumer, 2003, p. 42).

Bastedo (2009) observed that trustees who claim some expert professional competency (i.e. management, finance, law) are dominant forces on their boards, adding, however that they tend to monopolize decision making. While these professional

individuals are often desired by college presidents to serve on their institution's governing boards due to their expertise (Bastedo, 2009; Brown, 2014), their influence, Bastedo (2009) cautions, must be carefully managed. For example, when a board defers to the one lawyer on the board for all legal matters, such dependency can reduce the board's responsibility to engage in due diligence (i.e. seeking alternatives or information from other sources) and can place its independence at risk when stewarding its duties of care and obedience (Bastedo, 2009; Association of Governing Boards, 2015).

As shared earlier, placing the board's collective independence at risk can also mean calling into question an individual trustee's professional autonomy. In order to wield power, professionals must maintain autonomy and, according to Savage and Robertson (1997), such autonomy dictates that "no one except another professional... can challenge the day to day decisions of a professional. It legitimizes judgment without managerial oversight" (p. 12). While Savage and Robertson assert a model in which professional authority can go unchecked (1997), it is perhaps more pragmatic to consider that model as applicable to governing boards if it is balanced with Starr's (1984) adaptation of professional authority. Starr (1984) notes that professional authority relies on others dependency on the professional's superior competence and that such legitimation, emerges when a profession/professional is identified by others as having concomitant judgment that is both necessary and exclusive.

College governing boards are overwhelmingly comprised of individuals with professional backgrounds in management, finance, and law (Association of Governing Boards, 2004, 2010, 2015). These backgrounds have been long revered as elite fields of practice and have thusly benefited from a general societal acquiescence to their expertise

(Abbott, 1988). This acquiescence has lent them power, dominance and, in some cases, impunity (Abbott, 1988). To this end, even though the expertise of trustees with management, finance, and law backgrounds may have little direct correlation to their duties of care, loyalty, and obedience, their fellow trustees may defer to their judgment more frequently (Bastedo, 2009; Starr, 1984).

**Professional authority meets sensemaking.** Professional authority, derived from the theory of professionalism, can serve several important functions for individuals as they navigate sensemaking processes. Jecker (2004) asserts that professionalism assists learners in “resolving ethical problems; exposing invidious bias; and gaining broader perspective” (p. 47). Digging further into the practical applications of the theory of professionalism, Jecker (2004) provides an example of a physician who, through reflecting on her work through this theoretical lens, was able to identify that while she maintained many essential competencies, she lacked some key principles, dispositions, and knowledge that were needed to meet professional standards of care.

By applying Jecker’s (2004) example to the public college trustee, the trustee is a largely non-academic professional who is required to serve the public good while delivering on the duties of care, loyalty, and obedience. Moreover, trusteeship is an experience in which the authority and responsibilities of the individual and of the whole are largely crystallized but the principles, dispositions, and knowledge essential to the stewardship of that authority and responsibility are ambiguous. Just as a physician must demonstrate care for a patient, a trustee must demonstrate care for his institution.

In 2015, a study conducted on the governing boards of Ugandan secondary schools found, in pertinent part, that finance expertise among members of governing

boards had a significant effect on the respective institution's performance (Nkundabanyanga, Tauringana, & Muhwezi, 2015). The results also suggested that the financial expertise of the board was a more important factor in institutional effectiveness than factors such as board size and frequency of meetings (Nkundabanyanga, Tauringana, & Muhwezi, 2015). This finding is congruent with much of the research thus far that has called for a greater focus on understanding and appreciating the role professional orientation plays in the effectiveness of college boards (Brown, 2009; Coombes et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Considerable research has been conducted on the origins and principles of lay board governance and the fiduciary duties of trustees. An examination of the materialization of lay board governance during the emergent and industrialized eras in the United States reveals that the role of the lay person trustee is challenging and riddled with complexity. Roughly 90% of the time, the trustee is an industry outsider often appointed by a state legislature to provide oversight of an institution (AGB, 2016). However, the trustee has multiple masters with a diversity of agendas and, as a result, even his most basic duty of loyalty (requiring that he put the needs of the institution before all others) may emerge as a multifarious responsibility. Further, while the fiduciary responsibilities of trustees may be clearly stated, they are being exercised within organizational environments that house increasingly complex missions, operations, and structures. While there is some research on how a trustee's status as an alumnus, faculty member, or donor may drive his fiduciary focus, there are no established criteria or skill sets for the public college trustee. In addition, a trustee's non-academic professional background is

believed by some to be a potential asset to his trusteeship and by others as a potential hindrance.

At present, there is very little research on how public college trustees navigate the breadth and depth of their fiduciary responsibilities. Further, while we know that professional trustees can lend notable legitimacy to their organizations, we know very little about the extent to which the trustee actually relies on his professional competencies and authority when exerting his influence and when navigating his fiduciary duties. This study sought to fill that gap in the research and provide recommendations on how institutions may leverage the professional orientations of their trustees to maximize trustee satisfaction and, in turn, good governance.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this two-phased, mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to examine, through the lenses of sensemaking theory and professional authority, the relationship between how non-educational professionals experience their fiduciary responsibilities as trustees of New Jersey's public colleges and universities and to what extent their professional orientations shape their oversight. This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties?
2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles?
3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?
4. What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes?

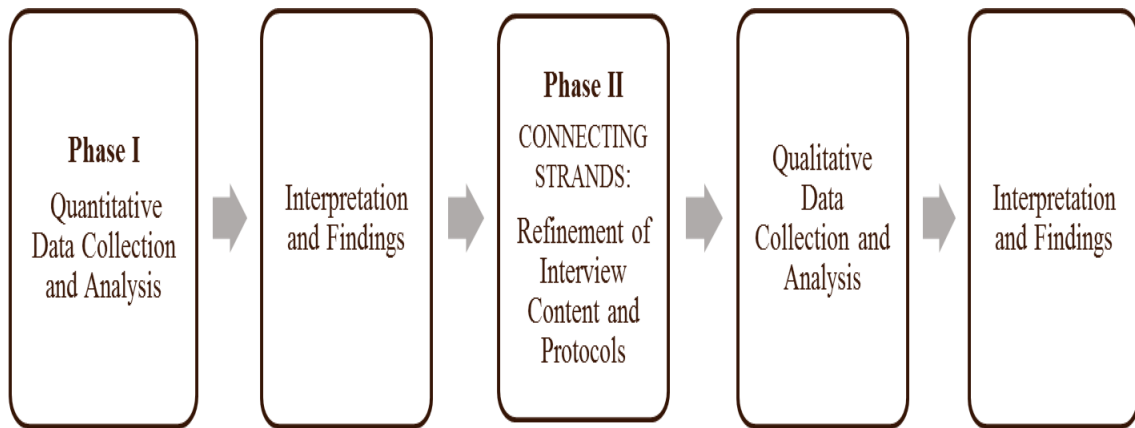
#### **Assumptions of and Rationale for Mixed Methods**

Mixed methods research is a research design that assumes that the phenomenon being researched is complex, and that to arrive at an understanding of said phenomenon the researcher must use both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). As a result of the design's appreciation for both approaches, mixed methods research consequently can also represent multiple philosophical assumptions

such as post-positivism and social constructivism (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This fluidity of assumptions is inherent to mixed methods design in that it fosters interpretation throughout all stages of a study and allows for that ongoing interpretation to influence and shape the research process (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

A mixed methods design and a sequential explanatory strategy of inquiry were selected for this study for several reasons. First, mixed methods research takes into account the role culture plays in educational issues and its influence on educational research (Greene, 2012). In this study, culture envelops the behavior and way of thinking of public college boards, their member trustees, and their respective professional orientations (Nerland & Jensen, 2012). Second, as a special population, college and university trustees engage with their colleagues and their institutions in a host of complex fiduciary activities. To this end, the use of purely quantitative methodologies when working with special populations (trustees in this case) would not effectively elucidate the complexity of the phenomenon (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Eastwood & Lucas, 2009). Third, when used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Ivankova & Stick, 2007). In order to yield greater understanding of the phenomenon, this study's mixed methods design also fostered stronger data strands via its two-phased quantitative and qualitative instrumentation (survey and interview, respectively) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As a result, the sequential explanatory strategy of inquiry was employed (see Figures 1 and 2).





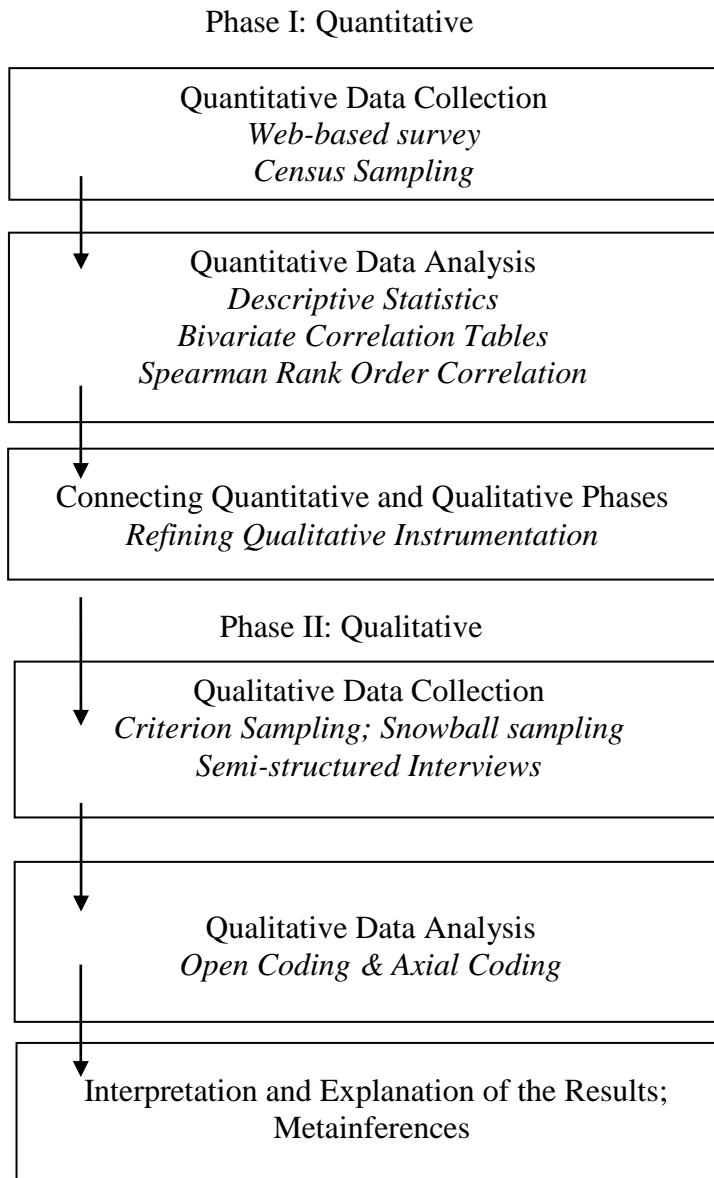
*Figure 1.* Sequential Explanatory Design Overview. Adapted and modified from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006.

**Sequential explanatory design.** Sequential explanatory design is one of six mixed methods design strategies defined by Creswell (2013). As described in Figure 1, it features the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the connecting of the strands, and then the collection and analysis of qualitative data. As described by Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2006), “In the mixed-methods sequential designs, the quantitative and qualitative phases are connected (Hanson et al. 2005) in the intermediate stage when the results of the data analysis in the first phase of the study inform or guide the data collection in the second phase (p. 11).” To this end, with sequential explanatory design, the results of the study’s qualitative phase are connected and then used to explain and further explore the findings from its quantitative phase (Creswell, 2013). Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2006) note that the limitations of sequential explanatory design are that it can be time-consuming and heavily resource reliant, however, its advantages

include its straightforwardness and the opportunities it presents for the detailed exploration of quantitative results.

In Phase I of this study, the quantitative data gleaned from the survey and its subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the research problem and, through the use of bivariate correlational tables, helped identify relationships between variables. That analysis was then used to inform the content of the interviews in Phase II (see Figure 2). The interview data and analysis served to more fully explain the quantitative results by exploring the trustees' views in more depth (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Wilson 1985; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The initial quantitative findings from the survey regarding the relationship between fiduciary responsibilities and professional orientation were gathered, analyzed, and, through the application of an emergent connection, were used to shape the qualitative interview instrumentation (Charmaz, 2009). Data gleaned from the interviews was valuable in helping to further explore, illuminate and assess the complexity of the relationship between the trustee's professional orientation and his fiduciary oversight. This latter phase of analysis generated vivid description of the trustee experience, fostered the generalizability of the findings to a greater population of trustees, and may be used to inform policy, practice, and research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene & Caricelli, 1997).



*Figure 2: Sequential Explanatory Design Detail. Adapted and modified from Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick (2006).*

***Epistemological assumptions.*** The sequential explanatory strategy of inquiry serves as both “guide and ballast” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 9) in that its paradigmatic assumptions transition and strengthen as the study moves from phase to phase. Because this study’s sequential explanatory design includes distinct quantitative and qualitative

phases that are peppered with an emergent approach, the philosophical assumptions undergirding it transitioned from post-positivist to social constructivist.

*Phase I: Quantitative research and post-positivism.* The first phase of this study was supported by a post-positivist quantitative understanding of trustees' responsibilities as relatively verifiable elements of their experience (Creswell, 2013). While much quantitative research dwells within the positivist scientific paradigm, quantitative and mixed methods researchers are increasingly embracing a post-positivist worldview as they navigate their research (Gelo, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The ontology of post-positivism supports a critical realism that accepts that most of what is "real" is "probabilistically apprehendable" rather than "perfectly apprehendable" (Gelo, 2012, p. 119). In this study, the possible alignments of a trustee's perceived professional competencies to the satisfaction of his fiduciary oversight and importance of his fiduciary duties were measured through quantitative survey analysis. Further, the epistemology and methodology within the post-positivist paradigm are predicated upon the belief that knowledge is probably true and on methods that are largely experimental (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In light of this study's quantitative examination of the arguably subjective lived experiences of its participants and their self-perceived competencies, the post-positivist paradigm provided a suitable framework for its first phase including survey instrumentation and iterative analysis.

*Phase II: Qualitative research and social constructivism.* In its second phase, this study transitioned to a social constructivist understanding of trustees' experiences as products of their personal and professional frames and sensemaking processes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Because the data that emerged from Phase I was regarded as mostly true,

it was connected to and used in Phase II as a vehicle through which the content of the interviews was further shaped and the emergent themes were tested.

The social constructivism paradigm and its ontological assumption that multiple socially-situated realities exist (Gelo, 2012) helped frame a holistic understanding of the multiple trustee experiences. Pursuant to the ontological assumption of social constructivism, its epistemological and methodological assumptions assert that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed and that methods to understand knowledge must be hermeneutical or dialectical in nature (Gelo, 2012). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between the trustees' professional orientations, the satisfaction of their fiduciary oversight, and the importance of their fiduciary duties was revealed through the use of semi-structured interviews and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of participant responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview structure facilitated pointed yet flexible dialogues aimed at eliciting topical yet vivid details of the participants' experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The combination of post-positivist and social constructivist assumptions, to echo Ravitch and Riggan (2012), facilitated this study's nimble yet rigorous strategy of inquiry—a strategy that considers both relative objectivity and subjectivity as critical generative components in the exploration and consideration of the trustee experience as a complex educational phenomenon (Boote & Beil, 2005).

As noted in Chapter 2, a review of the literature revealed that the phenomenon in question in this study has been historically under-researched. Upon surveying more than 600 college trustees, Michael et al. (1999) called attention to the critical need for in-depth research on trustees:

Given their power, roles and responsibilities, trustees as a special breed of leaders deserve a continuing empirical devotion of higher education scholars. Such engagement is necessary to expand our understanding of trusteeship and to contribute toward improving trustee effectiveness. Future researchers may want to include in-depth interviews of trustees to discover data that may not be obtainable via questionnaires. (p. 191)

It is important to also note that, while some researchers have used sequential explanatory design to explore other phenomena associated with governing boards, these studies have focused largely on the k-12 sector (Vaughn, 2010; Nkundabanyanga, Tauringana, & Muhwezi, 2015; Orndorff, 2015). Therefore, this study engaged a unique methodological approach for understanding the experiences of public college trustees.

### **Context**

**New Jersey public higher education.** This study was conducted in New Jersey. As the overseers of their colleges and universities, boards of trustees in New Jersey have considerable fiduciary authority over their institutions (N.J.S.A 18A:64-6, 2014). This authority is complex in its scope. For example, the board is responsible for setting tuition and fees, the conferral of degrees, borrowing money, approving academic programs, the hiring and assessment of the College president, and the management of capital assets (N.J.S.A 18A:64-6, 2014).

In 1994, New Jersey's Higher Education Restructuring Act transitioned institutions from broad State control to local board control noting that in order to provide institutions with the ability to fulfill their mission and statewide goals, greater decision

making and accountability had to be placed at the institutional level (McLendon, 2003). Public college and university board members in New Jersey continue to be appointed by the Governor but there are no qualifying criteria outlined for their service (N.J.S.A 18A:64-6, 2014). This lack of criteria for trustees was exemplified in 2007 when the New Jersey Commission of Investigation (an independent fact-finding agency whose mission is to investigate waste, fraud and abuse of government tax dollars) published “Vulnerable to Abuse: The Importance of Restoring Accountability, Transparency, and Oversight to Public Higher Education Governance” in which it described the statutory and administrative architecture of the State colleges and universities as marked by “the complete absence of any mechanism to ensure internal accountability, independent external oversight and proper transparency” (Edwards et al., 2007, p. 2).

Three years later, the New Jersey Governor’s Task Force on Higher Education furthered the preceding discussion regarding board oversight. It recommended in its report that “Trustees should have qualifications to ensure their ability to oversee the institutions in their charge (p.14, 2010).” That report, and the 72 recommendations therein, were largely lauded by the higher education sector. Specifically, the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU, 2010) “strongly endorsed” the report but, at the time this study was conducted, the aforementioned recommendation had not yet been formally advanced by the State.

*Gatekeepers: NJASCU and board professionals.* In cooperation with trustees, students, faculty and campus administrators, NJASCU develops and proposes state-based higher education policy to better serve New Jersey's citizens. NJASCU was used as a vehicle through which trustees were contacted to participate in this study. At the time of this study, nine of New Jersey's public colleges and universities were members in good standing of NJASCU. Its member institutions include: The College of New Jersey, Kean University, Montclair State University (affiliated member), New Jersey City University, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Rowan University (affiliated member), Stockton University, Thomas Edison State University, and William Paterson University.

In addition, the board professional at each of the NJASCU institutions was also contacted and used as a resource to follow up with and/or encourage trustee participation. Using the board professionals as a resource to foster participation was a strategy largely borrowed from Miller (2011) who noted that a key to the effectiveness of her mixed methods research on college trustees was honoring the role of the board professional as a pivotal gatekeeper. "The board secretary's assessment of institutional interest and board members participation was critical for data collection and obtaining high response rates," wrote Miller (2011, p. 60). For this study, the board professionals were contacted by phone and email and were asked to personally encourage their respective trustees to complete the survey.

### **Participants and Sampling**

There are examples of sequential mixed methods sampling procedures throughout the social and behavioral sciences (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In this study and, as is common in mixed methods, the methodology and results of the first (quantitative) phase informed



the methodology in the second (qualitative) phase. “Sequential QUAN→QUAL sampling is the most common technique that we have encountered in our exploration of the Mixed Methods literature,” wrote Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 89). The qualitative sample in this study was a partial subset of the quantitative sample.

The sampling approach a researcher uses must be informed by his research design and by the purpose of his research (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). To this end, the selected sampling approaches maximized the relevance of participant responses, supported the generalizability of findings, and also minimized the amount of time and resources that might have been expended on the recruitment of unqualified participants and the collection and analysis of irrelevant data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In addition, the sampling strategies used represent the rigorous and persuasive elements of the quantitative and qualitative research strands, respectively (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). These complementary elements manifest in the sampling strategies chosen for each strand of data. Census sampling and snowball sampling techniques were selected to foster an in-depth understanding of trustees’ experiences while still ensuring that, within the sample of participants, there was opportunity for variances in perspective (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Patton, 2002). From a paradigmatic lens, these sampling strategies largely complemented the relative fixedness of post-positivism while still providing the flexibility of interpretation inherent in social constructivism.

**Phase I: Quantitative sampling.** External validity is the extent to which the results of a study can be generalized from a sample to a population (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). The external validity of this study’s survey was strengthened through its sampling strategy which aimed to represent the broader trustee population. To achieve

representativeness, census sampling was used in this study's first, quantitative phase. As such, this study attempted to survey 81 participants ( $n=81$ ) from the total population ( $N=102$ ) of NJASCU public college trustees so that the probability of inclusion for every member of the population was determinable and a 95% confidence level could be attained (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). While student trustees were invited to participate in the survey, they were asked to disclose their status early on in the survey. Upon disclosure, they were advised that they were not eligible for participation due to their non-professional status as students.

**Phase I: Gatekeeping.** To gain access to this study's participants, the Executive Director of NJASCU was contacted and presented with this research study's proposal. He forwarded the proposal to NJASCU's Board of Directors. Once support was secured, participants were contacted via phone and/or electronic mail. As noted earlier, the board professional at each institution was also contacted. The board professionals were provided a statement that communicated NJASCU's endorsement of the research, the intention of the study, and what was expected from participants. If the board professional advised that the board would be receptive to the study, he/she was engaged by the researcher throughout both phases to encourage trustee participation.

**Phase II: Qualitative sampling.** The information generated through Phase I of this study was helpful in selecting participants with particular characteristics for Phase II. Criterion sampling assists the researcher with understanding information-rich and complex cases (Patton, 2002). It was applied for Phase II of this study to identify participants based on two important pre-determined criteria (Patton, 2002). Some of the Phase II participants were a subset of the Phase I sample, and had to have indicated on

their surveys or through dialogue with the researcher that (1) they were willing to participate in an interview, and (2) they had served on their respective board for a minimum of one year. Phase II participants were also sought via snowball sampling which asks interviewees to identify other persons who may be included for this research (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009, p 288). Snowball sampling has been used effectively in other mixed studies designed around sensemaking theory (O'Meara, Lounder, & Campbell, 2014; Reischauer, 2015).

Phase II participants were sampled until data saturation was achieved. Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) describe saturation as “occurring when information occurs so repeatedly that the researcher can anticipate it and whereby the collection of more data appears to have no additional interpretive worth” (p. 4). Referring back to this study’s transition from a post-positivist paradigm in Phase I to a social constructivist paradigm in Phase II, it became clear that saturation had been achieved as the experiences of the participants in Phase II were interpreted and reflected upon. Accepting that while multiple realities of how the participants experienced their fiduciary duties existed, a thematic constancy in those experiences (as detailed in Chapter Four) began to emerge.

### **Data Collection Methods**

As described earlier, this study was conducted in two phases.

**Phase I: Quantitative data collection and survey research.** Survey research refers to any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents (Fink, 2008). Surveys can take many forms and, when thoughtfully designed, administered, and assessed, should yield valuable data. The effectiveness of any survey tool is predicated, in

part, upon the researcher's full consideration of potential bias (on the part of both the researcher and the participant), the population to be surveyed (i.e. readiness, accessibility, literacy, etc.), and the questions to be posed (i.e. sequencing, complexity, applicability, etc.) (Fink, 2008; Jackson & Trochim, 2000). Survey research was used for this study for several reasons enumerated below.

Fink (2008) describes surveys as valuable tools to describe and explain feelings, values, and behavior. This study's survey included largely fixed items to (1) help determine relationships between the study's identified variables including the importance of fiduciary duties and trustee's professional competencies, and the frequency of trustee utilization and satisfaction and (2) to inform the subsequent qualitative phase (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The quantitative analysis was used as a means to further organize and refine the Phase II interviews into prioritized areas of focus: the importance of a trustee's respective fiduciary duties and professional competencies, and the frequency and extent of a trustee's utilization and satisfaction in oversight activities.

Table 1

*Data Sources in Relation to Research Questions*

Research Question	Data Source: Survey	Data Source: Interview
1. To what extent do trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties?	X	
2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary role?	X	X
3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?	X	X
4. What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes?	X	X

**Phase II: Qualitative data collection and interview research.** As noted earlier, upon an initial review of the survey responses, all participants who selected that they (1) were willing to participate in an interview, and who (2) had served on their respective board for a minimum of one year, were invited via phone and/or email to participate in Phase II of the study, a qualitative semi-structured interview. Additional participants were identified via snowball sampling and coordination with board professionals.

The interview, as a qualitative research tool, is used to explore and describe the meaning of what interviewees share (Kvale, 1996). While attributing meaning to an interview can be challenging due to the possible range of what is expressed and due to the potentiality of researcher and interviewee bias, a critical component of this study was that it was conducted within the parameters of a dual sensemaking and professional authority theoretical framework. The sensemaking framework assumed that individuals turn to their personal and professional frameworks to make sense of their roles and arrive at decisions (Weick et al., 2005; Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Noting this theoretical lens, interviewing was used to further explore the quantitative data gleaned in Phase I and to, in turn, reveal how the interviewees made sense of their fiduciary responsibilities.

The semi-structured interview design was employed because, in alignment with sensemaking theory, it fosters the researcher's capacity to pursue greater depth of meaning and to pivot, as appropriate, into the exploration of emergent themes (Kvale, 1996; Smith & Coombs, 2003). In addition, semi structured interviewing is also used by researchers to overcome poor survey response rates, to explore attitudes and motives (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), and to facilitate comparability among interviewees (Bailey, 1987).

In his mixed methods study on organizational sensemaking, Reischauer (2015) describes the criticality of the semi structured interview in mixed methods design, adding that, in his study, the questions were neither standardized nor closed. Reischauer also found that to increase participant responsiveness it is incumbent upon the researcher to take into account the current state of the studied organization. Borrowing from Reischauer's approach, the interviews featured, in part, questions that directed participants to consider specific experiences at their institutions.

Pursuant to this study's professional authority framework, the semi-structured interview also aimed to relax participants. Parry (2003), in his study on organizational sensemaking among senior executives, noted, "I found (semi-structured interviewing) particularly useful to relax interviewees and to encourage them to reflect on something in which their expertise is clearly unchallenged, their own professional life history" (2003, p. 247). Parry (2003) went on to reference research by Musson (1999) who argued that "researchers need to understand that people construct narrative accounts as part of the sensemaking process and as a way of preserving and communicating information and they do this through the telling of stories" (Musson, 1999, p. 16; as cited in Parry, 2003). To these ends, the interview, and more specifically, the semi structured interview design, was used to facilitate the interviewees' reflexivity, to put them at ease, and to capture the meaning and processes through which they navigated their fiduciary responsibilities through their professional frames of reference.

### **Instrumentation**

This section describes the protocol associated with each of this study's data sources. This study relied heavily on Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick's (2006)

methodological overview of priority, implementation, and connecting in sequential explanatory design. Priority was given to the qualitative phase of this study despite the fact that it occurred in Phase II. This decision was made based on the study's emphasis on understanding and explaining the variables that affect the relationship between how non-educational professionals experience their fiduciary responsibilities as trustees and to what extent their professional orientations shape their oversight.

**Phase I: Quantitative survey protocols.** The first, quantitative phase of this study was focused on revealing the predictive power of multiple variables on trustee satisfaction. The data collection for this phase was limited to survey. Its analysis employed descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation tables using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation ( $\rho$ ) to describe the degree of relationship between the variables of frequency, agreement, and importance.

Drawing from the assumptions of survey research, a 56-point quantitative survey instrument was developed for Phase I (see Appendix A: Survey of Trusteeship and the Professional). It was distributed via Qualtrics survey software. The content validity of the survey was assessed through a mapping of survey items. See Table 1 for a summative mapping of the data sources in relation to the study's research questions. In addition, the survey underwent expert review. The content validity of the survey was tested (as presented in Table 1) and members of the dissertation committee examined the survey instrument and their feedback was used to modify it. The survey was then pilot tested to examine its rigor and appropriateness. Trustees at a New Jersey college were contacted through the College president to participate in the pilot study.



The survey was administered online via Qualtrics survey software. It incorporated several best practices in Web survey design and administration paying special attention to survey flow, appearance, length, and accessibility (Fink, 2008; Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001). The identities of survey participants were largely anonymous. Participants were only asked to self-identify at the conclusion of the survey if they elected to participate in Phase II of the study. Strategies to increase the response rate to the survey included email reminders noting the value of their participation and outreach to the board professionals at the respective institutions to promote the visibility of the survey.

The survey included multiple five-point scale items including: the importance of fiduciary responsibilities and professional competencies; the frequency of the participant's use of his professional competencies; the participant's level of agreement with deriving satisfaction from their trusteeship experience; and the participant's level of agreement with their preparedness to carry out their fiduciary responsibilities. The five-point importance scale choices included "extremely important", "very important", "moderately important", "slightly important", and "not at all important." The five-point frequency scale choices included "routinely", "often", "sometimes", "rarely" and "never." The five-point agreement scale choices included "strongly agree", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree." (Fink, 2013; Vagias, 2006). In addition, closed-ended questions focused on collecting information on participant demographics including gender, age, education level, occupation, length of board service, and institutional and other resources.

Finally, although the survey contained a majority of closed-ended questions that yielded quantitative data, including general demographic information, four open-ended

qualitative-oriented questions were also included in the survey. These open-ended items were designed to ensure that participants were not impeded in their answers and were provided the opportunity to share any additional background or contextual information they deemed relevant.

**Phase II: Qualitative interview protocols.** The goal of the qualitative phase of this study was to explore and further interpret the quantitative results obtained from the survey. To enhance the depth of qualitative analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Mindful of the potentiality for the Hawthorne Effect, a phenomenon in which research participants may alter their behavior as a result of participating in research, to confound the data from Phase I, the interviews were structured to allow for follow-up and further exploration of the relationships and themes that emerged from the survey (Smith & Coombs, 2003) and to also provide opportunities for member checking to ensure the accuracy of participant statements. Using a semi-structured format, the interviews fostered a conversational, flexible, and dynamic approach to data collection (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) allowing (1) exploration of the detail and nuance of how participants experienced their trusteeship, (2) facilitation of real-time responsiveness to emergent themes, and (3) a handful of pointed questions which culled from participants any relevant experiences on their Board (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Reischauer, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2013).

The interviews included a series of main, follow-up, and confirmatory questions. The majority of the main questions were broad and focused on asking participants to describe the importance of certain fiduciary duties with attention given to how they applied their professional competencies to make sense of the duties. Several participant

responses warranted follow-up questions and, through their responses, I was able to provide greater context to participants and further explore and capture greater detail regarding the relationship between the importance of certain fiduciary duties, professional competencies, utility of those competencies, and the satisfaction of the trustee experience.

Confirmatory questions were also posed to participants and assisted in establishing the accuracy and validity of responses. Like member checking, with confirmatory questions the validity procedure shifted from the researcher to the participant. As such, I was able to informally test out interpretations of the survey data via the interview dialogue (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Each interview was approximately 45 minutes in length, took place either via phone or in a quiet setting selected by the participant, and was audio recorded and later transcribed by a third party.

### **Data Analysis**

This study also relied on Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2009) methodological standards regarding mixed methods sequencing and analyses, particularly noting, "although the two sets of analyses are independent, each provides an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. These understandings are linked, combined, or integrated into meta-inferences" (2009, p. 266). Meta-inferences are unique to mixed methods research. In this study, meta-inferences were largely achieved by analyzing data that was collected through exploratory and confirmatory questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009).

**Phase I: Quantitative strand analysis.** Upon receipt of the participant responses to the survey, the survey was closed in Qualtrics and a final report of the raw data was produced. It was then ordinally coded and entered into statistical software (SPSS). Upon completion of data checking, descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize the data. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation (rho) was used to measure the degree of association between variables (importance, agreement, and frequency) (Zar, 2005). Rho is used to conduct a correlation analysis when the variables are measured on a scale that is at least ordinal (Zar, 2005). In this study, rho was used to assist in determining if a statistically significant relationship existed between participant responses to survey questions assessing the importance of particular fiduciary duties and the frequency with which trustees employed their professional competencies to fulfill those duties. Rho was also used to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between how the trustees measured the importance of their contributions to the board and how frequently they used their professional competencies in fulfillment of their fiduciary responsibilities. The following formula, as furnished by Zar (2005), was used to calculate the Spearman Rank Order Correlation where:  $\rho$ = Spearman rank correlation,  $d_i$ = the difference between the ranks of corresponding values X and Y, and  $n$ = number of values in each data set:

$$\rho = 1 - \frac{6 \sum d_i^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

**Intermediate phase: Connecting data.** In mixed methods research, the researcher can choose to merge his data sets, embed his data at the design level, or connect his data from the analysis phase to the collection phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As described earlier, this study employed sequential timing, moved from the quantitative phase to the qualitative phase, and placed greater emphasis on the qualitative

data. In light of this design, the two data sets were connected. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) note:

The second, qualitative, phase builds on the first, quantitative, phase, and the two phases are connected in the intermediate stage in the study. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem. The qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth. (2011, p.104)

In accord with the rationale provided by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the analysis of the quantitative data from the survey in Phase I of this study both pointed to the need for qualitative data and was used to shape the qualitative instrument (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As a result, the qualitative interviews provided for greater exploration and understanding of participants' sensemaking processes.

**Phase II: Qualitative strand analysis.** Again being mindful of the literature regarding the Hawthorne Effect (Smith & Coombs, 2003) in social science research and the demands upon mixed methods researchers to demonstrate rigor in their work, the trustworthiness of the qualitative data in this study was promoted via four key tools. First, confirmability was advanced through the use of semi-structured interviewing and constant self-assessment of my researcher role as a follower, not a leader in the dialogues (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Second, the dependability of the data was strengthened through third party transcription of the audio recordings of the interviews and an audit trail of the qualitative

methods. The transcripts underwent significant content analysis. Specifically, the transcript data was cleaned and, through open coding and axial coding, each transcript was carefully analyzed. Text segments were identified via coding. Codes were assigned to attribute meaning to the concepts in the text segments. A list of the codes was then assembled to include key concepts and categories therein.

Specifically, open coding and axial coding were used to analyze the qualitative data. Open coding and axial coding, which include labeling concepts as well as defining and forming categories based on their characteristics, was used (Saldaña, 2009). Through open coding, a system of color coding was employed to highlight the key concepts in the transcripts. Then, through axial coding, relationships among the key concepts were identified. These relationships formed categories and their colorful representation assisted in revealing patterns and themes in the transcripts. The transcripts were reviewed a third time and the credibility of the concepts, categories, and relationships were determined through peer debriefing, to accurately represent the participant responses (Saldaña, 2009). Further consideration of the relationships between the concepts, categories, and relationships then occurred and a series of themes were established.

### **Legitimation**

At the heart of mixed methods research design is the convergence of multiple sources of information and methods as a means to further the legitimacy of a study's data interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Tashakkori and Teddlie asserted that, "Mixed methods data analyses offers a more comprehensive means of legitimating findings than do either qualitative or quantitative data analyses alone by allowing analysts to assess information from both data types" (2003, p. 355). Through this convergence, the

researcher is better able to identify common themes in the research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition, as a strategy for enhancing validity and reliability in qualitative research, mixing methods can help control bias (Mathison, 1988).

**Validity and generalizability.** In order to foster this study's external validity and generalizability to the State's other appointed college trustees, it was imperative that the quantitative phase of the study sufficiently represented the limited population of public college trustees in the State of New Jersey. To this end, probabilistic random sampling was used and a 95% confidence level was sought to further the study's credibility (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). For reasons noted earlier, the response rate to the survey did not achieve the desired confidence level. However, the data was still connected to and used to shape Phase II. Findings that demonstrated majority agreement and correlational significance were noted and, as appropriate, woven into the semi-structured interviews to be further explored.

The survey was pilot tested and to confidently use the results of the survey, it was imperative that measurement validity, ensuring that which is being measured persuasively demonstrates what it is supposed to have measured (Adcock, 2001), was at the forefront of the survey's design and analysis. For example, and as noted earlier, the Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used to describe the degree of relationship between variables on the survey, and the content validity of the survey instrument was assessed through a mapping of survey items.

**Transferability and credibility.** In this study's qualitative phase, criterion and snowball sampling were employed to further identify and qualify participants and to foster the study's transferability. To these ends, the semi-structured interviews were

designed to yield rich, thick description while still ensuring that within the sample there was opportunity for variances in perspective (Patton, 2002), the detailed accounts therein of the participants helped create creditable reports that may be generalized to others (Stringer, 2014). Confirmatory questions were used to ensure accuracy of responses and member checking occurred both during and after the interviews, ensuring that the authenticity, credibility, and accuracy of participants' contributions were tested.

In this study, the quantitative and qualitative phases each yielded their own findings; however, together the insight gleaned from connecting the phases revealed shared themes among the findings (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

**The researcher's role.** The researcher's identity shapes her inquiry and, as such, requires thoughtful consideration and, in the case of mixed methods research, may reveal the operation of multiple researcher identities and paradigms (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). As described earlier, this study dwelled within the post-positivist and social constructivist paradigms. Just as its worldviews were two-pronged, so too was the researcher's identity. As a higher education professional with 15+ years of experience working in administrative functions including enrollment, instruction, human resources, executive affairs, public relations, and, most importantly, board services and governance, I developed survey and interview questions to specifically address the research questions. The development of the questions, however, was greatly informed by my direct experience with and exposure to the sensitivities, tensions, and political dynamics often at play in higher education governance. While this experience informed the study, it is important to also note its potentiality to bring bias into the study.



As a board professional, I acknowledge my inherent passion for governance and my responsibility to ensure that trustees are well-informed and are governing effectively. As a result, I was challenged to not misinterpret data that may have described deficits in my own intimate network of board professionals. My attempt to reduce researcher bias was effectuated by remaining true to what the quantitative and qualitative data revealed. While this is more difficult when working with subjective qualitative data, I did so by routinely member checking and posing confirmatory questions to ensure credibility. In addition, I ensured the confidentiality of all research participants.

The survey in Phase I was distributed in September 2017. The timing was selected to maximize awareness of and access to the study by prospective participants. It was announced at the preceding meeting of the NJASCU and distributed immediately thereafter. In addition, reminders for completion were distributed in accord with the NJASCU activity calendar so as to promote a cross-pollination of the study's visibility but to also manage the possible pressure on prospective participants. In Phase II, the majority of the interview questions were pilot tested to ensure that they did not reflect researcher bias or expectation.

Most of the interviews took place in the participants' preferred settings and those settings were only shared with me and the participant to ensure participant privacy. Each participant in Phase II was assigned a participant name. The naming system reflects chronological alphabetization. For example, the first participant is Trustee A, the second participant is Trustee B and so on. In no case was the participant referred to by any derivation of his first or last name. In addition, in no case was the participant's institution identified.

All data was maintained on a secure server and access to the information was passcode protected. Hard copy transcripts and audio files were immediately coded to reflect the naming mechanism. To ensure that responses to interview questions were accurately captured, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a third party. Notes were also taken during each interview. Following the conclusion of the interviews, all Phase II participants were sent a confirmatory email and when necessary, second interviews were conducted to permit member checking and ensure accuracy.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations of working with human subjects are well-defined. To this end, approval for the study was sought and received by the Institutional Review Board of Rowan University and endorsement was sought and received by the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities. In addition, I completed through Rowan University the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which enables the University, in part, to maintain its Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) with the Office of Human Research Protection in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

**Deferential vulnerability.** When working with human subjects, however, the researcher must be cognizant of the participants' vulnerabilities. The Hawthorne Effect was mentioned earlier as a potential threat to this study's trustworthiness. Like the Hawthorne Effect, Seiber and Tolich (2013) refer to "deferential vulnerability" (p. 15) as one of six participant vulnerabilities a researcher should heed. Deferential vulnerability emerges when a participant appears "too eager to please" or too timid to express unwillingness to participate (Seiber & Tolich, 2013, p. 15). Because this study placed

considerable value on the influential endorsement of it by the NJASCU and the support of board professionals to rally participants, I took substantive steps to ensure that the consent process was free of any perceived social pressures. To this end, consent was sought during both phases of the study (see Appendix B: Phase I Consent to Take Part in a Research Study and Appendix C: Phase II Consent to Take Part in a Research Study with Addendum). In addition, consent for audio recordings was also sought from Phase II participants (see Appendix C: Phase II Consent to Take Part in a Research Study with Addendum).

**Informed consent.** Participants were reminded of the purpose and procedures of each phase of the study, that their engagement in the study was voluntary, that they could discontinue their participation at any time without consequence, and that their privacy would be maintained regardless (Seiber & Tolich, 2013). Participants were also invited to receive a copy of the study results. Finally, the details of the study are explained in depth so as to allow readers the opportunity to judge the ethical quality of this study for themselves.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between how largely non-educational professionals in New Jersey experience their fiduciary responsibilities, largely understood as their legal duty to act solely in the institution's interests (Downes & Goodman, 2014), as trustees of the state's public colleges and universities and the manner in which their professional orientations influence their oversight. A combination of post-positivist and social constructivist researcher assumptions, derived from the complexity of the trustee experience, shaped a strategy of inquiry that considered relative objectivity and subjectivity as critical generative components in the exploration of this experience (Boote & Beil, 2005; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). To better understand the trustee experience, a two-phased design was created; the first phase collected quantitative data via a survey instrument. The data were analyzed and then connected to Phase II which featured semi-structured interviews aimed at expanding and exploring the quantitative survey findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

This chapter communicates the findings from data analysis in relation to the research questions and the two phases, it also describes some changes to the proposed methodology in each phase. The first part of this chapter presents findings derived from analyses of the quantitative survey responses collected in Phase I. The second part of this chapter describes how that analyses shaped Phase II. The third part of this chapter then presents themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected from interview participants. It concludes with a summary of findings.

## **Phase I: Quantitative Overview**

Phase I of this study collected survey data that was focused on revealing the predictive power of multiple variables on trustee satisfaction and significant correlations among variables.

**Response rate.** The survey response rate was significantly lower than desired. The total number of responses was 10. A 95% confidence level would have been achieved by a total of 81 responses. The primary reason for the low participation rate was the discovery that a formal digest of all New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities (NJASCU) trustee email addresses was not, after all, a resource that had ever been created let alone maintained by NJASCU. As a result, it was not possible for the survey to be distributed directly to trustees by the Executive Director of NJASCU and, consequently, the methodology of the survey distribution changed at multiple steps.

**Changes to quantitative methodology.** The first step in distributing the survey included, as planned in mid- September, the acquisition of a letter of support from NJASCU. The second step, upon learning that the digest of trustee emails was not an available resource, was a more robust than originally planned outreach in late September to the Board professionals at the NJASCU-member institutions. That outreach included personalized email correspondence and telephone inquiries from me to the professionals which included the NJASCU letter of support and a request that they share the survey link with their respective trustees. Noting a lack of survey responses in the first two weeks of correspondence, the third step was an announcement of the study to NJASCU's membership of college and university presidents which was made at its regular meeting in October. The fourth step included a series of follow-up emails, phone inquiries, and,

when possible, face to face discussions with trustees, Board professionals, and presidents across the state to encourage participation through to mid-November. Despite these changes to the methodology, and the highly iterative approach to generating participation, the desired response rate and confidence level were not attained.

In light of the low participation rate, I pivoted in order to foster the study's generalizability. To these ends, the demographics reported by the 10 respondents were compared against a 2015 national survey of trustee characteristics conducted by the Association of Governing Boards (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). Of the demographic items surveyed for which national data were available, the demographics of this study's respondents were consistent with the national demographics of public college/university trustees in the areas of sex, age, and professional training/career. The consistency of the data, however, were limited in the areas of ethnicity, education level, employment status, and length of service. Details of that comparison are displayed in detail in Table 2.

**Survey respondents' demographic data.** Respondents were asked to complete seven demographic-related items on the 56-point survey. Of the 10 respondents, 60% were male and 40% were female compared to 67.7% male and 32.3% female nationally (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). Half of the participants were between 50-69 years old, 10% were between 30-49 years old, and 40% were 70 years or older. Nationally, these age demographics are 66.2%, 15%, and 14.2% respectively (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). Further, 100% of respondents reported being of White, non-Hispanic ethnicity compared to 74.9% nationally (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). Twenty percent of respondents reported service as a trustee of

7-9 years, 40% reported 4-6 years, and 40% reported 1-3 years. Forty percent of respondents reported their highest level of degree attainment as bachelor's degree, 30% earned a master's degree, and 30% earned a doctorate or terminal degree. National data regarding length of service and degree attainment was not available.

With respect to employment status, 40% of survey respondents were employed for wages, 30% were retired, and 30% denoted "other". Nationally, these percentages are 72.8%, 18.7%, and 8.5% respectively (Association of Governing Boards, 2016). In addition, 60% of respondents reported that their primary professional training/experience was in business, with 20% reporting it was in professional services and 20% in education. Nationally, 39.6% of trustees report business as their primary professional training/experience, 21.8% report professional services, 10% report education, 18.7% report being retired, and 9.9% report other.

While "population validity is a threat in virtually all educational studies because (a) all members of the target population rarely are available for selection in a study, and (b) random samples are difficult to obtain due to practical considerations such as time, money, resources, and logistics" (Onwuegbuzie, 2000, p. 31) a comparison of the respondent demographic data with the national survey data reveals that in the areas of sex, age, and professional training the Phase I participants are a representative sample and findings therefore from Phase I are consistent with the broader population of publically appointed trustees (see Table 2). However, per Onwuegbuzie's (2000) recommendation for strengthening generalizability, in Chapter 5 I recommend additional studies and replications.

Table 2

*Phase I Respondent Demographic Data in Relation to National Trustee Demographic Data*

Demographic Item	Respondent Survey Data	National Survey Data
Gender	60% Male	67.7% Male
	40% Female	32.3% Female
Age	10% 31-49 years old	15% 30-49 years old
	50% 50-69 years old	66.2% 50-69 years old
	40% 70 years old+	14.2% 70 years old+
Ethnicity	100% White non-Hispanic	74.9% White non-Hispanic
Employment Status	40% Employed for wages	72.8% Employed for wages
	30% Retired	18.7% Retired
	30% Other	8.5% Other
Professional	60% Business	39.6% Business
	20% Professional Services	21.8% Professional Services
Training/Career	20% Education	10% Education
	0% Other	9.9% Other

*Note:* Source of national demographic data is Association of Governing Boards (2016).



## **Phase I: Survey Findings**

The data collected in the survey sought, primarily, to reveal the predictive power of multiple variables on trustee satisfaction, correlational significance among those variables and, in so doing, address, in part, three of the study's four research questions:

1. To what extent do trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties?
2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles?
3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?

This phase collected data using a 56-item survey (see Appendix A: Survey of Trusteeship and the Professional). The survey featured seven items focused on demographic data (as described earlier) and two items focused on collecting data regarding the overall complexity of fiduciary responsibilities. The survey then went on to collect data on each of the five key fiduciary responsibilities (oversight of capital assets, oversight of financial assets, oversight of human resources, oversight of institutional reputation, and oversight of institutional mission) by using Likert scales of frequency, agreement, and importance. The survey results were ordinally coded and entered into SPSS. Bivariate correlation tables were generated and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation ( $\rho$ ) was used to capture the significance among variables.

**The nature of the trustee experience.** As noted earlier, this study’s conceptual framework advanced that the trustee experience is complex. Two of the survey items used agreement scales to assess respondents’ overarching assessments of their fiduciary duties as “complex” and “challenging.” 90% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their fiduciary responsibilities are complex and 80% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their fiduciary responsibilities are challenging (see Table 3). These findings supported the conceptual framework for this study premised on complexity in the trustee’s role and the application of sensemaking theory as a vehicle by which these individuals navigate and make sense of their complex environments and roles (Kezar, 2013).

Table 3

*Respondents’ Assessments of their Fiduciary Responsibilities as Complex and Challenging*

	Agreement (strongly agree/ agree)
	<i>n=10</i>
My fiduciary responsibilities are complex.	90% (9)
My fiduciary responsibilities are challenging.	80% (8)

**Alignment of professional orientation with fiduciary duties.** The first research question asked to what extent trustees’ professional orientations align with their fiduciary responsibilities. To examine the survey data in relation to this question, non-parametric tests using rho were first performed to determine if correlations existed between trustee preparedness to perform a duty and the level of importance the trustee ascribed to the duty. Among the five duties, the correlation between importance and preparedness was determined at the .05 level (2-tailed) for the duties of oversight of financial assets and advancing the mission of the institution (see Table 4), but it was not noted for the other three duties.

Table 4

*Correlational Relationship Between Importance of Fiduciary Duty and Self-reported Degree of Professional Preparedness to Steward the Duty*

Fiduciary Duty	Spearman’s Correlation Importance vs. Professional Preparedness
Oversight of Capital Assets	.587
Oversight of Financial Assets	.730*
Oversight of Human Resources	.284
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	.577
Advancement of Institutional Mission	.665*

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

While correlational significance was established for only two responsibilities, for all five responsibilities assessed the majority of respondents reported that they “strongly agreed or agreed” that their professional competencies prepared them to steward their fiduciary responsibilities yielding a 70% mean across all five responsibilities (see Table 5).

Establishing this level of agreement that professional orientations are aligned to trustee stewardship reinforced the applicability of the second research question, “How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles?” and provided assistive context for further exploration of this research question in Phase II.

Table 5

*Respondents’ Self-reported Degree of Professional Preparedness for each Fiduciary Duty*

	Professional Preparedness
Fiduciary Duty	(strongly agree/agree) <i>n</i> =10
Oversight of Capital Assets	60%
Oversight of Financial Assets	60%
Oversight of Human Resources	80%
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	90%
Advancement of Mission	60%
	70% (Mean)

The fact that seven of 10 respondents, on average, strongly agreed/agreed that they were professionally prepared for stewardship of their fiduciary duties provided a helpful context through which assessment of much of the other survey data was considered through the theoretical lens of professional authority and the consequential consideration of trustees as professionals being granted authority because of their expertise (Friedson, 1994). Furthering this theoretical premise, 90% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their professional competencies are well known to their fellow trustees, yet 70% noted their fellow trustees only sometimes/rarely deferred to them on fiduciary matters related to their professional competencies. While all respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their professional competencies are well-known to their institution's administration, similarly 70% reported that their administration only sometimes/rarely employed their professional competencies.

As a result of these analyses, I affirmed the study's conceptual framework which advances the trustee experience as a complex phenomenon. In addition, for the duties of oversight of financial assets and advancing the institutional mission, a positive correlation was found between the levels of importance trustees ascribed to these duties and their own levels of professional preparedness. Finally, trustees asserted that, while their professional competencies are well-known to their fellow trustees and institutional administration, they also reported that their competencies weren't sufficiently leveraged by their trustee peers or institution's administration.

**Alignment of preparedness for stewardship of duty and satisfaction.** The third research question asked, “What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?” Analysis began with correlation tables of responses relevant to the level of importance of a duty, the trustees’ professional preparedness to steward each duty, and the level of trustee satisfaction with each duty.

First, I sought to determine if there was a positive correlation between the level of importance participants placed on a fiduciary duty and their level of satisfaction in stewarding that duty. A positive correlation was established for two of the five duties. The correlation between importance of a duty and trustee satisfaction with the duty was noted at the .05 level (2-tailed) for oversight of institutional reputation and advancement of institutional mission but it was not noted for the other three duties (Table 6).

Table 6

*Correlational Relationship between Importance of a Duty and Satisfaction in Stewardship of the Duty*

Fiduciary Duty	Spearman's Correlation Importance vs. Satisfaction
Oversight of Capital Assets	.591
Oversight of Financial Assets	.397
Oversight of Human Resources	.400
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	.638*
Advancement of Institutional Mission	.628*

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

Second, I moved to determine if there was a positive correlation between the level of satisfaction participants reported experiencing when stewarding a fiduciary responsibility and the participants' perceived professional preparedness to steward that duty. A positive correlation was established for three of the five responsibilities. The correlation between preparedness and satisfaction was determined at the .05 level (2-tailed) for oversight of capital assets, oversight of human resources, and oversight of institutional reputation (see Table 7). Pursuant to this finding, when assessing satisfaction, the majority of respondents reported that they "strongly agreed or agreed"

that stewarding their fiduciary responsibilities was satisfying yielding an 88% mean across all five responsibilities (see Table 8).

Table 7

*Correlational Relationship between Satisfaction in Stewardship of a Duty and Self-reported Degree of Professional Preparedness to Steward the Duty*

Fiduciary Duty	Spearman's Correlation Professional Preparedness vs. Satisfaction
Oversight of Capital Assets	.767*
Oversight of Financial Assets	.478
Oversight of Human Resources	.639*
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	.721*
Advancement of Institutional Mission	.428

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level.



Table 8

*Satisfaction in Performing Fiduciary Duty*

	Satisfaction in performing the duty (strongly agree/agree)
Fiduciary Duty	<i>n</i> =10
Oversight of Capital Assets	90%
Oversight of Financial Assets	90%
Oversight of Human Resources	60%
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	100%
Advancement of Mission	100%
	88% (Mean)

In light of these findings, I sought to determine if a positive correlation also existed between participants' levels of satisfaction with a responsibility and the frequency of their engagement with that responsibility. This analysis did not suggest a consistently positive association. The observed data indicated that a perceived high level of satisfaction with a fiduciary responsibility did not equate consistently to a high frequency of engagement with that responsibility. Similarly, the lower the satisfaction level with a fiduciary responsibility did not equate consistently to less frequent engagement of that

responsibility. This lack of positive association was present in the assessment of respondent's oversight of capital assets, oversight of financial assets, and oversight of human resources. In contrast, however, a positive association between satisfaction and frequency of oversight was found when assessing the participants' oversight of institutional reputation and advancement of mission (see Table 9). Further examination of the broader reaching nature of these latter duties when compared to oversight of capital, financial and human resources, occurred in Phase II. Finally, 90% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that, regardless of frequency or importance of a duty, the overall experiences they have had applying their professional competencies to their work as trustees have been satisfying and they would welcome additional opportunities to do so.

Table 9

*Correlational Relationship Between Satisfaction in Stewardship of a Duty and Frequency of Engagement with the Duty*

Fiduciary Duty	Spearman's Correlation Frequency vs. Satisfaction
Oversight of Capital Assets	.256
Oversight of Financial Assets	.282
Oversight of Human Resources	.387
Oversight of Institutional Reputation	.699*
Advancement of Institutional Mission	.633*

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

### **Intermediate Phase**

Ivankova, Creswell & Stick (2006) advise that, “In the mixed-methods sequential designs, the quantitative and qualitative phases are connected (Hanson et al. 2005) in the intermediate stage when the results of the data analysis in the first phase of the study inform or guide the data collection in the second phase” (p. 11). The results of the data analysis from this study yielded five findings, all of which were used to either inform or guide the interview protocols in Phase II. The five findings from Phase I that informed and guided Phase II include:

**Finding 1: Complexity and challenge.** The trustee experience is a complex phenomenon and trustees largely perceive their responsibilities to be challenging. To this end, 90% of participants strongly agreed/agreed that their responsibilities are complex and 80% of participants strongly agreed/agreed that they are challenging (see Table 3). This finding affirmed the applicability of the study's conceptual framework and Phase II interview protocol.

**Finding 2: Professional preparation.** Trustees' professional orientations help prepare them for stewardship of their fiduciary responsibilities. This finding was supported by a 70% mean across all five duties in which participants strongly agreed/agreed that their professional orientations prepared them to steward their duties (see Table 5). In addition, there was a correlational significance between professional preparedness for and satisfaction in stewardship of duties of oversight of capital assets, human resources, and institutional reputation (see Table 7). This finding also affirmed this study's conceptual framework and prompted, when appropriate, follow up questions in Phase II that focused specifically on participant experiences with these three duties.

**Finding 3: Trustee preference for alignment.** Trustees prefer engaging in duties that align to their professional orientation and trustees seek opportunities to apply their professional competencies. To these ends, 90% of participants strongly agreed/agreed that they prefer engaging in duties aligned to their professional orientations and 80% strongly agreed/agreed that they seek opportunities to apply their professional competencies to their trusteeship. This finding prompted me to refine the Phase II interview content to explore, in detail, specific examples of trustees applying their professional competencies and how they may have sought opportunities to do so.

**Finding 4: Trustees are underleveraged.** While trustees' professional competencies are known to their trustee peers and institutional administration, they are reportedly not sufficiently leveraged. 90% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their professional competencies are well known to their fellow trustees yet 70% noted their fellow trustees only sometimes/rarely defer to them on fiduciary matters related to their professional competencies. Further, while all respondents strongly agreed/agreed that their professional competencies are well-known to their institution's administration, 70% again reported that their administration only sometimes/rarely utilizes their professional competencies. This disconnect was also supported by the fact that there was no correlational significance found among preparedness for duty and frequency of engagement with a duty. This finding prompted me to reframe Phase II interview content to further explore this apparent disconnect between strong awareness of professional competencies and the infrequent deference/use of the competencies by peers/administrators.

**Finding 5: Importance of a duty  $\neq$  satisfaction, preparedness.** The ascribed importance of a duty did not correlate consistently to the level of trustee satisfaction in stewarding the duty or the level of trustee preparedness for the duty. To these ends, correlational significance was found among importance and satisfaction only for the duties of overseeing institutional reputation and advancing institutional mission (see Table 6); and correlational significance was found among importance and preparedness only for the duties of overseeing financial assets and advancing institutional mission (see Table 4). In addition, the observed data revealed that correlational significance was found among frequency and satisfaction only for the oversight of institutional reputation and

advancing institutional mission (see Table 9). However, when assessing satisfaction, the majority of respondents reported that they “strongly agreed or agreed” that stewarding their fiduciary responsibilities was satisfying yielding an 88% mean across all five responsibilities (see Table 8). As a result of these data points, Phase II interviews were reframed to avoid main questions that were focused on the importance of duties.

### **Phase II: Qualitative Overview**

Phase II collected qualitative interview data with the purpose of exploring and expanding the five findings from Phase I. As such, the findings from Phase I were connected to and used to shape the content and protocol for the semi-structured interviews in Phase II. Phase II was given priority in the study and, as such, the use of semi-structured interviewing as a data collection tool and sensemaking as a theoretical and practical foundation in this phase were essential to further explain the phenomenon of how trustees make sense of their fiduciary responsibilities. Through iterative coding, a host of concepts and subcategories were revealed, and from that analysis were born key themes and meta-inferences.

**Participation rate, sample criteria, and participant demographic data.** Phase II participants were largely a subset of the Phase I survey respondents, and had to have indicated on their surveys or through dialogue with the researcher that they were willing to participate in an interview, and that they had served on their current New Jersey State college/university board for a minimum of one year. In light of the low response rate in Phase I of this study, the researcher additionally relied on snowball sampling to increase participation in Phase II (O’Meara et al., 2014; Reischauer, 2015). Doing so yielded the

researcher participation by 12 trustees from six of the nine state colleges and universities across the state of New Jersey (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Phase II Participant Characteristics*

Participant	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Professional Training
Trustee A	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee B	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Other
Trustee C	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee D	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Education
Trustee E	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee F	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee G	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee H	Female	Hispanic	Business/Professional Service
Trustee I	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Retired
Trustee J	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Other
Trustee K	Male	Not Available	Business/Professional Service
Trustee L	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Retired

Demographic data collected from Phase II participants included sex, race/ethnicity, and area of employment/professional training. First, of the 12 Phase II participants, eight (67%) were male and four (33%) were female. This breakdown is reflective of the national composition of public trustees in which 67% identify as male and 33% identify as female (Association of Governing Boards, 2016; see Table 2). Second, of the 12 participants, 11 disclosed their race and ethnicity. As such, 10 identified as White/Non-Hispanic (83%), one identified as Hispanic (8%), and one did not disclose. The national composition of public trustees by race and ethnicity is 75% White/Non-Hispanic, 5.8% Hispanic, and 13.6% Black/African American/Non-Hispanic (Association of Governing Boards, 2016; see Table 2). Third, of the 12 participants, seven reported that their area of employment was business/professional service (59%), one reported it was education (8%), two reported being retired (17%), and two reported other (17%). The national composition of public trustees by area of employment is 61% business/professional service, 10% education, 18% retired, and 9.9% other.

Reflecting upon the representativeness of the Phase II participants in the context of the national composition of public trustees and, more importantly, upon arriving at the determination that Phase II participants were sampled until a thematic constancy in participant responses emerged (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009), I thusly determined that data saturation was achieved via 12 participants.

**Changes to qualitative methodology.** As a result of the Phase I findings, in the intermediate stage the content of the interview questions was refined or reframed. These changes were done primarily to focus Phase II less on the importance of fiduciary duties, and instead to more pointedly explore perceived relationships between professional



preparedness for a duty and satisfaction in stewardship of said duty, and to gain insight into the availability or lack thereof of opportunities to foster trustee satisfaction through new opportunities or strategies. I maintained, as anticipated, a semi-structured interview format that featured main, follow-up, and confirmatory questions as well as a reliance on member checking.

**Qualitative methods and analysis.** Throughout the interviews, which were audio recorded and later transcribed by a third party, I took field notes that served primarily as mechanisms through which to quickly track emergent themes and redirect or revisit questions and responses in a manner that leveraged the semi-structure format. Interviews ranged in length from 21 to 54 minutes, the average length of an interview was 45 minutes. Interviews took place in semi-private locations and over the phone, modes chosen by the participant.

Through iterative coding, data gleaned from the interviews were used to generate themes (Saldaña, 2009). Specifically, the transcripts were cleaned and, through open coding and axial coding, concepts and relationships among concepts were identified which yielded categories and then themes (Saldaña, 2009).

Theme generation from iterative coding and analysis of interview data was used to help address three of the study's four research questions, namely:

RQ 2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary role?

RQ 3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?

RQ 4. What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes?

The interview transcripts were initially coded using open coding. Several concepts emerged through this process which focused on culling together broad concepts that represented the participants' perspectives of their trusteeship as some derivation of a professional activity through which they exercise authority (Scott, 2008). Among the most resonant overarching concepts that were revealed through this iteration were: deference and reference, expertise, satisfaction, benefit, commitment, and service (see Figure 3). After highlighting text blocks that were representative of these six concepts, I then analyzed those text blocks and identified, therein, participant sentiments that gave meaning to or demonstrated an interpretation of their roles and or responsibilities as trustees (Flick & Gibbs, 2007).

Axial coding was then used to reveal relationships and/or conditions expressed by the participants within those text blocks. To do this, the text blocks were analyzed again by identifying in them any norms, values, feelings and reactions that focused, first, on how participants described their relationships with one another, with their fiduciary responsibilities, and with their institutional administration, and second, on any constraints, strategies or conditions participants identified as part of their experiences (Gibbs, 2007). This stage of axial coding led to the distillation of the six concepts into 15 categories and ultimately four dominant themes: multiple orientations, trust, mutual benefit, and opportunities (see Figure 3).

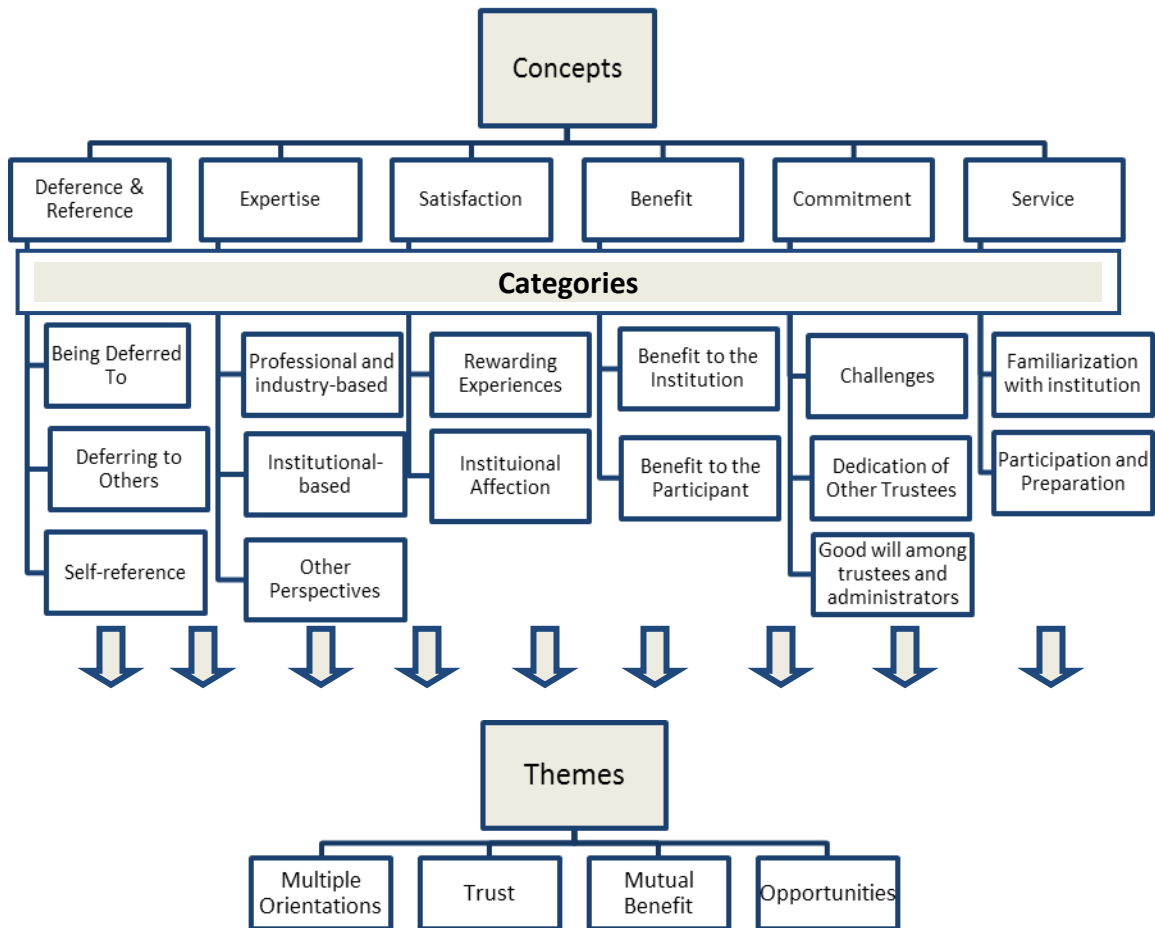


Figure 3. Conceptual, Categorical, and Thematic Code Map of Phase II Data

### Phase II: Interview Findings

Figure 3 depicts the concepts, categories, and key themes that emerged after iterative analysis and axial coding of the 12 interview transcripts. These key themes of multiple orientations, trust, mutual benefit, and opportunities, are unpacked briefly in the paragraphs that follow and serve, in large part, as the foundation for this study’s meta-inferences which are detailed later.

First, while trustees placed notable value on the diversity of professional orientations of their fellow trustees, they also placed similar value on the orientations of their fellow trustees as institutional historians, alumni, regional experts, and/or members of traditionally underrepresented populations. All participants discussed their experiences applying their own expertise (reference) to their trusteeship and yet only a few participants shared that they are deferred to by their peers for their expertise. In contrast, however, all participants discussed routinely deferring to others for their expertise. These experiences with reference and deference are important in that many of the examples provided demonstrate how the participants made sense of their fiduciary responsibilities and that these sensemaking activities largely sprung from a reliance on professional/industry-based expertise, institutional-based expertise, or other perspectives/orientations upon which multiple participants ascribed value.

Second, trust among trustees, demonstrated through various applications of deference, as well as with institutional administration, was both explicitly and implicitly at the forefront of trustees' capacity to derive satisfaction from their service. Descriptions of trust were echoed in trustees' accounts of rewarding experiences and sentiments connoting affection for the institution.

Third, while trustees indeed rely on their professional expertise and the expertise of their fellow trustees to navigate decisions, they also rely on their trusteeship to navigate or enhance their roles as professionals, community members, and as lifelong learners. Mutually beneficial experiences that were shared by participants were largely gleaned from their own application of their professional expertise to their fiduciary

responsibilities but examples also routinely pointed to the returns of trusteeship to the participants' personal or professional lives.

Fourth, trustees are overwhelmingly keen to contribute to their boards in formal and informal ways. Commitment to the institution and to service more broadly, were revealed as solid foundational elements across participant experiences. However, obstacles to commitment were also revealed and generally referred to a perceived lack of commitment from trustee's peers and pointed to lack of preparedness and/or availability to serve.

**Trustee orientation as a continuum, not a compendium.** Trustees' sensemaking processes revolve in large part around their identities as professionals. However, trustee orientation, as designed in this study to focus on professional orientation, while significant, is not a fixed lens through which trustees view or navigate their work. While the largely fixed professional orientations of trustees indeed resonated as central elements in their sensemaking so too did their orientations as alumni, historians, or members of traditionally underrepresented populations. This continuum of orientations lends insight into the trustees' sensemaking processes as layered and nuanced, and as such, aligned with how, in Phase I, they strongly agreed/agreed that their trusteeship was "complex" and "challenging." To this end, the diversity of trustee orientations is best captured as a continuum in which trustees rely largely and simultaneously on professional, institutionally-rooted, and other orientations to make sense of their responsibilities and arrive at decisions.

*Professional orientation.* Many participants placed explicit value on the competencies of individuals whose professional backgrounds were rooted in the financial, capital, or legal industries, in particular, when navigating their fiduciary responsibilities of capital and financial oversight. For example, Trustee C, shared, "...I say all of this about the soft skills not to take away from the attorneys, real estate, and finance people on the board, I defer to them, many of us do particularly when we are facing budget shortfalls or litigation." Such deference to these business professionals was echoed throughout the participant interviews and Trustee D, a retired educator, commented similarly on the professional composition of his board, and the significant assistance that comes from trustees with professional knowledge of capital management:

...at the present time we don't have any engineers...They make a real contribution. They help ground us in the reality of some of the things. I think that the two that I'm thinking of, two trustees that we've had have been owners and engineers themselves, of engineering firms. There's a certain sense of, I guess you'd say security or comfort that the rest of the board had, knowing that they reviewed things, they were an extra set of eyes, looking out for the best interest of Institution X on any of the contracts, or any of the specifications, safety issues, you know. That's the way we should do that.

Here the participant noted that technical professions, such as engineering, can provide piece of mind to other board members during contract negotiations. Trustee I, a construction professional, also commented on the importance of capital industry background in stewarding oversight of capital assets:

When it comes to capital projects, new buildings and addressing our deferred maintenance, we are building Project Z now, I have a unique perspective to add, you know. I spent my career ensuring the safety and integrity of structures so I know that when I ask questions or provide input into those projects, I am heard by the administration...I like to think the other trustees respect my input. I don't know, I wouldn't say they defer to it. We have talented staff. But, but they do rely on it, you know. I think they rely on it.

Expertise related to capital and financial oversight was of high value to participants. Above, Trustee I expressed how his own expertise provides him with a “unique perspective” and that his perspective is relied upon by his institution's staff. Similarly, Trustee J, a government employee, shared how his own professional expertise with public funds translates to his capacity to provide financial oversight of his institution:

But in the professional world the Department Q has to operate in the confines of a budget. Just like the state government, that has to be passed and approved by June 30th of every year. There's a process to get to the budget to hit the number that you have to hit to stay within those confines...Institution Y is the same thing... Your revenue, based on tuition or whatever else, you need to get to a number and you can't go over it because there's no money left. If you want to build you have to bond. It's the same kind of principle that government entity and a public university operate under.

Like Trustees I and J, Trustee F, an accountant, shared that he applies his own professional expertise to his trusteeship and he also recalled being tapped by his fellow trustees for his professional skills:

My specialty in accounting is forensic accounting, so I tend to work with the auditors and really micro-analyze things. I get the audit questions from the other trustees and even the staff sometimes. It's good, I should. I chair the (Audit) committee. I'm the guy that always says, "Now wait a minute, let's not move on yet." I sort of tend to over analyze things. I don't consider it over analyzing, but maybe some of my colleagues do.

Whereas Trustees I, J, and F primarily shared how their own professional expertise in financial/capital matters assist them in making decisions, other participants commented on the importance of financial expertise among their fellow trustees to inform how they steward their financial responsibilities. A public administrator, Trustee B noted the enormity of responsibility associated with trusteeship and in particular, the oversight of capital and financial resources and the risk therein in providing such oversight. He described the risk management/audit universe and importance of having some trustee expertise to navigate it:

When I walk into Risk Management, those types of things, I walk out of there saying, "Man. We really could be exposed on a million different levels. How do you prepare for all that? I think that I wasn't expecting as much... Then being exposed to those other areas was like, "Whoa, there's a different dynamic out there." I think that's where the expertise comes in play with these other board members, so you rely on them. Our auditors



are in the insurance risk management area. They've seen it more...and it gives you a better comfort level at the end of the day.

Like Trustee B, who shared that relying on his peers' expertise provides comfort to his decision making, deference to trustees with financial expertise was expressed by multiple participants as a means by which they make financial or capital decisions for their institution. Trustee E, who shared that while he is "financially savvy" he is "by no means a finance guy" described one of his fellow board members as a finance and banking industry professional and, as such, as someone he has turned to to help him make sense of his responsibilities and decisions related to oversight of financial and capital assets:

He's a very glorified accountant, highly, well, incredibly successful. That's what he is, so he fits the mold. But when he talks about some of these experiences that he's had and the circles that he has to run in, you know this guy has tremendous substance, so it is just because I knew that he could answer my questions about this major capital project, a huge financial investment, ya know, should we be doing this? Should we be incurring this debt? Is this reasonable risk? I couldn't answer that myself and I wanted an expert opinion.

Here, Trustee E described how he sought guidance and affirmation from his expert peer and he was not alone in sharing such an experience. When describing their fiduciary responsibilities to oversee financial and capital resources, participants pointed to a complex landscape in which professional expertise on the Board in the areas of capital, finance and risk management, provided valuable perspective, comfort and security to their decision making processes.

*Institutionally-rooted orientation.* In addition to professional orientation, participants also ascribed notable value to their fellow trustees or to themselves, as appropriate, based on their non-professional identities, specifically those identities that lent themselves to institutionally-rooted roles. Sentiments expressed toward or from trustees with institutional roots to their institutions (i.e. as alumni or former employees) were consistently and positively aligned to the trustee's fiduciary responsibilities to oversee human resources and to advance the mission of the institution.

Trustee D, a former employee and alumnus of his institution, shared how his historical knowledge is a resource to his fellow trustees on matters pertaining to human resources, "...within the context of presidential evaluation, president's contract and that kind of thing, I was asked to help put it into some sort of framework or context on how it was done in the past. Then the use of outside consultants, that particular area, how we approached it with prior presidents," he said. Trustee H, an alumna of her institution, also echoed the value of historical perspective to her board and in her case, married such perspective to her status as an alumna:

Historical knowledge also makes our board so attractive to me, it's why I enjoy it, is that I know that I'm also sitting with a group of folks who are alumni who were also students who have a sense of history about the place...It's very helpful. It adds a context to the work that we're doing and people are committed to it because it makes a real difference when you've been there.

While Trustees D and H described their own institutionally rooted identities as assistive in providing context for decisions that confront their boards, Trustee F connected his

alumnus status to his duty of loyalty to his institution. “I really think if you're an alumnus of the institution it really helps because you have this real love and passion. It doesn't feel like [a] chore so to speak,” he said. The duty of loyalty which is essentially acting in good faith and in the best interest of the institution, was indirectly referenced by several other participants including Trustee A, also an alumna of her institution, who echoed this duty through her expressed affection for her institution:

I think you have to have a passion for the institution. Everybody on the board has some type of a link to the institution, and I think that helps with the dedication and the commitment of everyone. Then, I think I get more amplified, because I am an alum. I've walked the halls, and I've paid the student fees, and I've dealt with the board of trustees. I don't know. It's just your heart, it's just heart has to be there for the dedication.

Dedication and commitment, as referenced by Trustee A, point to the trustee's duty of loyalty to the institution and were prevalent throughout participant sentiments of institutional affection. In addition to providing valuable context to decision making processes as well as fostering decisions that are in the best interest of their institutions, participants also noted that trustees with institutionally-rooted identities also lend valuable insight to matters of direct academic concern. Also an alumna of her institution, Trustee G said, “As an alum, I would say that I have an appreciation of both the student side and the faculty side.” She added, however, recognizing the need for greater perspective on her board, “I lobbied hard for the retired faculty member (on our Board) and so that's an important addition that's just been very recent because I wanted to have someone who understands it from the faculty side of it.” The “faculty perspective” was

broadened by Trustee J who expressed that an educational professional's perspective on his board would inform his decision making. Trustee J noted that the Board's responsibility to oversee the academic programming and curriculum of the institution was most foreign to him. He said he would welcome an education professional on his board adding:

The life of a teacher is not something that I'm familiar with because I'm not a teacher...So getting the perspective of class sizes and what works, and the curriculum is something that I would rely on an educational professional, if you will, to advise.

Trustee J expressed that he would seek out an educator's perspective and rely on it to help him make sense of some of his responsibilities. Like Trustee J, Trustee C also expressed that she would benefit from having trustees with institutionally-rooted orientations, namely educational professionals, added to her board:

I also think our board could be enhanced with an educator or even a faculty member from another institution. I mean I think we have one person on the board who has ever stood in front of a classroom. That's a perspective that if on the board could help break down barriers between trustees and faculty and staff and others I think.

Trustee C's comment expands upon Trustee J's sentiment by adding that she would see the additional perspective of an educator as providing expertise but also as a conduit for relationship building. Such relationship building is discussed in more depth later as an element of trust in the trustee's experience. Trustee C also shared that she would like to

see another alumnus serve on her board and described the alumnus perspective as “critical” to her board’s work.

Generally, participant sentiments on the value of institutionally-rooted orientations on their Boards were associated with the heightened capacity of trustees with such backgrounds to provide historical context, demonstrate duty of loyalty, and foster greater understanding of academic issues. These associations, coupled with an expressed desire by some participants to add trustees with institutionally rooted orientations to their boards, helps illuminate, in part, how trustees rely on others to assist them in navigating their responsibilities.

**Other orientations.** While professional orientation and institutionally-rooted identities were dominant elements in Phase II, participants also championed a series of other orientations that were described as increasingly important to cultivate on their respective boards. These other orientations largely rested in individuals’ lived experiences as members of traditionally underrepresented populations or socioeconomic backgrounds, and as residents of the region served by the institution.

***Traditionally underrepresented orientations.*** Participants, by and large, recognized the shifting demographic of students in their institutions as part of national and regional trends. To this end, Trustee H shared, “I think we're getting more diversity of folks, in terms of race and economic backgrounds. I think that's really important, I'd like to see more of that on the board.” In addition to Trustee H, other participants commented on how, as trustees, it is incumbent upon them to navigate their fiduciary responsibilities with an eye toward understanding better the challenges, strengths and needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Several participants shared that their

boards were not currently composed of enough individuals whose own life experiences mirror those of the students they serve. Trustee I, for example, commented on the general homogeneity of his Board, noting challenges therein:

Our board is mostly older white men though and our students are anything but... I would like a better ethnic mix on the board though. I think that brings a different perspective. I think we are doing a very good job in advancing the Institution U mission but our perspectives aren't as broad as they certainly could be (inaudible). It's hard to say but it's not hard to see.

Different perspectives, according to Trustee I, are the product of a diverse board and can help boards advance their institutional mission. Trustee C described the challenges that are born from a lack of diversity among trustees particularly as it impacts serving a broad range of students. She described her Board as having little diversity and asserted that that the lack of diversity on her Board hurts decision making, "Our main responsibility is, in my view, is to support the mission and we do that foremost by serving *all* of our students and that's not I think always at the forefront as much as it could be." Trustee C, who also shared that while she does not identify as ethnically or racially diverse, she has spent much of her career focused on issues of diversity, continued:

I was assigned by our previous chair to the committee of the board that is focused on human resources and until I joined it there was very little discussion about diversity among employees or recruiting or retaining. I will say that I think my influence directly led to the reports we receive now being more reflective of these issues. I have also tried to steer Institution V toward more multi-religious and multicultural

approaches... We also have some first generation college trustees and that's also a background that adds value, self-made people, the perspective is huge particularly as we look at enrolling more first generation students.

While Trustee C shared how she draws from her own professional background with diversity to shape her contributions to her board, she also connected the need for increased diversity on her board to her board's capacity to make decisions that advance the institution's business imperative to recruit and retain diverse employees and students. She closed by mentioning the value added of trustees who are first generation college students which was also echoed by Trustees F and E. Trustee F, a self-described first generation college student, shared:

I was a poor college student. I'm very, very sensitive to the students' money, which is really the source of funds for the college... I make a lot of decisions based off of not wanting the students to bear the burden of a college education in the way that I did. I think most of the Board does, but for me, it's personal. It's what I knew.

The "personal" perspective as informative in trustee sensemaking was also expressed by Trustee E who identified "good experience" as a precursor for trustees, but went on to distinguish the value of "experience" from the value of "perspective":

I guess "good experience" is relative right? I mean, experience a lot comes with time and (inaudible) gray hair and I wouldn't want a need for a certain expertise to get in the way of finding someone whose experiences, perspectives as a vet, a single mom, somebody who was first in their family to go to College, would be outweighed.

Trustee E's sentiment that expertise and perspective are not mutually exclusive, points to another aspect of trustee sensemaking which is a trustee's reliance on perspective taking. Perspective taking, or engaging with others whose perspectives have been shaped differently than one's own (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995) was described by participants particularly in relation to their reliance on their peers' non-professional identities.

Building upon Trustee C's and E's sentiments that diversity on the Board adds valuable perspective and can drive better decision making, Trustee F added that his board recently welcomed a new trustee, "She's very good and she's also a Hispanic woman from the area, so she brings that perspective as we have a fairly big and regional Hispanic population. It's very helpful for the students and for the rest of us on the board," he said. Echoing the perspective taking that occurs among trustees and the value that diverse perspectives bring to the board, Trustee H shared that her own experiences as a member of a traditionally underrepresented population, move her to broaden Board discussions about diversity beyond the traditional enrollment function, adding that she has worked with her fellow trustees and administration to foster decisions that steer her institution toward thinking about institutional efforts like undergraduate career fairs and faculty retention as critical diversity and inclusion efforts.

In addition to racial and ethnic diversity, some participants also commented that diversity of age among trustees adds value to their perspective taking. The addition of young professionals to the board who "represent a younger population would be really helpful," said Trustee H, and Trustee G shared that she was interested in being able to tap a young professional for perspective specifically when attempting to understand issues related to social media. Participant sentiments that demonstrated interest in increasing the



diversity of their boards were consistently wedded to assertions that diversity in race, ethnicity, and age is essential to their board's capacity as a whole to make thoughtful decisions and to their individual capacity to consider other perspectives when making decisions.

***Regional identities.*** In addition to participant advocacy for trustees from traditionally underrepresented populations, some participants also commented on the added value of trustees whose lives are rooted in their institution's service region. Trustee F spoke fondly of two trustees on his board whose longevity and familiarity as residents of a city in which his institution operates a campus are of immeasurable value to his Board:

We have an old attorney born and raised in City R, so he knows all of the things we need to know about operating a campus there. He's practiced law there his whole career and he's been on the board forever. He's the longest one, so he's generally looked upon when we're trying to look at history and are trying to do things in the city. We have another member who was also born and raised in City R. He was an incredibly successful real estate developer and is the absolute go to guy with the city. These two guys, yeah their professionally helpful, but they live and breathe the city. They know the families, the politics, the neighborhoods, they have the relationships going back thirty, forty years. No consultant could give us what they give us.

In describing his two peers, Trustee F illuminated the value of their professional expertise as, in part, a byproduct of their regional expertise and influence noting that such insight

has provided the board with invaluable advice and context when navigating decisions that impact town/gown relations. Stewarding town/gown relations, often an institution's community relations program, is primarily the responsibility of an institution's administration, but the board can have a role in supporting community outreach and engagement through liaisons and advocacy initiatives as a means to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility to advance institutional reputation (Abraham, 2013). The unique capacity of trustees with regional identities to navigate and advance these relations, was also mentioned by Trustee I who described himself and the chair of his board as lifelong residents of the town in which his institution is located:

Whenever there was a fire call, my fire company was the first one to respond here. I did that for a lot of years, watching Institution U and watching it change. So I had a preconceived idea of how valuable this institution was and is to the township where I lived and worked for so long. [The Chair] knows so much about how the campus has grown, its history too. He's great for the president on [town-gown] relationships like with the college and the police or fire departments. Stuff like that that I think helps behind the scenes. We know a lot of the local business owners too and help them get involved with Institution T to find interns or sponsor events or just attend the plays and games.

As described by Trustee I, he and his chair's regional orientations, like trustees with institutionally-rooted orientations, provide their boards with historical knowledge and influence among community parties. Across several participants, trustees with regional orientations were consistently regarded by their peers as

resources that are relied upon to assist their boards in navigating and building community-based relationships, a component of the board's fiduciary responsibility to advance institutional reputation.

As described, participant sentiments illuminated that trustees draw from their own range of orientations and expertise as well as those of their peers to make sense of their roles. For example, trustees with regional orientations lend to their board community-based expertise that assists them in stewarding their fiduciary duty to advance institutional reputation. Trustees with professional orientations that are aligned to financial and capital industries provide expertise to their boards that assist them in stewarding their institutions' financial and capital assets. Trustees with institutionally-rooted orientations and expertise were attributed with helping their boards, through the lenses of institutional historians and alumni, steward human resources, advance their institution's academic missions, and make decisions that are in the best interest of the institution.

Participants also attributed notable value to the perspectives of trustees who identify as members of traditionally underrepresented populations particularly to assist them in making decisions that are mindful of the changing demographic of students they enroll and, across institutions, participants expressed a desire to add diverse perspectives to their boards as a means to help them engage in perspective taking while navigating and strengthening their decision making.

**Trust is an essential component of trusteeship.** In higher education governing boards, a prevalence of mutual faith in the professional capacity of both trustees and institutional administrators is essential to good governance while a deficiency of such mutuality has been found to cause severe disruption and inefficiency (Tierney, 2006). For many participants, trust emerged as an implicit factor in their sensemaking, particularly with respect to how they affectionately described their commitment to their institutions and their relationships with administrators. Further, obstacles to trust that were identified by participants largely focused on limitations of the trustee appointment process and the availability of trustee time.

*Institutional affection.* As noted earlier in describing the importance of institutionally-rooted orientations, expressions of affection for their institutions were recurring in participant interviews. These expressions described trust through commitment and dedication to the institution as a central element in participants' sensemaking processes particularly as it related to the responsibility of their board to make decisions that are in the best interest of the institution. For example, Trustee D, noting his alumnus status to his institution as an assistive resource, said:

Yeah, I think it makes things easier. You're not splitting your love and affection for multiple partners here. You're committed, you know, you're on the board of the institution where you got your degree. It makes life easier...Also it makes life easier in terms of giving and charitable giving as it relates, you know, you've got one institution here, where you're serving as a board member, but it's your alma mater too.

While Trustee D's expressed notion of not splitting affection was unique, the importance of institutional-based affection as an embodiment of trust was pervasive throughout participant interviews. Such affections did not reside solely in the arena of alumni trustees, but permeated more broadly as an ingredient essential to trustee satisfaction.

Trustee C explained, "You have to love the College to be a trustee. You must be proud of the organization you are engaged with" and, in response to an inquiry about qualities essential to success as a trustee, Trustee D shared, "I don't know if you'd call it a quality, but a love and commitment to the institution... That's probably the number one motivating factor, and also guiding principle I use. I think that kind of puts everything into context, you know." Much like trustees who have institutionally-rooted orientations are turned to to provide context, Trustee D described how his love of institution helps him contextualize issues that are brought before the board.

Institutional affection was also described consistently by participants as an essential ingredient to trustees' capacity to understand their institutions and their responsibilities and therefore serve as effective trustees. To this end, Trustee F said, "I think in our situation to really understand the Institution T philosophy and historical significance is most important... I think if you don't get that, don't feel that, understand that, then you're going to have a difficult time." Echoing Trustee F's sentiment, Trustee J explained how his affection for his institution serves to clarify and shape his decision making:

As an alumni, as somebody who went there I know the struggles of an average Institution W student. It's predominantly a commuter school.

People work their way through the college so it's different than a Rutgers

where most people live there, right?... I understand the buildings. I understand where the campus was, and where it is today. I've seen the change over the years. And I'm familiar with the life of a student there. I was one.

Trustee J's understanding and familiarity with his institution was captured in his affection for it, but so too was his perspective as an alumnus. He later described how a combination of perspectives (he shared that he was also the parent of a college-bound child) and affection led him to determine that college affordability was the most important challenge facing his trusteeship.

Institutional affection, broadly captured as good will toward the institution and commitment to working towards the best interests of the College, was for many participants, an ingredient to effective trusteeship. Participants drew from their own institutional affection to contextualize and prioritize their fiduciary responsibilities and they also depended upon their trustee peers to approach their responsibilities from a similar foundation. Where some participants indicated concern was in their assessments of their fellow trustees as lacking institutional affection and thus hindering trust among the board.

***Trust-based relationships.*** In addition to institutional affection, participants consistently placed importance on trust-based relationships with institutional administrators and with one another. In light of their roles as volunteers and reflecting upon the complexity and range of their fiduciary duties, participants were keen to laud strong relationships with their presidents as critical to the effective stewardship of their responsibilities. To this end, Trustee B shared:

My contact with Institution Q is literally almost daily, sometimes multiple times a day. Not overwhelming, but it's just, you know, just like a school board or even this board, there is difference between what a trustee should be involved with and what administration should be doing. You don't want to micromanage, and technically you can't micromanage. So, there is a lot of power that remains with the presidency and administration that the board and the chair doesn't really... can't overstep that...the good thing is it depends on who the president is of the university and how your relationship is with board and the chair. They could be sharing a lot, or they could be sharing little. They don't have to share. We actually have a president who likes to share so that is tremendous.

Trustee B's comments about not micromanaging, respecting one another's roles, and sharing between the board and the administration, highlight the importance of trust, even if informal, in the participant's sensemaking process. Trustee D, echoed the importance of trust among all parties:

Well, one of the things that's so important is the board being able, the board having confidence in the leadership of the individual, namely the president...I think that kind of summarizes our board's review to most things, that they seem to be confident in the leadership of Institution X and especially in the president of the university as an individual who's going to do the right thing for the university. Not just the right thing for the president. I think that's one of the key things.

Trustee D's sentiment that the president will do the right thing for the institution and will not act out of self-interest is emblematic of the aforementioned duties of care and loyalty that resonated prominently across participant interviews. Trustee F provided examples of how his president fostered trust, "There's a lot of presidents that want to keep their board protected or out of reach, not our guy. He encourages everybody to talk and so forth."

Trustee L similarly said his institution's president, at the beginning of his term, facilitated trustee engagement with other campus groups and that such engagement was a major shift in how the board had functioned under its previous president:

The styles were just totally different. We didn't know what to do at first so the president actually facilitated for us meetings with faculty and student leaders. The discussions were gripe fests in the beginning and it took some time to get to a point where the conversations were constructive but it happened and it [has] been helpful for those of us that participate. I know it's been helpful to me for example because I seldom interact with the students and their perspective is really unique.

Multiple participants, including Trustee L, who were simply encouraged by their presidents to elicit the perspectives of other institutional stakeholders, described those opportunities as fueling trust-based relationships and, in turn, shaping their decision making processes. Trustee G, for example, explained that during her trusteeship, she has experienced two presidents:

Our (previous) leader was different, the way he siloed out information was really different than now with our new president. As a Board, we changed procedures...so we now have much more, we get much more information



than we've ever received before and we ask many more questions and rely on different departments within the institution, and our current president encourages us to do that which is a major shift from the previous president.

The experience of Trustee G described how a trust-based relationship between the board and the administration has led her board to rely increasingly on multiple sources of information to inform its decisions. The capacity of trustees to trust and rely on their institution's administration to assist them in their decision making is essential, however, it also has limitations. Trustee E warned that trustee deference to administration must not go unchecked:

When I look at the relationship between the board and the president, or the chair and the president, I see overarching and overwhelming positives. I see some negatives. If you heard Trustee O, as an example, talk about the way the board and the president work together, you would think it's nirvana, and it's not nirvana but it is open...And sometimes, if the trustees don't ask enough questions, it is incumbent upon the president and the staff... to say, "You haven't asked me about this, but let me tell you about this." That's how trust is built. Because the moment the trustees don't trust the administration is the moment they start mistrusting one another too.

Trustee E's description of the role of the president and or the administration in trustee sensemaking signals that trust must be mutual and it also cautions that a lack of mutual trust among parties can cause problems. Overall, participants that discussed relationships with their institutional presidents consistently expressed that trust is a prominent factor in

their capacity to rely on the administration to help them, as appropriate, navigate their fiduciary responsibilities. In instances in which trust was eroded, participants described siloed information, limited access to alternate perspectives, and resultant underdeveloped decision making processes as hindrances to their effectiveness as trustees and to their boards.

**Challenges to trustee sensemaking.** As noted above, a lack of trust in institutional administration was described by some participants as a generally surmountable challenge in their trusteeship. Some of the less surmountable challenges to trust that were identified by participants rested in trustee disengagement and in the process through which trustees are appointed. It is important to note though that disengagement was broached by participants as a byproduct of either minimal capacity or minimal will of some trustees to devote the time necessary to serve their respective boards. The issue of minimal will, in some instances, was connected to the state-mandated appointment process.

*Capacity to serve.* On the issue of trustees lacking availability of time to serve, participants noted some of their own limitations as well as those of their peers. These limitations are described below and reveal hindrances to trustee sensemaking. Trustee F said of his service:

It is a huge time commitment. An enormous commitment of your time. To do it right too you have to have the time. You need to have the support of those you work with and live with because your service, my service, eats away at the time I have for other things.

Trustee F's sentiment was shared by several participants who strongly agreed that trustee service requires considerable time and energy. Participants shared that, at the start of service, the "enormous commitment of time" is largely spent on gaining an understanding of the board's responsibilities, getting to know the institution, and building relationships. As described earlier, trustees draw, in significant part, from their relationships with their peers and their administration to make sense of their responsibilities and, as such, establishing those trust based relationships also requires time and energy.

Several participants shared that their institutions provided them, as new trustees, with Board Orientations as a means to assist them in understanding their responsibilities and their institutions, however, while these orientations were generally described as helpful by participants they were also described as overwhelming. Trustee H, described how her institution, shortly after she was appointed to the board, attempted to orient her to mitigate the steep learning curve:

We had a board orientation. What happens in a board orientation is the president brings all of his staff and his leadership team and you just get downloaded on it. It's just very difficult to grapple with that. In the midst of being also, a working professional, I feel like I started out with a data overload, in spite of the fact that my heart's in the right place.

An orientation, as described by Trustee H as a largely one-way interaction, fails to acknowledge that a trustee's sensemaking, in addition to his reliance on his peers, is also derived from his own expertise, perspectives, and institutional affection or lack thereof. Recommendations related to the utility of board orientations to incorporate strategies to foster trustee sensemaking are described in Chapter 5.

Trustee capacity to serve, broadly defined as a trustee's ability to commit the time and energy to serve his institution, according to participants, requires a steadfast commitment and support system that enables the trustee to adequately prepare for, attend, and engage in meetings. Limitations placed on trustee time and energy as well as institutional orientations that fail to appreciate trustee identities and cultivate trustee knowledge can detract from a trustee's capacity to make sense of his responsibilities.

***Will to serve.*** In addition to comments about trustee capacity to devote the time and energy necessary for their service, participants also described challenges with trustee will to serve. Trustee will to serve, broadly described within a trustee's duty of loyalty to put the interests of the institution before all others, was, in some instances, connected to concerns about the trustee appointment process in New Jersey which is based on senate confirmation and gubernatorial approval. Trustee C, who shared that her own path to the trusteeship required political jockeying, said:

Don't be on a board to build a resume, for some I think it's a power trip. They aren't there for the right reasons, they didn't get there for the right reasons... I don't understand why some trustees even serve because they sometimes are so disengaged or when they are engaged they approach their responsibilities without consideration for what is in the best interest of the college but rather what will keep them out of the fray. You know their loyalty is questionable. Are you here to build your resume, to be a watchdog for the governor, or are you here for Institution V? I mean we have trustees who just flat out don't show up when there's a vote that might be contentious or media are interested in. They just don't show.

Trustee C's criticism of some of her peers as wanting to stay "out of the fray", to be loyal to the governor vs. the institution, or to be absent when there is a possibility of media attention hearkens back to the importance of trust and institutional affection as foundational elements to trustee sensemaking. Like Trustee C, Trustees B and H also expressed that the actual process through which trustees are appointed does little to prepare the trustee for service and, in Trustee H's experience, it also demonstrates that trustees are not generally appointed to fill institutional needs. Trustee B said:

Because, imagine in New Jersey they're appointed by the governor ...most people don't know...most people don't run to the president's office and say, 'Hey, I'd like to be a trustee. How do I go about doing it?'...So, the time you get tapped on the shoulder from what you do in life, if you're a big donor to the university or if you know the governor, which you do or you don't, something that a lot of people don't, but if you do, or if you know a senator, or however it may be, they tap you on the shoulder, "Hey, would you do this?" "Yeah, that sounds interesting. I'll do it." Then you don't know what you're doing. You know?

Trustee B's comment points to the appointment process as potentially being tied to a trustee's professional background, philanthropic activity, or political connections. Regardless of the tie, however, his comments also point to his own perceived lack of preparedness when joining his board. In discussing the appointment process, Trustee H also commented on the ambiguity surrounding the appointment process and the lack of vetting of candidates by the State, describing the process as a disservice to the education sector and to the capacity of boards to "gel" when making decisions:

I think, to me, education is so critical and it's personal because it was a pathway for me, and I think these are not positions that should be taken lightly. I do get concerned about the State appointments process. A lot of these things are driven by more political affiliations. I'm not certain that, I mean I know from some history but I don't know what this looks like now, that there's any real vetting of candidates... Where there's a nominations committee that looks at what do we need? Where are we short? What do we have? And they interview people to try to find those matches. Does this person fit into our values? Does this person fit into our mission, and can this person embrace our mission and/or bring things to the table that help this group which has to make really important decisions really ultimately gel. What are the differences, what's the whole thing? I've been on boards and have been on nominating committees but we really pull out a spreadsheet and literally count all the categories. That's not what we see, and this is one of the most fundamental civic service positions, I think ever, which is education.

Trustee H's sentiment criticizes the appointment process asserting that it fails to select trustees to fill an institutional need or to compliment the current board. Trustee I also expressed frustration with the appointment process as an element of trusteeship that fails to heed the needs of the Board or the institution over which it presides:

Don't get me wrong, I know we have tried with the state for trustee appointments that bring with them diversity but that process takes a lot of time and can be so political... We can recommend all we want, but the

appointment's going to be political. And I think it's a shame. Because I think he needs, whoever they be, needs to be able to understand that there's a need in the institution to have a balance, versus the political entities involved. We have a member of the board right now that is not being appointed to the appropriate term, strictly because of politics. That is a discredit to the institution, and I mean the institution of the senate, not the board.

These and other participant criticisms of the appointment process are discussed further in Chapter 5 wherein recommendations for strategic appointment processes that align trustee expertise and orientations with institutional needs are presented.

Trust, as portrayed through institutional affection and relationships with institutional administration was consistently shared, like expertise, as a foundational element in how trustees navigate their roles. Cracks in that foundation, however, were noted by many participants as caused by perceived trustee disengagement which was largely attributed to a trustee's capacity to devote the time needed to serve and/or to their will to devote the time to serve. Discussions focused on will, more so than those discussions focused on capacity, were associated with perceptions of flaws inherent to the political process of trustee appointments.

**Trusteeship as a symbiotic relationship.** As noted earlier, trustees rely, in part, on their professional orientations and those of their fellow trustees to navigate decisions. In addition, part of trustee sensemaking is connected to what participants describe as their capacity to make meaningful contributions to their institutions. Participants, however,

also described their trusteeship as an experience that has enriched them professionally and personally. Trustee A commented:

It's just a wonderful honor, and very humbling to be able to give back. I would not be the person I am today without the exposure and education I got at Institution S as both a student and a trustee.

This symbiotic relationship, described by Trustee A, of giving back in which the trustee derives satisfaction from contributing to her institution and, in turn, yields experiences that enrich her professional and personal lives was described favorably by many participants.

*Enriched professional orientations.* Some participants described their trusteeship as a boon to their professional lives. For example, Trustee B shared:

I think ironically, serving as a board of trustee and my career at Employer Z has a lot of similarities. Obviously, there are a lot of differences, but there are definitely a lot of similarities and I think it helps and enhances my view as a trustee, and the role I can play.

An enhanced professional view was also described by Trustee C who shared how the wealth of information she has gleaned from her trusteeship has translated to her career:

I would just say that my trusteeship has been a very rewarding experience. It has been so stimulating for the last three years. I've learned about the financial significance of empty beds, the experiences of commuters versus residential students, the impact of flat state appropriations. I could go on...I do think that as a professional I have grown in the past three years.



My time on the board has really taught me a lot about education and about people and I take that with me when I work with clients.

Trustee C's assertion that her trusteeship has enhanced her work with clients was similarly expressed by Trustee E who shared that his trusteeship has added heightened cachet to his professional status:

I mean the one thing is that my value as a consultant to my clients, either supporting the client or selling the client that they should retain us have been exacerbated by the fact that they know that I chaired a college.

There's a certain added value in my profession.

The added value of service as a trustee, as described by Trustee E, yielded legitimacy to his professional persona whereas the added value for Trustees B and C lent itself to fostering for them a more well-rounded approach to or understanding of their careers. For several participants, trusteeship also generated intrinsic enhancements to their personal lives.

***Enriched personal orientations.*** Some participants shared that the symbiotic relationship of trusteeship to their professional lives was not as strongly felt as it was to their lives as community members and lifelong learners. Trustee K described his trusteeship as a "win-win" adding, "I've learned so much from the other trustees and from the staff, the students. I'm old, ya know, I don't hang out with young people much. It keeps me young, I think, plus I feel like I'm helping them." As described by Trustee K, his trusteeship fostered opportunities for him to learn from others and to help them. Trustee I discussed the impact of his trusteeship on his community-based activities:

I would say that as a board member, I have been able to strengthen my community relationships. You know, I'm very involved in my VFW and with the fire department and I think I approach that work a little bit differently now. I look at things differently because I have a much better sense of how Institution U relies on the community resources and I can bring that perspective to those groups and advocate for both.

As described by Trustee I, his engagement in perspective taking as a result of his trusteeship has enhanced the way in which he understands and engages with his community. Trustee I also went a step further and described how his trusteeship has affected his worldview:

I never went to a liberal arts college. I went to a scientific college and received a master's degree in a very specific thing. So the whole concept of going to a liberal arts college, it's changed my approach to life. I had discussions with my wife over many years the minute I met her as which was a better approach: going to a liberal arts college or university, or going to one specifically geared towards a profession. I was in the latter camp, until I came here. Now, I had to tell her the other day that she was correct and that the liberal arts approach allows you to learn how to think, not how to just recite things.

Like Trustee I who shared that his trusteeship has introduced him to new ways of looking at and making sense the world, Trustee G, also described her trusteeship as an experience through which she has cultivated greater understandings. She described her service as a catalyst for both her own personal inquiry and professional study:

I'm not sure how my trusteeship has really effected what I'm doing in Business B, I mean, I'm sure in some ways it does, and I read things maybe a little more carefully than I used to, but it makes me interested in doing more in the future and a few weeks ago... I thought, wow, shared governance is so interesting, the human part of it...the part that when you're including people that feel marginalized...So then I start to think in terms of, okay, well what about on a corporate level, what companies are [inaudible] and wouldn't it be interesting to study their boards. And actually, what I would like to do there is I would like to get on some of those boards, the corporate boards...I have a feeling that the last three years was kind of ...Everything I've been gathering has set me up for something that I would never have guessed that I would be interested in.

Trustee G's trusteeship, namely her exposure to shared governance (a primarily academic governance model) as a sensemaking process, has prompted her to explore how the model can be applied to corporate boards. Trustee G's enthusiasm about this exploration into a new field of study and possibly employment was palpable. Whether describing the intrinsic or extrinsic rewards of their trusteeship on their professional and personal lives, a similar enthusiasm and gratitude permeated across participants. All participants expressed that their service as trustees, despite challenges, has been a mutually beneficial and satisfying experience.

**Formalizing informal trustee engagement.** Throughout participant interviews, trustees expressed that they have found their trusteeship to be highly satisfying and mutually beneficial. They primarily described how they draw from their professional and

personal identities and expertise and that of their peers to make sense of their responsibilities. In addition to these sources of information, however, several participants also noted that they also value opportunities to engage informally with their institutions adding that such opportunities shape their sensemaking. Examples provided by participants of these informal opportunities included participation in a range of campus events, informal meals with stakeholders, and sitting in on classes. Further, participants consistently attributed the informal engagement of trustees as the responsibility of their institution presidents.

***Informal engagement as sensemaking activity.*** The act of getting involved informally in their institutions, away from the formal meetings and work of the board, revealed itself as an important component of trustee sensemaking. Trustee J, commented on his involvement in campus life sharing that he attends as many functions as he can, adding “I do not intend just to do board meetings and nothing else. I intend to go to as much of the functions on campus and hear and see. I think that’s how you learn.” Like Trustee J, learning about their institutions through informal activities fostered for several other participants greater understanding of their institutions and their roles. These broadened understandings were noted by participants as integral to their decision making. “It’s what you make of the position and how much you want or how little you want to be involved with things,” said Trustee B. He went on to describe his attendance at student-led events and at campus town halls:

I like being involved with things. I don’t want to go into something and say ‘Oh I’ll just show up to vote on things.’ I like to understand it, the nuts

and bolts of it. I'm a better trustee for it and I think a better resource to Institution W.

Understanding “the nuts and bolts” of an issue or, to Trustee C, getting a deeper understanding of an issue through her informal experiences on campus serve to compliment the information she receives from the administration:

I've sat in on classes at the college. I have dined with faculty. I have made myself accessible to the campus really and I rely on a good deal of sensory input to make sense of issues...I do think as a board we get sufficient information to make decisions but I also think there is a lot to be gained by speaking to people directly in informal settings to get a deeper understanding of the challenges [and] to build relationships.

Here Trustee C notes that she relies on these experiences to unpack issues and she also attributes informal engagement with her institution as a means through which relationships are built. Similarly, Trustee K shared:

If I hadn't taken some time a few weeks ago to attend this student research presentation thing...I admit, I do, I wouldn't have really understood why our VPs were talking about shifting the budget to invest in these, they're called, high impact practices.

In Trustee K's statement, he linked his informal engagement with his institution to providing him with a better understanding of an institutional shift of resources over which he and his Board would preside.

*Presidential responsibility for informal engagement.* As noted earlier, the presence of trust-based relationships among trustees and with administration is of critical importance to trustee sensemaking and, interestingly, several participants attributed the responsibility of informally engaging trustees to their institution president. Trustee K added that he turns “to the administration, mostly the president or his chief of staff, to involve me in other campus activities or projects, they have the pulse of Institution V.” Expressing a similar sentiment regarding informal engagement with his institution and reliance on the administration, Trustee L shared:

I do think our president and the staff do a very good job of making sure that we are all engaged. When I have said, ‘I want to learn more about X, I would say, 9 times out of 10, the staff figure out a way for me to get involved.

Getting involved in the institution, as noted by Trustee L, apart from the formal work of the Board has the potential to foster trust between the trustee and the administration while also cultivating institutional affection. To this end, presidents are positioned to generate or identify informal engagement opportunities for trustees. Described further in Chapter 5, these opportunities have the potential to foster trust-building and institutional affection among trustees.

Despite expressed sentiments regarding the enormity of time that trusteeship requires, fostering opportunities for meaningful trustee engagement is largely welcomed by trustees and is largely perceived by trustees to be the responsibility of their institutional administration.

## **Summary of Findings**

The integration of findings from Phase I and Phase II helps us to answer the final research question and arrive at metainferences: What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes? In accord with this study's sequential explanatory design, this section presents how the qualitative findings from Phase II expanded, shaped, or strengthened the quantitative findings from Phase I.

The findings of this study are the product of sequential explanatory design in which Phase I findings, during an intermediate stage, were connected to Phase II. This connecting process included using the Phase I findings to reframe and refine the interview content in Phase II to then ultimately generate three metainferences (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006) (see Figure 4). These findings led to three metainferences.

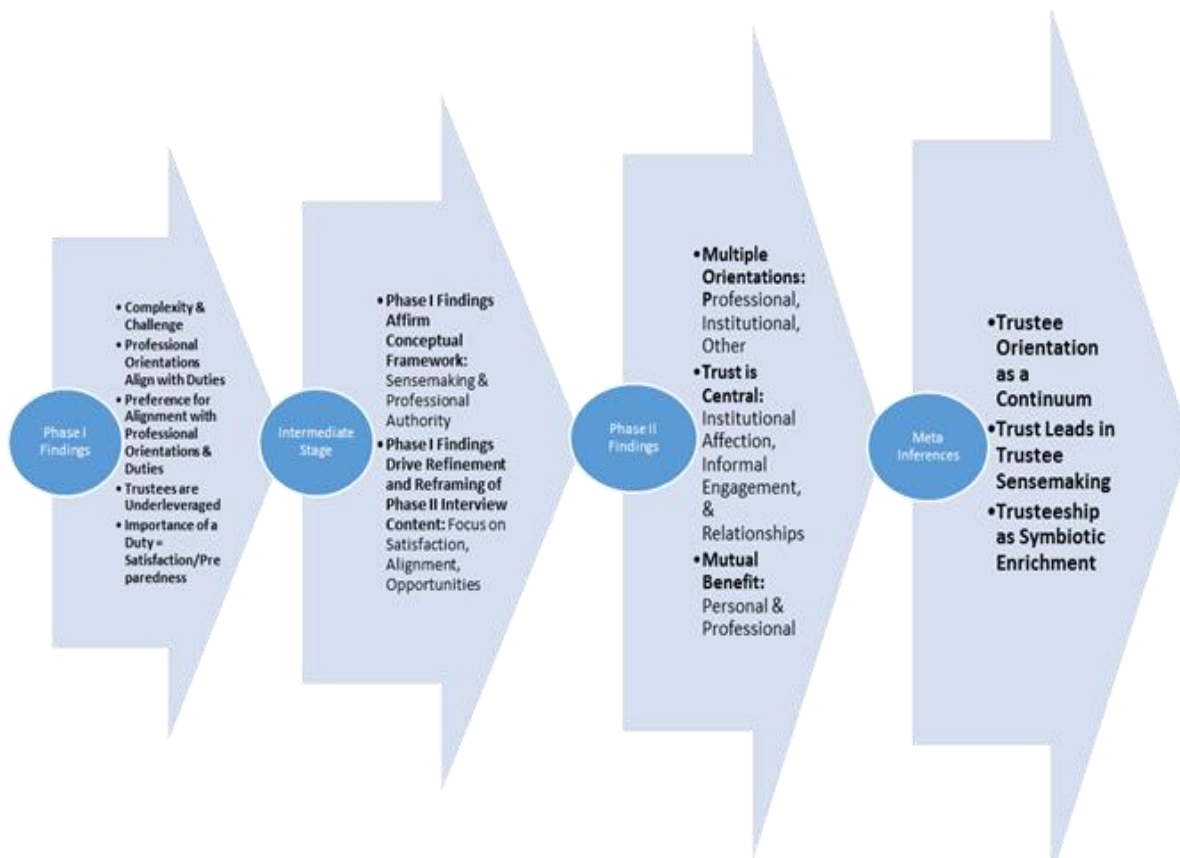


Figure 4. Findings and Metainferences of this Study.

**Metainferences.** This study's three metainferences represent the overall understandings gleaned from this study's data and analysis (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). They include:

- Trustee orientations are a continuum of diverse orientations rather than a compendium of professional skill sets.
- Trust is at the core of trustee sensemaking.
- Trusteeship is a process of symbiotic enrichment.



Findings from Phase I suggested that trusteeship is complex and challenging and that professional orientation is a factor in trustees' preparedness for stewardship of their duties. Phase II findings confirmed these suggestions. Phase II themes, for example, revealed that trustees, in addition to relying on their own professional orientations and those of their peers, also rely on trustee orientations as historians, alumni, and as members of traditionally underrepresented populations to make sense of the complexity of their fiduciary responsibilities. With respect to the challenging nature of trusteeship, Phase II revealed that challenges to trusteeship include significant demands on trustee time, overwhelming onboarding processes, and issues related to the state mandated appointment process that was described by some participants to be driven more by political agency than institutional need.

Phase I findings also suggested that trustee competencies are known to their institutions but are under-leveraged. In Phase II this preliminary finding was explored further and that exploration revealed that trustees are keen to contribute in meaningful ways to their institutions. This keenness persists despite acknowledgment of the enormous time commitment required of trustees to serve their institutions as volunteers. Participants also largely attributed the responsibility of thoughtfully and informally engaging trustees as that of the institutional administration, not of the Board.

In addition, findings from Phase I also suggested that the ascribed importance of a fiduciary duty did not equate consistently to trustee preparedness to steward said duty or to trustee satisfaction in stewarding said duty. As a result of these findings, Phase II focused less on importance of duty and instead redirected inquiries to how trustees perceived their preparedness for all five duties regardless of their ascribed importance.

This redirection in Phase II revealed that trustees by and large derived satisfaction from stewarding all five of their fiduciary duties. However, it also revealed that in stewarding their fiduciary duties of providing oversight of financial and capital assets, participants routinely relied on and deferred to their trustee peers who had professional backgrounds in finance, capital/construction, and risk management. Participants described finance, construction, and accounting professionals as critical assets to their decision making, sharing in many instances, examples of how they deferred to those individuals for their expertise and their judgment.

The act of deference was also further explored in Phase II. Participants' willingness to defer to their trustee peers and to their institutional administration was found to be predicated on the establishment of trust. Trust, as revealed in Phase II, extended to trustees having faith in one another's good will, affection for the institution, and therein, the presumed intention to do what is in the best interest of the institution. Trust also extended to trustees' relationships with administration that, in being trust-based, were marked by openness with the president, transparency with the senior administration, and trustee access to a range of materials and other constituent groups. In addition, trustees rely on informal engagement with their institutions to help them navigate their responsibilities. Facilitating this engagement was viewed as the responsibility of the president and as a mechanism through which trust-based relationships develop and context is provided to decisions.

While Phase I preliminary findings also suggested that trustees derive satisfaction from all five of their fiduciary duties, Phase II revealed that trustee satisfaction was also borne from a mutually beneficial arrangement. This symbiotic relationship revealed itself

in trustee experiences in which participants shared examples of how their trusteeship enhanced their professional skills or professional visibility, and/or fostered in them more engaged roles as community members or lifelong learners. The findings from Phase I and Phase II, when integrated, helped illuminate how trustees make sense of their responsibilities and arrive at decisions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented findings from both phases of this study. Quantitative findings from Phase I primarily helped us understand the extent to which trustees' professional orientations aligned with their fiduciary duties and reaffirmed this study's conceptual framework as appropriate to study a complex phenomenon. Qualitative findings from Phase II helped us to better understand how trustees actually draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary responsibilities and to identify the challenges and opportunities for enhanced engagement therein. We learned that professional orientation is not the sole frame of reference from which trustees draw. Institutionally-rooted orientations and other perspectives including orientations as members of underrepresented populations were found to be of critical import to how trustees navigate and make sense of their responsibilities. We also learned that trustees rely on their presidents to informally engage them in their institutions and that such opportunities help build trust and provide context for their fiduciary work. In addition, we found that trustee satisfaction does not correlate consistently to how important trustees may perceive a fiduciary duty to be. Rather, trustee satisfaction is an amalgam of factors rooted in trust, broadly defined, through trustee descriptions of institutional affection, and trust-based relationships with

their peers and institutional administrators. Satisfaction from trusteeship was also derived from what participants described as mutually beneficial relationships with the institution and with the trustee's personal or professional lives.

Chapter Five will present these findings in light of the literature and the study's framework. It will highlight their potential contributions to the literature and limitations. Chapter Five will conclude with a discussion of the findings' implications for policy, practice, leadership, and research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the role professional orientation plays in how public college and university trustees navigate their fiduciary responsibilities. This chapter will begin with a discussion of this study's three metainferences and the extent to which the study's findings align with its theoretical framework. To this end, focus will be on sensemaking and professional authority and the intersects between the two as they pertain to trustee experiences. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of implications for policy, research, practice, and leadership as they connect to the larger discourse regarding the experiences of public college trustees and their fiduciary responsibilities.

This chapter will also discuss the three metainferences and findings in relation to the study's four research questions, the literature, and the theoretical framework that guided this study. The four research questions were:

1. To what extent do trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties?
2. How do trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles?
3. What is the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship experience?
4. What results emerge from using quantitative data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties and trusteeship experiences to elicit qualitative interview data on their sensemaking processes?

## **Metainferences**

This study's three metainferences represent the overall understandings gleaned from this study's data and analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). They include:

1. Trustee orientations are a continuum of diverse orientations rather than a compendium of professional skill sets.
2. Trust is at the core of trustee sensemaking.
3. Trusteeship is a process of symbiotic enrichment.

**Trustee orientation as a continuum, not a compendium.** The first research question asked to what extent trustees' professional orientations align with their fiduciary duties and the second research question asked how trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their fiduciary roles. Trustees professional orientations largely align with their fiduciary duties and trustees prefer engaging in duties that align to their professional orientations and they seek opportunities to do so. Through acts of reference, deference, and perspective taking, trustees indeed draw from their professional orientations but they also draw from other orientations thus revealing the concept of trustee orientations as a continuum of diverse orientations rather than a compendium of professional skill sets.

***Deference disconnect.*** It is important to acknowledge, at this time, a disconnect related to deference that was observed between Phase I respondents and Phase II participants. Phase I respondents overwhelmingly reported only being "somewhat/rarely" deferred to for their professional competencies and yet Phase II respondents nearly all shared experiences in which they have been deferred to and have deferred to their peers because of their professional competencies. This disconnect may be explained, in part,

through Hirst's (1982) consideration of professional authority which asserts, "The role of any professional is thus set not merely by some general human good that he serves, but by the specific responsibilities given to him within the institution in which he must work" (1982, p. 172). To this end, the Phase I survey identified the five specific fiduciary responsibilities of trustees, it did not describe them. In contrast, Phase II interviews provided the opportunity for participants to inquire about the five responsibilities and yielded dialogues with me, in many instances, about the breadth of the five duties. These dialogues routinely led to real-time participant realizations that they were or may have, in fact, been engaged by their trustee peers for matters related to their professional or other orientations.

**Trust leads in trustee sensemaking.** The third research question inquired about the relationship between the value of importance trustees place on their fiduciary duties and the level of satisfaction in their trusteeship. The ascribed importance of a duty is not consistently associated with comparable levels of trustee satisfaction in stewarding the duty. By and large, trustees ascribed high levels of satisfaction in stewarding all five of their fiduciary duties regardless of their ascribed importance. What was revealed through further exploration of these data was that, at the core of trustee satisfaction is not the ascribed importance of a duty but rather the capacity to trust in others when stewarding the duty. Trust revealed itself through acts of deference and reference, sentiments of institutional affection, as well as relationships with administration.

**Trusteeship as symbiotic enrichment.** The second research question asked how trustees draw from their professional orientations to navigate the complexity of their professional roles. As noted earlier, trustees draw from their own professional

orientations and the orientations of their fellow trustees to navigate their fiduciary responsibilities. Participants frequently indicated that their trusteeship has actually enriched their sensemaking in other roles. These mutually beneficial aspects of trusteeship, as shared by participants, were highly individualized but consistently connoted high levels of satisfaction.

Ultimately, the final research question asked what results emerge from integrating data on public trustees' assessments of their fiduciary duties with data on their sensemaking processes. The answers to this question can be found in the previously identified metainferences, namely in brief that, in order to navigate their fiduciary responsibilities, (1) trustees draw from a range of diverse orientations, (2) trust is the cornerstone of a trustee's capacity to derive satisfaction from his service, and (3) trustees engage in referential, deferential, and mutually beneficial activities, and, noting this, are generally keen to engage more with their institutions.

## **Discussion**

This section will discuss how the key findings identified in Chapter Four support, contrast, or expand the reviewed literature and theoretical assumptions shaping this study.

**Sensemaking theory and professional authority.** Reviewed literature regarding sensemaking theory and professional authority in governance has largely focused on exploring how corporate boards navigate their social responsibilities (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). There has been no peer-reviewed research applying sensemaking theory and professional authority to higher education boards and, while there is an abundance of data on the professional compositions of these boards, there is a dearth of information focused



on the behavioral orientations of higher education boards (Bastedo, 2005; Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

This study adds to the body of literature on higher education boards, and the orientations (professional and not) and sensemaking processes of their members. To these ends, this study describes the complexity and ambiguity surrounding trusteeship and the challenges that may emerge when trustees lack a personal stake in the governance of their organizations (Balch, 2008; Legon, Lombardi & Rhoades, 2013). Further, it also describes how trust, as a critical factor favoring trustee satisfaction and engagement, manifests in the stewardship of a trustee's fiduciary duties (Brown, 2014; Dika & Janosik, 2003; Tierney, 2006; Vidovich & Currie, 2011).

We also learned that institutional opportunities exist to mitigate trustee disengagement through the cultivation of institutional affection. The intentional and iterative development of this institutional affection, as a manifestation of trust, supports the assertion made by Adobor (2005) that trust creation is itself a process of sensemaking. In this study, the development of affection between trustee and institution was described as part of the trustee's sensemaking process. Small gestures advanced by the president or fellow trustees served to expand the trustees' familiarity with the institution, their peers, and their responsibilities, and assisted them in navigating the complexity of their fiduciary duties.

**Value of professional orientation in finance, capital, and risk.** A key finding of this study is that indeed trustees make sense of their fiduciary responsibilities through their professional orientations but also through other orientations linked to institutionally-rooted orientation and membership in traditionally underrepresented populations. Pilon

(1991) argued that in light of scarce institutional resources, colleges and universities, to remain financially solvent, should cultivate the professional talents of those who volunteer to serve them and, more recently, Barringer and Riffe (2018) argued that trustees actively involved in their institutions significantly influence institutional behaviors, policies, and practices. This study found that trustees are indeed influential but they also stand to be better engaged with and leveraged by their institutions.

Boards are indeed cultivating the talents of trustees with professional orientations in finance, capital/construction, and accounting and these individuals are consistently deferred to by their peers. Bastedo (2009) found that such individuals are dominant forces on their boards and tend to monopolize decision making. This study confirms Bastedo's 2009 finding that trustees with these backgrounds are dominant forces in that they are so consistently deferred to by their peers, however, this study did not find that these same individuals tend to monopolize decision making. Noting Starr's (1984) theory that professional authority is contingent upon the extent to which others depend on the professional's competence, this study found that high levels of deference did not equate to a monopoly on decision making but, in contrast, fostered more democratic practices of consultation and perspective taking, yielding, in turn, trust-based relationships among board members.

**Value of professional orientation in academia.** As layperson boards, this study advances Balch (2008) and Longanecker's (2006) findings that higher education trustees generally have little to no professional background in academia. This study also found that while this is largely accurate, participants were keen to recognize the valued added by their peers that were regarded as institutional historians largely because of their status

as former institutional employees or alumni of their institution. In particular, such trustees were deferred to for their backgrounds in academia and in some instances, participants were keen to onboard more trustees with academic backgrounds to their boards. Brown (2005) found that trustees who are tenured faculty are more inclined to investigate the long term impacts of board decisions. Drilling deeper into Brown's (2005) finding, this study found that trustees who could provide an educator's perspective were desired by participants as persons who could help them make sense of their duties as they pertain to gaining a better understanding of areas such as classroom experiences, shared governance, and intra-campus relations.

**Trust and appointment as a factor in duty of loyalty.** The literature also discussed trustee appointment as a factor in how trustees arrive at decisions. Serving multiple masters was described by Cohen and Kisker (2010) as a byproduct of the political appointment process. Cohen and Kisker (2010) asserted that trustee decision making can be complicated in light of the fact that appointed trustees may be beholden to their appointing authority, sectors of the public, and the institution they serve. Longanecker (2006) also found that politically appointed trustees can develop a "strong affinity" (p. 96) for their institutions but are also responsible to others. In this study, such affinity was captured as institutional affection, such as good will toward the institution and a commitment to working toward the best interests of the college/university, and it was regarded by trustees as a measure of one's loyalty to his institution. Further, this study found that in instances where institutional affection was perceived to be lacking, so too was trustee engagement with the institution.

Institutional affection was also considered a measure of trust among trustees and was found to serve, in some instances as a salve to doubts regarding fellow trustees' level of commitment to the institution. Wrightsman (1974) and Zand (1971) found that in environments where there are high levels of trust among members, those members are more likely to disclose problems, share their thoughts, and seek ideas for solutions from their peers. Trustees described such environments among their boards as a factor in their willingness to refer to their own professional expertise and to defer to the expertise of their peers. Tierney (2006) described trust in higher education as "a dynamic process in which two or more parties are involved in a series of interactions that may require a degree of risk or faith on the part of one or both parties" (p. 57). To this end, this study furthers that these dynamic exchanges among trustees and with institutional administration are exercises in trust and in turn serve to facilitate trustee sensemaking and foster satisfaction.

Impediments to cultivating trust largely centered around trustee disengagement which was attributed to either a trustee's minimal capacity to serve or, more problematic, minimal will to serve. The challenge of minimal will to serve, in some instances, was connected to the state-mandated appointment process. This process was criticized as being driven more by political agency than institutional need. Invariably, the political appointment process (and the selection process therein) was thusly criticized by participants for demonstrating little regard for institutional need or a prospective trustee's institutional affection. These characterizations of the appointment process confirm general dissatisfaction in the appointment process and advance, nearly two decades later, the findings of a survey of nearly 600 higher education trustees which found that public

trustees favored enhancing trustee satisfaction by “matching new trustees to institutional needs” (Michael et al., p. 184, 1999). In addition, the findings of this study lend additional context to recommendations that non-partisan commissions be used to screen trustees for background and ability (Bastedo, 2009).

### **Limitations**

This section will present the limitations of this study’s findings as a result of methodological and procedural decisions.

The findings provide valuable insight into how trustees of New Jersey’s public colleges and universities experience their fiduciary responsibilities, but they are limited in their generalizability to a national audience. As a result of the study’s sequential design, the quantitative data gleaned from Phase I was solely used to shape Phase II. This decision was made based on the design but also on the low participation rate in Phase I. As a result, the findings connected to and shaped the content of the semi-structured interviews in Phase II but did not limit the scope of Phase II’s inquiry. Future studies in similar contexts with greater participation rates, would advance the emergence of more generalizable findings over time.

Phase I findings, because of the participation rate, did not yield significant associations among variables. Future studies would allow for statistical analysis that identify such associations. Phase I, however, did assist in revealing five findings which were used, as noted earlier, to shape Phase II, and were further explored therein through the analysis of participants’ narrative accounts of their experiences. To this end, this study sought to expand the quantitative data with qualitative findings and priority was given to the qualitative phase. The qualitative phase occurred over a period of

approximately 10 months and as such, participation was increased through snowball sampling. Saturation was achieved when a consistency in participant responses began to emerge (Tashakkorie and Teddlie, 2003) and responses could be anticipated (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

In addition, this study, by design, was conducted in New Jersey with participants who are confirmed by the senate and appointed by the governor to their trustee positions. While it was bound to the state of New Jersey, the findings may be generalizable to other appointed trustees across the country in part because 69% of trustees across the country are appointed (Association of Governing Boards, 2016), and although self-reported, the demographics of this study's participants are largely consistent with national demographics of public higher education trustees. Continued studies on the experiences of higher education trustees could shed more light on trustee sensemaking by focusing in on populations of trustees based on their status as alumni or as self-described historians.

### **Implications**

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, its findings have implications for policy, research, practice, and leadership.

**Policy.** Findings from this study have implications for state policies related to the appointments of trustees. This study's findings largely supported research's findings that public higher education trustees serve multiple masters (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Pusser & Ordonika, 2001) and that their appointments are effectuated with little regard to institutional need (Michael et al., 1999). Current New Jersey law specifies that, among its many powers and duties, a college board of trustees in New Jersey has the authority to determine the institution's curriculum, to borrow money, to direct and control its

expenditures, to set policy, to hire and evaluate the college president, and to fix and determine tuition and fee rates (N.J.S.A. 18A:64-6, 2014). Further, despite this complexity of a public trustee's duties and increasing scrutiny of the sector, coupled with a 2007 state-commissioned report which criticized the sector's "complete absence of any mechanism to ensure internal accountability, independent external oversight and proper transparency", statute remains silent on the qualifications and skills required of trustees to navigate that complexity (Edwards et al., 2007, p. 2).

On February 8, 2018, however, New Jersey's Senate Higher Education Committee introduced Senate Bill 1833 (2018): Requires members of governing boards of public institutions of higher education to complete a training program developed by Secretary on Higher Education. As described, the bill requires members of governing boards of public institutions of higher education to complete a training program that is developed by the Secretary of Higher Education. In pertinent part, the bill notes:

...the secretary would prescribe the subject matter of the training, which will include, but need not be limited to, information concerning governance responsibilities, ethical standards, due diligence, the requirements of the "Senator Byron M. Baer Open Public Meetings Act," and the open public records law, issues associated with laws on privacy, board member fiduciary responsibilities, and the types of financial, organizational, legal, and regulatory issues associated with discharging the duties of a governing board member. Under the bill, the secretary could provide the training directly or arrange for, or specify,

the entity or entities to provide the training, and certify completion of the training for each governing board member. (S.1833, 2018)

Senate Bill 1833 (2018) is potentially a step in the right direction for the oversight of higher education in New Jersey, however, such an orientation, should be developed or delivered in partnership with the institutions so that trustee's responsibilities and expectations are clarified with all parties and early opportunities to cultivate institutional affection are not squandered.

In addition to the proposed state-mandated orientation, the establishment of statutory language that would set forth broad qualifications for trustees could help advance trust and, in turn, effectiveness, among board members. The assembly of minimal qualifications for trustees would provide a shared foundation through which trustees could initially connect with one another. Such broad qualifications might address, as borne out in this study's findings, a range of desired professional and/or institutionally-rooted orientations, previous governance experience, familiarity with institution, availability of time to serve, etc.

Policy might also consider statutory language that would set forth service expectations of trustees that extend beyond current ethical and financial disclosure requirements. At present, trustees in New Jersey may only be removed from a Board through the Governor's confirmation. Service expectations, broadly defined, could address participation and attendance in institutional proceedings. Such service expectations, with or without accompanying statutory language authorizing institutional boards to remove delinquent trustees, could provide institutional boards with heightened control over their boards. The establishment of qualifications and expectations for



trustees, whether through statutory language or through institution-based communications could serve to clarify the trustee's role and responsibilities, and, in turn, provide clarity as the trustee navigates his fiduciary responsibilities.

**Research.** Findings of this study have implications for continued research regarding trustee sensemaking and trust-based relationships among boards. Noting limitations of this study, it is recommended that replication studies of the quantitative phase of this study be conducted to promote its generalizability. A key finding of this study was that trustees draw from multiple orientations to navigate their complex roles. Additional research is needed on how trustees draw from their non-professional orientations. In particular, as borne out in this study, trustees with institutionally-rooted orientations were deferred to by their peers as historians and, in some cases, as the only trustee perspective with first-hand knowledge of the academic enterprise. Such institutionally-rooted orientations may include alumni, former employees, or donors. Further case studies focused on the exploration of trust-based relationships among boards that feature multiple trustees with institutionally-rooted orientations and those without such representation might reveal strategies for boards, institutions, and appointing authorities as they seek and/or onboard new members. In addition, research that seeks to identify factors and characteristics favoring trustee engagement is needed. As revealed in this study, trustee engagement is critical to institutional governance and the absence of engagement can lead to deterioration of trust.

Research focused on the experiences and impact of trustees from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds on public boards is also needed. At a time in which the diversity of college-going students in the country is increasing at a rapid rate, it is

essential that the perspectives of persons from traditionally underrepresented populations are part of the discussions and decision making processes that take place in the board rooms of our institutions of higher education.

**Practice.** Findings of this study have implications for institutional and board practices. First, findings revealed that trustees draw from multiple orientations to make sense of their responsibilities. In addition, trustees defer to their colleagues for their professional and non-professional orientations. It is recommended that, in light of this finding, that governing boards, in partnership with their institutional administrators, periodically assess the representativeness of their membership. While a deficit-based approach to a membership assessment may be more expedient, it is recommended that Boards engage in the assessment as a means to co-identify their strengths and their areas in need of improvement. Doing so may simultaneously reveal to boards that currently serving trustees are underleveraged and/or that there are areas of expertise/perspective that are not sufficiently represented. The results of such periodic assessments should be used to inform the board's nomination processes as well as its professional development and strategic goals.

Findings of this study also revealed that satisfaction derived from trusteeship was rooted in trust as described by institutional affection and relationships with administration. Hindrances to trust included a perceived lack of engagement by fellow trustees and a perceived lack of opportunities to engage meaningfully in the institution. With respect to trustees who fail to sufficiently engage in their responsibilities, it is recommended that expansion of statutory language be explored (as noted earlier). However, it is also recommended that, at the institutional level, boards establish baseline

metrics for trustee engagement that address preparation for and participation in official board meetings.

In addition, it is recommended that boards communicate clearly any expectations of trustees to participate in institution-based activities, events, and symposia that advance the mission or reputation of the institution. Some participants shared instances in which their presidents or board chairs appointed them to committees or projects based on their expertise. While these instances were infrequent and only described by a minority of participants, they were consistently characterized as highly satisfying. Moreover, all participants expressed that they would welcome opportunities aimed at aligning their professional, institutionally-rooted, or other orientations to their fiduciary responsibilities. This appetite for more thoughtful engagement of trustees, both formally and informally, creates opportunities to enhance trustee satisfaction and potentially advance good governance. The formal appointment of trustees to Board Committees often lies with the Chair of the Board. To this end, an assessment of individual trustee's perceived strengths, preferences and networks, if employed by the Board, could inform and advance the effectiveness of these appointments.

**Leadership.** This study also found that trusteeship is a mutually beneficial experience, that trustees are generally keen to engage more with their institutions, and trustees place the responsibility of creating engagement opportunities, by and large, on their institutional presidents. Thusly understood as a symbiotic experience that enriches the institution and the individual, trusteeship lends itself to an array of strategies that could foster increased opportunities for engagement.

The informal engagement of trustees in the lives of their institutions is perceived by trustees to be the responsibility of the institutional president. This informal engagement presents similar opportunities for satisfaction and good governance and uniquely positions the president to leverage trustee knowledge and orientations in ways that can cultivate institutional affection, engender trust, and assess and address institutional needs. It is therefore recommended that institutional presidents and administrators, in consultation with their trustees, invest time and energy in designing or presenting opportunities for trustees, as appropriate, to engage with the institution and with their professional networks outside of the official work of the board. Such opportunities should be aimed at cultivating institutional affection, leveraging trustee expertise, and/or mitigating representative-based deficits on the board.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation sought to explore the role professional orientation plays in how public college and university trustees navigate their fiduciary responsibilities. The purpose of this study was rooted in the practical problem of understanding better, in an era of heightened scrutiny and accountability of public higher education, how college and university trustees experience their fiduciary responsibilities and arrive at decisions.

This study found that trusteeship is complex and challenging. Key insights illuminated how trustees, through acts of reference, deference and perspective taking, draw from a continuum of orientations to navigate the complexity of their responsibilities. This continuum includes professional, institutionally-rooted, regional and traditionally underrepresented orientations. In addition, this study found that trustee sensemaking, as an amalgam of factors rooted in trust, is marked by institutional

affection, trust-based relationships, symbiotic rewards, and informal participation in the life of the institution.

This study's findings are timely as positive public sentiment toward higher education continues to wane and the decisions of institutional boards are increasingly scrutinized by regulators, the media, and consumers. Public higher education is confronting mounting external pressures. As fiduciaries of their institutions, trustees are tasked with managing the market strains of globalization, national waves of state disinvestment, record student debt levels, a rapidly changing demographic of incoming students, and unfunded regulatory mandates from state and federal legislatures. As a result, it is critical now, more than ever, that institutional leaders and policy makers, take renewed interest in how the individuals appointed to oversee our public institutions of higher education understand and steward their complex range of fiduciary responsibilities. Further, during times of continued tumult, it is critical that these parties foster effective institutional governance by thoughtfully and strategically engaging trustees as experts, advocates, and guardians of public higher education.

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## Appendix A

### Survey of Trusteeship and the Professional

**Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey.**

#### **I. Demographic Data**

**Please answer the questions that follow to the best of your ability.**

**1. What is your gender identity?**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not to Answer

**2. Are you a student trustee?**

- Yes
- No

**3. What is your age?**

- 18-30 years old
- 31-49 years old
- 50-69 years old
- 70 years or older

**4. What is your ethnicity?**

- White (non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American (non-Hispanic)
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer Not to Answer

**5. For how many years have you served as a trustee in higher education?**

- 10 years or more
- 7-9 years
- 4-6 years
- 1-3 years
- Less than 1 year

**6. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed (if currently enrolled, highest degree received)?**

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)

Vocational Training/Trade Certification  
Associate's degree  
Bachelor's degree  
Master's degree  
Doctorate/Terminal degree

**7. What is your current employment status?**

Employed for wages  
Retired  
Out of Work/Unable to work  
A homemaker  
A student  
Military

**8. What category below best represents your professional training/career?**

Education. *(Includes: officer, administrator, or faculty member of a college, university or higher-education organization; teacher/administrator of a primary/secondary school; and others.)*

Business. *(Includes: executive, administrator, or employee of: a large business corporation; a banking, financial, insurance, or real estate/property management company; a small business; and others.)*

Professional Service. *(Includes: accountant; attorney/law; construction/trades; dentist, physician/medical professional; psychologist/mental health professional/social worker; and others.)*

Other. \_\_\_\_\_

**II. Fiduciary Data**

Among a College trustee's chief fiduciary responsibilities are (1) oversight of capital assets, (2) oversight of financial assets, (3) oversight of human resources, (4) oversight of organizational reputation, and (5) advancing the mission of the organization.

Drawing from your own experience, please answer the questions that follow regarding the five chief fiduciary responsibilities:

**9. My fiduciary responsibilities as a trustee are complex.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neither Agree nor Disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**10. My fiduciary responsibilities as a trustee are challenging.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neither Agree nor Disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**11. Fiduciary Responsibility: Oversight of Capital Assets**

**11a. Among my responsibilities as a trustee, the oversight of my institution's capital assets is...**

Extremely Important    Very Important    Moderately Important  
Slightly Important    Not at All Important

**11b. As a member of the Board, I am called upon to oversee my institution's capital assets...**

Routinely            Often            Sometimes            Rarely            Never

**11c. My professional competencies prepared me to oversee my institution's capital assets.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neither Agree nor Disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**11d. As a member of the Board, my experience(s) overseeing my institution's capital assets has been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neither Agree nor Disagree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

**12. Fiduciary Responsibility: Oversight of Financial Assets**

**12a. Among my responsibilities as a trustee, the oversight of my institution's financial assets is...**

Extremely Important    Very Important    Moderately Important  
Slightly Important    Not at All Important

**12b. As a member of the Board, I am called upon to oversee my institution's financial assets...**

Routinely            Often            Sometimes            Rarely            Never

**12c. My professional competencies prepared me to oversee my institution's financial assets.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**12d. As a member of the Board, my experience(s) overseeing my institution's financial assets has been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**13. Fiduciary Responsibility: Oversight of Human Resources**

**13a. Among my responsibilities as a trustee, the oversight of my institution's human resources is...**

Extremely Important    Very Important      Moderately Important    Slightly Important  
Not at All Important

**13b. As a member of the Board, I am called upon to oversee my institution's human resources...**

Routinely      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

**13c. My professional competencies prepared me to oversee my institution's human resources.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**13d. As a member of the Board, my experience(s) overseeing my institution's human resources has been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**14. Fiduciary Responsibility: Oversight of Organizational Reputation**

**14a. Among my responsibilities as a trustee, the oversight of my institution's reputation is...**

Extremely Important   Very Important   Moderately Important   Slightly Important  
Not at All Important

**14b. As a member of the Board, I am called upon to oversee my institution's reputation...**

Routinely   Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

**14c. My professional competencies prepared me to oversee my institution's reputation.**

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neither Agree nor Disagree   Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**14d. As a member of the Board, my experience(s) overseeing my institution's reputation has been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree   Agree   Neither Agree nor Disagree   Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**15. Fiduciary Responsibility: Advancing the Mission of the Organization**

**15a. Among my responsibilities as a trustee, advancing the mission of my institution is...**

Extremely Important   Very Important   Moderately Important   Slightly Important  
Not at All Important

**15b. As a member of the Board, I am called upon to advance the mission of my institution ...**

Routinely   Often   Sometimes   Rarely   Never

**15c. My professional competencies prepared me to advance the mission of my institution.**



Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**15d. As a member of the Board, my experience(s) advancing the mission of my institution has been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**III. Utility of Trustees' Professional Orientations/Competencies**

**An individual's professional orientations/competencies are derived from his employment experiences. Professional orientation/competency includes the authority and influence a person cultivates from these experiences and the extent to which he sees himself as knowledgeable, a good judge of outcomes, respected, and deferred to for expertise on certain matters.**

**Drawing from your own experience, please answer the questions that follow regarding your trusteeship:**

**16. My professional competencies are well known to my fellow trustees.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**16a. As a member of the Board, my fellow trustees defer (either in part or entirely) to me on fiduciary matters related to my professional competencies.**

Routinely      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

**17. My professional competencies are well known to my institution's administration.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**17a. As a member of the Board, my professional competencies are effectively utilized by my institution's administration.**

Routinely      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

**18. I prefer engaging in fiduciary responsibilities over which I have some professional competence.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**19. I seek opportunities to apply my professional competencies to my work as a trustee.**

Routinely      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

**19a. I am provided opportunities to apply my professional competencies to my work as a trustee.**

Routinely      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

**20. The experience(s) I have had applying my professional competencies to my work as a trustee have been satisfying.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**21. I would welcome (additional) opportunities to apply my professional competencies to my work as a trustee.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

#### **IV. Information Resources**

**Drawing from your own experience, please answer the questions that follow regarding resources that are available to you as a trustee:**

**22. My institution provided me with an orientation to the Board.**

Yes

No

**22a. My institution provides me with opportunities to attend campus events.**

Yes

No

**23. My institution engages trustees in development and educational sessions focused, in part, on our fiduciary responsibilities.**

Yes

No

**24. My institution evaluates trustee performance.**

Yes

No

**25. My institution evaluates trustee satisfaction.**

Yes

No

**26. I am familiar with NJ Rev Stat § 18A:64-6 (2013) (the New Jersey Revised Statute regarding the Powers and Duties of Boards).**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**27. When I have a question about my fiduciary responsibilities, I seek guidance from (please rank the items below from MOST likely to LEAST likely):**

One of my fellow trustees

The College/University President

A College/University Staff Member

A Regional/National Peer Group

My Professional Network (not associated with the Board)

**V. Research Assessment**

**Drawing from your own experience, please answer the questions that follow regarding this survey.**

**28. This survey was clear.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**29. Taking this survey has prompted me to reflect upon my fiduciary responsibilities.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**30. Taking this survey has prompted me to reflect upon my professional competencies.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**31. Taking this survey has prompted me to consider further how my fiduciary responsibilities and professional competencies may be better aligned or leveraged by my Board and/or institution.**

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree nor Disagree      Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

**VI. Open Ended Questions**

**The next three questions are open-ended and optional. Your written responses are appreciated.**

**32. Do you perceive your Board as representing a valuable cross-section of professional expertise? Please explain.**

**33. Do you perceive your Board as lacking in any professional expertise? Please explain.**

**34. If applicable, how have you successfully applied your own professional expertise to your trusteeship? Please explain.**

**35. Is there anything else related to your experience as a trustee and/or a professional that you would like to share with the researcher? Please explain.**

## **VII. Closing**

**36. I am interested in participating in Phase II of this study and may be contacted for a private 1:1 interview. I understand that my name and institution will not be revealed in any data that is collected or published.**

Yes: My contact information is:

(First and Last Name); \_\_\_\_\_ (Phone); \_\_\_\_\_ (Email) \_\_\_\_\_

No

**37. This is the last question in the survey, by clicking “Submit” your responses will be recorded.**

**Submit**

**Go Back**

Auto reply upon submission: Thank you for completing this survey. Your time and input is sincerely appreciated. If you indicated that you would like to participate in Phase II of this study (1:1 interview), you will receive additional correspondence shortly.

END

## Appendix B

### Phase I Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

#### PHASE I

**TITLE OF STUDY:** A Mixed Methods Study Examining the Role Professional Orientation Plays in How Trustees of New Jersey's State Colleges and Universities Experience their Fiduciary Responsibilities

**Principal Investigator:** Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study regarding the experiences of state college/university trustees. This study will occur in two phases, however you are only being asked to participate in phase I at this time. Phase I includes a web-based survey not to exceed 15 minutes. At the conclusion of the survey, you may indicate if you wish to participate in Phase II which is a 1:1 interview to be scheduled at a later time.

This consent form will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for Phase I of this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the survey, you should feel free to discontinue the survey and direct questions to me.

Ane Turner Johnson, the Principal Investigator of this study, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be issued a copy of this signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

**A. Why is this study being done?**

This study is being conducted for a dissertation at Rowan University.

**B. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been selected to participate in this study due to your status as a sitting trustee on a state college/university governing board in New Jersey.

**C. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?**

Individuals who are currently serving as trustees of New Jersey's state colleges/universities are eligible to participate in Phase I of this study. Student trustees are not eligible to participate in this study.

**D. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**

Up to 81 subjects will be surveyed in Phase I of this study.

**E. How long will my participation in this study take?**

The study will take place over a period not to exceed three months. As a participant in Phase I of this study, I ask that you spend approximately 15 minutes completing the survey.

**F. Where will the study take place?**

Phase I of this study is a web-based survey. You will be asked to complete this survey from any internet connected device at any location of your choosing.

**G. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

In Phase I of this study, you will be asked to complete a web-based survey focused on how your professional background influences your trusteeship. Your responses will be de-identified and not attributable.

**H. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**

As a participant in Phase I (web-based survey) of this study, it is not anticipated that you will encounter any risks or discomforts.

**I. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**

The benefits of taking part in this study may be:

- Greater awareness of your professional orientation.
- Greater awareness of your fiduciary duties as a trustee.

It is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation may help us identify new strategies for appointing authorities and institutional boards that foster good governance.

**J. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?**

There are no alternative treatments available for Phase I (web-based survey) of this study. Your alternative is not to take part in this study. However, if you participate in Phase I of this study (web-based survey), you are under no obligation whatsoever to also participate in Phase II (interview) of this study.

**K. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**

During the course of the study, if necessary, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

**L. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**

There will be no cost to you to participate in this study.

**M. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**N. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in any study. Your personal information may be given out, only if required by law, the likelihood of this occurring is very, very, very slim. Your responses in this study will not be attributed to you. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name or any other personally identifiable information.

**O. What will happen if you are injured during this study?**

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to me at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

**P. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with me will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.



You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Rowan University, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028.

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**Q. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Ane Turner Johnson  
College of Education  
(856)256-4500 ext. 3818

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can also call:

Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

**What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have received answers to all of your questions.

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**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

- I agree to participate in Phase I (web-based survey) of this study.  YES  
 NO

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Phase II Consent to Take Part in a Research Study with Addendum

#### PHASE II

**TITLE OF STUDY:** A Mixed Methods Study Examining the Role Professional Orientation Plays in How Trustees of New Jersey's State Colleges and Universities Experience their Fiduciary Responsibilities

**Principal Investigator:** Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study regarding the experiences of state college/university trustees. This study is designed in two phases. Thank you for indicating your interest in participating in Phase II: A one-to-one interview (not to exceed 60 minutes) and possible follow-up session (not to exceed 30 minutes).

This consent form will provide information that will help you to decide whether you wish to volunteer for Phase II of this research study. It will help you to understand what the study is about and what will happen in the course of the study.

If you have questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you completely understand.

After all of your questions have been answered, if you wish to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

Ane Turner Johnson, the Principal Investigator of this study, or another member of the study team will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

#### **R. Why is this study being done?**

This study is being conducted for a dissertation at Rowan University.

#### **S. Why have you been asked to take part in this study?**

You have been selected to participate in this study due to (1) your status as a sitting trustee on a state college/university governing board and (2) your stated interest during Phase I of this study (survey) in participating in an interview.

**T. Who may take part in this study? And who may not?**

Individuals who are currently serving as trustees of New Jersey's state colleges/universities and have served for a minimum of one year in on their college/university board are eligible to participate in this interview phase of the study. Student trustees are not eligible to participate in this study.

**U. How many subjects will be enrolled in the study?**

It is expected that between 5 and 12 subjects will be enrolled in the interview phase of this study.

**V. How long will my participation in this study take?**

As a participant in Phase II of this study, I ask that you allow up to 60 minutes for an interview and up to 30 minutes some time thereafter for any required follow-up.

**W. Where will the study take place?**

Phase II of this survey is an interview. I will work with you to identify a location for the interview that is quiet, relatively private, and convenient for you.

**X. What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?**

You will be asked to participate in a 1:1 semi-structured interview with me. That interview will be audio recorded. The focus of the interview will be on exploring how your professional background influences your trusteeship.

**Y. What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?**

As a participant in Phase II (interview) of this study, you may feel at times uneasy when sharing your experiences as a trustee, however, the likelihood of this occurring is slim and you can discontinue the interview at any time.

**Z. Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?**

The benefits of taking part in this study may be:

- Greater awareness of your professional orientation.
- Greater awareness of your fiduciary duties as a trustee.

It is possible that you might receive no direct personal benefit from taking part in this study. However, your participation may help us identify new strategies for appointing authorities and institutional boards that foster good governance.

**AA. What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?**

There are no alternative treatments available for Phase II (interview) of this study. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

**BB. How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?**

During the course of the study, you will be updated, as necessary, about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

**CC. Will there be any cost to you to take part in this study?**

There will be no cost to you to participate in this study.

**DD. Will you be paid to take part in this study?**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

**EE. How will information about you be kept private or confidential?**

All efforts will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in any study. Your personal information may be given out, only if required by law, the likelihood of this occurring is very, very, very slim. Your responses in this study will not be attributed to you. Presentations and publications to the public and at scientific conferences and meetings will not use your name or any other personally identifiable information.

Any direct quotes that are provided by you in Phase II of this study and are used in this study will not be attributed to you and may be confirmed for accuracy with you in advance of any publication.

**FF. What will happen if you are injured during this study?**

If at any time during your participation and conduct in the study you have been or are injured, you should communicate those injuries to me at the time of injury and to the Principal Investigator, whose name and contact information is on this consent form.

**GG. What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may change your mind at any time.

If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, your relationship with me will not change, and you may do so without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also withdraw your consent for the use of data already collected about you, but you must do this in writing to Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, Rowan University, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028.

If you decide to withdraw from the study for any reason, you may be asked to participate in one meeting with the Principal Investigator.

**HH. Who can you call if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this study or if you feel you may have suffered a research related injury, you can call the Principal Investigator:

Dr. Ane Turner Johnson  
College of Education  
(856)256-4500 ext. 3818

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can also call:

Office of Research Compliance  
(856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

**What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?**

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

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**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

I agree to participate in Phase II (1:1 interview) of this study.     YES    NO

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**ROWAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
AUDIO/VIDEOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM**

**PHASE II**

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Principle Investigator Ane Turner Johnson, and researcher Brittany Goldstein. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audio record as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in Phase II of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team. The recording(s) will not include your real name. You will be assigned a participant name. The naming system will include chronological alphabetization. In no case will you be referred to by any derivation of your first or last name. In addition, in no case will your institution be identified.

The recordings will be stored on a secure server and access to the information will be passcode protected. Any hard copy transcripts or audio files will reflect the naming mechanism and will be retained indefinitely.

Your signature on this form grants the investigators named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigators will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that which is stated in the consent form without your written permission. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

**AGREEMENT TO AUDIO RECORDING**

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

I agree to permit the research team to audio record my participation in this study.  
\_\_YES \_\_NO

Subject Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_