

CHAMPION OF TWO WORLDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION OF NORTH CAROLINA EARLY COLLEGE LIAISONS'
LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT**CHAMPION OF TWO WORLDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF
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American high school reform has gone through many configurations during the past three decades. Dual enrollment, in which high school students access college courses for credit that can be applied toward high school and college transcripts simultaneously, is one of the more prevalent types of high school reform (Community College Research Center [CCRC], 2012). During the 2010-2011 academic year, there were slightly more than 2 million dual-credit enrollments in the United States, an astounding 67% increase nationwide in such enrollments since 2002-2003 (CCRC; Collins, 2012; Thomas, Marken, Gray, Lewis, & Ralph, 2013). One form of dual enrollment is early college, a secondary institution, typically located on a college campus, which allows dual-enrolled students the opportunity to earn a college degree while still in high school. In North Carolina, early colleges are initially funded by grants that are awarded by a private-public partnership called the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) (NCNSP, 2004a). Part of the grant funding pays for the salary of an early college liaison, a community college employee who, among other things, (a) assists in the development of programs of study; (b) coordinates high school and college schedules and calendars; (c) aids in the registration of students; and (d) develops college policies and procedures related to high

school students (NCNSP, 2004b). Despite a significant amount of empirical research focused on the early college model, there is a paucity – indeed, a seeming nonexistence – of literature related to the early college liaison. This qualitative phenomenological study filled a gap in the early college and educational partnership literatures by investigating the leadership experiences of early college liaisons – “boundary-spanners” who are tasked with navigating the differing cultures and curricula of K-12 and community college systems. Fourteen early college liaisons provided written reflections and documents for this study, and engaged in recorded interviews that focused on the leadership skills, social traits, and relationships that are required for maintaining student advocacy in a political educational environment. Data showed that early college liaisons (a) form professional relationships and communicate extensively with a wide variety of stakeholders; (b) collaborate closely with faculty and executive leadership on both “sides” of the partnership; (c) engage in diplomacy in a highly political environment; (d) possess knowledge of K-12 and community college cultures and academic requirements; and (e) advocate for students in times of conflict. Because dual enrollment has grown at such a rapid rate in the past decade (CCRC; Collins; Thomas et al.), and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities has recommended an increase in the amount of personnel who can bridge K-12 and higher education (Eddy, 2010), it is imperative that future research be conducted that examines the professional relationships, leadership skills, and social traits that this study unearthed, to explore how they can be applied to forthcoming educational partnerships. Such partnerships are bound to increase as state funding declines and institutions of learning create new avenues for maintaining effectiveness while decreasing financial burdens (Azinger, 2000; Eddy). Such research

would lend itself to the dearth of experiential studies focusing on how educational partnerships are planned, initiated, and developed (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Businesses, legislators, postsecondary educators, and the public have long sought change in the American high school. Secondary reform – characterized by prekindergarten-through-college (P-16) pathways and partnerships with postsecondary institutions – grew from a small movement in the 1980s to a nationwide phenomenon in recent years. Spurred by data and a dissatisfied labor market, high school reform is a response to a complex milieu of economic and educational factors. Starting as a reaction to the Reagan-era report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which, among other things, scrutinized the alignment of public-school learning and college admissions requirements, changes to secondary education have expanded for nearly three decades (North Carolina Business Committee for Education & Center for Teaching Quality [NCBCE & CTQ], 2007; Quint, 2006; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). The reasons for growth are numerous: Lack of academic preparation reflected in high remediation rates for college freshmen; a growing achievement gap between White students and students of color; low graduation rates; a rise in the number of students who are considered “at risk;” and an “increasingly sophisticated labor force” (Ascher & Schwartz, 1989, p. 2) that requires high levels of professional and interpersonal skills (Ascher & Schwartz; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003; Lerner & Brand, 2006; NCBCE & CTQ; Quint; Welch & Sheridan).

As P-16 issues became more complex, institutions began to take advantage of resource-sharing partnerships. These alliances allow institutions to fulfill their missions with more leverage and less financial burden (Azinger, 2000; Eddy, 2010). High school reform is at the core of many of these partnerships. Such efforts take numerous forms, but

the majority include some type of dual enrollment, which Robertson, Chapman, and Gaskin (2001) defined as “college-level course offerings provided to high school students on either the high school or college campus” wherein students “receive academic credit . . . on both their high school and college transcripts” (p. 1). Such scenarios, in theory, offer rigorous, college-level coursework that is relevant to the lives of the modern student (NCBCE & CTQ, 2007, Lerner & Brand, 2006; Quint, 2006).

Early Colleges

To provide at-risk high school students with multiple access points to college coursework, public school systems and community colleges have combined personnel and other resources to form structured dual-enrollment partnerships. Because dual enrollment tends to be more effective when courses are delivered on a college campus (Smith, 2007), early colleges are now at the forefront of the dual-enrollment movement. Early colleges are dual-enrollment programs housed on college campuses that provide students with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and a two-year college degree simultaneously (North Carolina New Schools Project [NCNSP], 2004a). Spearheaded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), more than 240 early colleges have opened nationwide since 2002 (Jobs for the Future, 2013). North Carolina has been particularly prolific in the creation of early colleges, and there are currently 74 such institutions in the state (T. Habit, personal communication, March 29, 2012). North Carolina early colleges are funded by grants awarded by a private-public partnership called the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP), which, through an initial \$11 million donated by the Gates Foundation,

has formed a bridge between community colleges and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to create the schools (NCNSP, 2004a).

Successes and challenges of early colleges. According to recently released data, the NCNSP-Gates Foundation investment has produced some interesting returns. A longitudinal experimental study managed by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's SERVE Center has determined that, in comparison to a control group of students who did not attend early college, a significantly higher percentage of North Carolina early college students (the intervention group) had taken or completed high school and college preparatory math classes. The study also showed that early college students, when compared to the control group, had a smaller achievement gap between White and minority students; fewer suspensions and unexcused absences; higher levels of academic engagement; and more positive academic experiences than their counterparts (Edmunds, 2010). Meanwhile, data have also indicated that, in North Carolina, early colleges have experienced higher overall and African-American graduation rates, and lower overall dropout rates (NCNSP, 2010).

In addition to positive trends reflected in secondary data, early college students appear to be making strides in their college coursework. Public-school figures reflect higher grades for early college students than traditional-age postsecondary enrollees, and early college students are passing their college classes at a higher rate than other dual-enrolled pupils (NCNSP, 2010; Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, & Department of Public Instruction, 2011) Furthermore, these North Carolina figures mirror a national trend, wherein the average early college student is earning more

than 17 college credits per year and carrying close to a 3.0 college GPA (Hoffman & Webb, 2010).

This good news, however, does not come without a price. Sharing of resources; scheduling challenges; and organizational and cultural differences between K-12 and postsecondary educators are common pitfalls of an early college partnership (Azinger, 2000; Hoffman & Webb, 2010; Huber & Williams, 2009). In North Carolina, early colleges are designed to handle these challenges. Among the requirements for each community college-high school partnership supported by NCNSP grant funding are (a) a memorandum of understanding, (b) invested high school leadership, (c) adequate learning space, and (d) the identification of “a college liaison to serve as the chief advocate for and support to the early college high school” (NCNSP, 2008, p. 2).

The early college liaison. According to American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRII) (2009a), “an active and engaged college liaison” (p. 59) is a prime element for a successful early college partnership. Their annual evaluation of the ECHSI stated “that along with commitment of high-level leadership, a college liaison plays a key role in facilitating the communication and coordination between the IHE [institution of higher education] and the ECS [early college school]” (p. 63). Although AIR and SRII briefly touched on the liaison role in prior yearly reports, the evaluators indicated they did not possess enough information until 2009 to adequately assess the characteristics of an effective liaison. This is indicative of the paucity – indeed, the seeming nonexistence – of research pertaining to this vital early college staff member. AIR and SRII reported that, nationwide, the liaison is sometimes a person who is relatively prominent on the college’s organizational chart, such as a vice president or

dean. Regardless of position, though, the liaison, which was labeled as “priceless” and a “God-send” (p. 63) by early college personnel who participated in the evaluation, was determined to need the skills of negotiation, familiarity with faculty, and commitment to the early college mission to be productive. AIR and SRII reported that

A liaison does not necessarily have high-level decision-making power in this role, but strong communication and problem-solving skills are essential. One full-time college liaison, formerly a department chair, succinctly stated: “I don’t consider [the position of liaison as] power — I consider it the ability to talk to the person who has the power.” (p. 63)

In North Carolina, the liaison is the only college position funded by the grant that supports the opening and first five years of an early college (NCNSP, 2008a). The supporting funds are granted to the partnering school district, which, as fiscal agent, supplies the money to the college. Original NCNSP rules allowed for liaison duties to comprise a full-time position or simply be part of an existing employee’s job responsibilities (NCNSP, 2004b). According to NCNSP literature, the college liaison’s roles include (a) assisting in the development of a plan of study that maps out a student’s path to completion of an associate degree, (b) helping coordinate high school and college schedules and calendars, (c) aiding in the registration of students into college classes, (d) developing college policies and procedures related to early college students, (e) facilitating the academic assessment of students into college courses that are designed for high school graduates, (f) planning curriculum between the secondary and postsecondary partners to avoid redundancy, and (g) working with community college department chairs to develop pertinent coursework (NCNSP, 2004b). In addition, liaisons are charged with

coordinating professional development and curriculum alignment between college and high school faculties. In these roles, the liaison can become invaluable to an early college high school's success. In fact, numerous North Carolina principals have intimated the liaison's importance, by expressing hope that the position continues to be funded by partnering colleges, even after the expiration of the grant (Vargas & Quiara, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Early colleges are having a large impact on North Carolina community colleges. In 2010, the state's 9,400 early college students took a combined 35,600 college courses (NCNSP, 2010). However, the early college model is not just an example of a dual-enrollment format that can improve academic outcomes for nontraditional students. It is also an illustration of a culture-bridging educational partnership. Within this milieu, the liaison – a college employee who is charged with bridging two distinct educational mindsets – is a critical cog. At the same time, in holding a position that advocates for first-generation college-goers, the liaison must be a “champion” for under-represented students and their educational attainment. Leadership, organizational, and sociological theories provide a framework that will allow for a better understanding of the role of the early college liaison, as well as prompt a description of the skill set that is necessary for a college employee to meet the early college mission.

Leadership as “adaptive work.” Heifetz (1994) examined leadership characteristics that are needed for supervising change in situations where complex conflict can occur. Heifetz viewed these characteristics through the lens of what he called “adaptive work.” “Adaptive work,” he wrote, “consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people

stand for and the realities that they face” (p. 22). Adaptive work includes coordinating conflict in such a way that it marshals seemingly incompatible energies toward a mutual goal. Furthermore, according to Heifetz:

Leadership requires orchestrating these conflicts among and within the interested parties, and not just between the members and formal shareholders of the organization. Who should play a role in the deliberations is not a given, but is itself a critical question. Strategy begins with asking: Which stakeholders have to adjust their ways to make progress on this problem? How can one sequence the issues or strengthen the bonds that join stakeholders together as a community of interests so that they withstand the stresses of problem-solving? (p. 22)

Considering that early college high schools are making strides in a very short time, Heifetz’s leadership philosophy applies when examining the early college movement. Heifetz warned that top-down authority, especially when it has been proven wrong in the past, is an ineffective way to cultivate meaningful cultural change. Rather, he recommended mining “personal and collective resources for accomplishing adaptive work” (p. 73). In many cases, he wrote, achieving this requires “leading without authority,” in which an employee who has little formal organizational power “seeks informal authority from those across organizational or factional boundaries” (p. 186) by advocating for a cause that is so strong and meaningful, it is worthy of organizational change.

For Heifetz (1994), adaptive work entails situations that call for complex, unknown answers. Among these, social issues can be the muddiest. Organizations such as community colleges and school systems, which have large constituencies with competing

values, must navigate many opinions about problems and their alleged remedies. In applying this theory to high school reform and the early college concept, one can see that the problems of low graduation rate, remedial college coursework, and the minority achievement gap call for leadership to manage the cultural misalignment that often occurs when a public high school is placed onto a community college campus. For Heifetz, applying authoritarian leadership to such a scenario would only cause angst. He advised “managing attention to issues rather than dictating authoritative solutions” (p. 88).

Regarding early colleges, the realm of adaptive work is where the high school and community college intersect. To manage the change that is necessary to make a K-12/two-year college partnership effective, the liaison – typically a nonauthoritarian “bridge spanner” – must, in the words of Heifetz (1994), “lead without authority” and possess the tools to make things happen quickly in a highly political arena.

The political frame of the early college. Managing change and integration across two distinctly different cultures is bound to cause conflict, and dwindling state support for public education doesn’t help. To engineer the battle for resources that inevitably follows the opening of an early college, the “champion” must be able to navigate conflict. According to Bolman and Deal (2003), conflict is a natural facet of politically charged organizations that operate with limited resources. To be sure, higher education is affected by politics, and a collision with K-12 culture is unavoidable when an early college is implemented. Bolman and Deal’s theory of the “political frame” is useful for examining the early college liaison’s world.

Bolman and Deal (2003) outlined four frames in their analysis of organizations: the structural frame, which focused on organizational mechanics; the human resource frame,

which highlighted organizations as entities that are composed of humans; the symbolic frame, emphasizing the esoteric issues of meaning and faith; and the political frame, which painted organizations as “competitive arenas characterized by scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 18). Of these models, the early college is most easily aligned with the political frame. In fact, considering the cultural and academic differences between K-12 educators and their higher education counterparts, the political frame’s alignment with the early college situation is uncanny.

Bolman and Deal (2003) wrote that the political frame includes five propositions, which are directly quoted here, with original italics (p. 186):

1. Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.
2. There are *enduring differences* among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating *scarce resources* – who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences make *conflict* central to organizational dynamics and underline *power* as the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from *bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position* among competing stakeholders.

Among the skills that Bolman and Deal (2003) highlighted as characteristic of the savvy bureaucratic politician, three are helpful in framing an examination of the early college liaison: (a) mapping the political terrain, wherein communication with politically influential people is cultivated; (b) networking and building coalitions through relationships; and (c) bargaining and negotiation, which require the skills of problem-

solving and putting objective goals before subjective feelings. These characteristics are at the heart of successful management by someone who does not have, in the words of French and Raven (1968), the “legitimate power” (p. 264) associated with a high position on an organizational chart.

“Bridging social capital.” Forming coalitions and negotiating do not come easy for everyone. Therefore, in looking at the early college liaison, it will be helpful to examine the relationship between the skills that are useful in the political frame and the individuals who bridge K-12 and higher education. The theory of social capital is considered useful in analyzing how middle-ranking people influence educational partnerships (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Eddy, 2010; Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Essentially, social capital is composed of the abilities and personal traits necessary to effectively build relationships, both within and between organizations. According to Eddy, these relationships are the foundation for achievement of a shared vision between partnering entities.

It is important to distinguish what Putnam (2001) called “bonding social capital” from “bridging social capital.” Bonding capital, he wrote, brings together people who have similar backgrounds (an example might be the organizer of an ethnically homogenous sorority). In contrast, bridging capital facilitates the “coming together” of people who are diverse, whether it be in ethnicity, religion, or thought. The idea of bridging social capital is particularly intriguing when applied to the early college liaison, who is charged not only with spanning educational cultures, but is also responsible for representing higher education to nontraditional (e.g., ethnically diverse) students.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

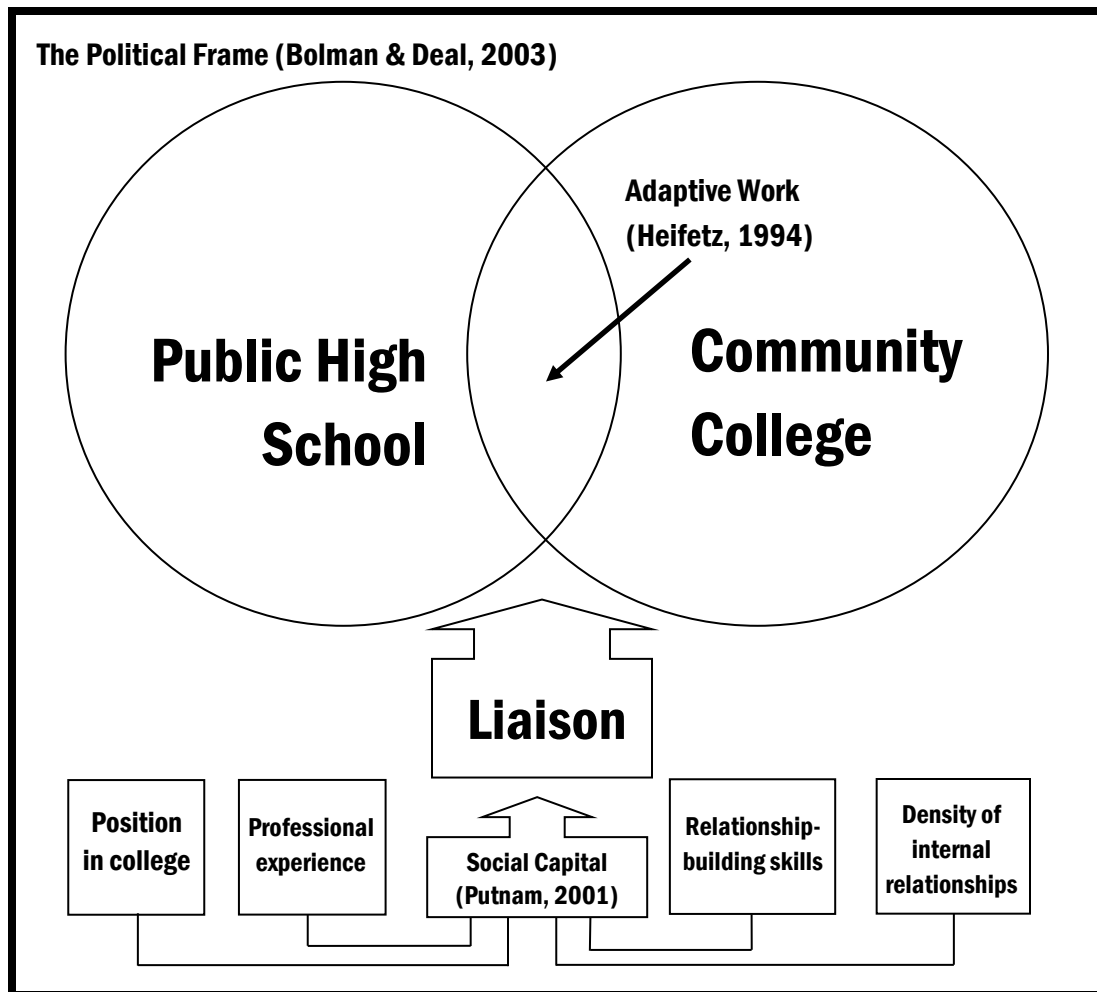


Figure 1 is a model of the conceptual framework. Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame contains the entire high school and community college, both of which are political in nature. Adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994) is the area where the high school and community college intersect. Within this adaptive work, located inside the political frame, liaisons carry out their duties. Social capital (Putnam, 2001) helps facilitate collaboration among diverse groups, and can aid in navigating conflict that arises when two culturally different institutions mesh. The amount of a person's social capital can

be influenced by professional rank, work experience, relationship-building skills, and quality of relationships within both partnering organizations (Eddy, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Partnerships in education have existed for many years. However, at a time in which public institutions are pressured to meet their missions with shrinking governmental resources, partnerships are becoming increasingly important. Chief among these partnerships are those that create pipelines for high school students to enter college and the work force. Public educational partnerships that provide academic pathways for students – particularly between secondary and postsecondary institutions – are high on policymakers’ agendas (Eddy, 2010). In North Carolina, early colleges are a prominent example of high school-college pathways and partnerships. Data pertaining to student achievement, school attendance, course completion, and the racial gap indicate that high schools on community college campuses are working (Edmunds, 2010; NCNSP, 2010). Part of the reason for this success is the early college liaison. Due to myriad variables in the early college milieu, it would very difficult, if not impossible, to measure the liaison’s quantitative impact on early college success. However, the paucity of research related to the liaison role in high school-college partnerships has shown that a qualitative analysis of the leadership and “boundary-spanning” experiences of early college liaisons will be very helpful to scholars’ understanding of the management of educational partnerships, as well as fill a gap in the academic literature focused on the early college concept.

Early college liaisons lead in two worlds. This study examined the liaison’s place in those worlds, and investigated the experiences of liaisons – community college employees who serve two masters (public high school and two-year postsecondary

institution) – from their perspectives. In addition, it described, from the liaison’s viewpoint, the challenges of melding two distinct cultures for the overall goal of improving the academic performance and experiences of nontraditional students. Finally, it probed the role that social capital (Putnam, 2001) and “leading without authority” (Heifetz, 1994) play in spearheading and maintaining the adaptive work (Heifetz) that takes place within Bolman and Deal’s (2003) political frame as it pertains to early colleges in North Carolina.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?” The subquestions were:

1. What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?
2. What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the “boundary-spanning” process?
3. How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in “boundary-spanning” between K-12 schools and community colleges?
4. What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?
5. How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. To provide an accurate and rich description of these experiences, an interpretive, qualitative research genre was deemed appropriate.

Qualitative inquiry recognizes the importance of the subjectivity of lived experience, and, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), attempts “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). In addition, an interpretive approach was chosen because of my relationship to the subject matter. As a former early college liaison (and current director of dual-enrollment partnerships for a large North Carolina community college), I wanted to understand how other people experienced the role. According to Creswell (2007), interpretive investigation happens when “researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21). Because the intent of the research was to describe a phenomenon – the leadership and “boundary-spanning” (Eddy, 2010) experiences of early college liaisons – a descriptive phenomenological research design was followed. Phenomenology is an epistemological system that informs a particular qualitative research framework which is designed to elicit descriptions of participant experiences (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenologists, Finlay (2009) wrote, “generally agree that our central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings. We aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (p. 6). The study’s research design was focused on describing the essence of early college liaison leadership as it is “concretely lived.”

In addition to its focus on rich descriptions of phenomena, phenomenology was selected for the proposed study because the methodology, according to Langdridge (2008), is a primary lens through which to view power and politics. Langdridge stated that, because power and politics are human phenomena, the expression of these

constructs “may be understood through the lived experience of the individual. Through the application of aspects of the lifeworld, ... it is possible to critically examine lived experience such that experiences imbued with power and politics may be identified” (p. 1136). In this study, the power and politics-related phenomenon examined was the leadership and cultural “boundary-spanning” (Eddy, 2010) of early college liaisons. Because the liaison position is not typically associated with high-level authority at a North Carolina community college, it is useful to describe how the liaison facilitates the adaptive, conflict-prone work (Heifetz, 1994) that results within politically oriented organizations with limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Again, phenomenology is appropriate because of my relationship to the early college liaison position. As a former liaison, I am intimately interested in the phenomenon of culture-bridging leadership that carries little, if any, of the “legitimate power” that comes with a prominent position on an organizational chart (French & Raven, 1968). Phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) wrote, should “reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher” (p. 21). It should be noted, however, that, according to Glesne (2011), a close relationship between researcher and subject can have its pitfalls, and, historically, purveyors of qualitative inquiry have gone to great length to retain a sense of objectivity during data collection.

According to ethnographer Savyasaachi (1998), though, a close relationship between researcher and subject is of paramount importance in qualitative research. He wrote that sacrificing rich dialog and rapport with participants, in an effort to be mindful of the positivist concepts of validity and objectivity, stifles the researcher’s quest for meaning. “Subjectivity when constructed as ethically and culturally neutral,” Savyasaachi wrote,

“discourages dialogues and discourses across differences, prevents exchange of ideas and becomes a means to accumulate and monopolize symbolic capital” (p. 86). According to the author, a close relationship to one’s participants, on the other hand, helps the researcher gain “access to the phenomena of day to day living” (p. 86). The goal of this dissertation was to make a connection with the essence of early college liaisons’ lived leadership experiences; therefore, my relationship to the phenomenon of “boundary-spanning,” though controlled for the sake of neutrality, was a feature of the study.

Participant Selection, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

The participants in this study were liaisons employed with New Schools Project-affiliated early colleges housed at North Carolina community colleges. Because liaisons across the state vary in the amount of time spent performing early college-related duties, the selected informants were liaisons whose full-time job duties were dedicated to early college functions. The recommended number of participants varies for a phenomenological study, although most scholars lean toward about 10. Morse (1994) advised at least six participants, while Polkinghorne (1989) listed between five and 25 as optimal. Creswell (1998), meanwhile, wrote that 10 participants are sufficient in phenomenology, and Boyd (2001) recommended between two and 10. Some scholars, though, such as Moustakas (1994) and Wertz (2005), did not attach a number. Wertz stated that the number of participants is far less important than the point at which repetition – otherwise known as “saturation” – starts to occur among subjects. Moustakas was even more detailed, but, as with Wertz, remained noncommittal about number. He wrote that “essential criteria include: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, (and) is

willing to participate in a lengthy interview” (p. 107). Because the generally recommended number of participants was about 10 (Benisovich & King, 2003), it was determined that, for this study, 14 early college liaisons from across North Carolina would be interviewed and documented. In retrospect, this was sufficient, because, as the findings show, data saturation did occur on a number of topics related to the study’s research question and subquestions.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with all 14 participants, to cull the rich data that are needed to grasp the essence of a phenomenon. Such interviews – because they describe a person’s perception of a phenomenon – are considered to be the most powerful form of phenomenological data collection (Ashworth, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Giorgi, 2009; Groenewald, 2004; Hein & Austin, 2001; Langdridge, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, the phenomenological interview technique recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) was employed for this study. This interviewing method, among other things, is designed to gather data about specific situations through conversational, back-and-forth interaction in which “the interviewer and the subject act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other” (p. 32). Because of my relationship to the phenomenon being investigated, it was determined that this reciprocal approach would lend itself to generating rich data. In addition, participants’ reflective writings and submitted documents were used to glean information related to the leadership of North Carolina early college liaisons, as were the extensive notes that I took during data collection and analysis.

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed, and multiple readings of transcribed interview data were performed, to uncover the essence of the

phenomenon being examined. Data were coded and themed, to target recurring ideas related to the leadership of early college liaisons. Words, phrases, or large passages that described the phenomena of leadership and “boundary-spanning” were extracted from the raw data and clustered into themes. The data were coded and themed in their entirety three times. The subjectivity of phenomenological inquiry requires that the researcher look beyond personal feelings, so as to focus on participants’ descriptions of the living experience to uncover the essence of the phenomenon. Because of this, “bracketing,” the act of the researcher separating subjective feelings from the data collection process, took place prior to and during data collection (Langdrige, 2008; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). A full description of the bracketing methods that were used for this study is included in Chapter Three; however, it is prudent to note here that bracketing prior to data collection was partially done through a pilot interview with an early college liaison who was not a participant in the final study. During the pilot interview, I took care to recognize any personal biases that could affect the neutrality of data collection during subsequent interviews with early college liaisons. Bracketing during data collection was done through continuous note taking and through immediate listening to and transcribing of recorded data, both of which helped me recognize and account for any biases that could affect the data.

Assumptions and Delimitations

This phenomenological study included several assumptions. First, it was assumed that early college liaisons would have experiences that are detailed enough to provide thick, rich descriptions about leadership that is not related to the “legitimate power” (French & Raven, 1968) associated with a high position on an organizational chart. This

assumption arose from literature that indicated the position is one of negotiation, planning, and “boundary-spanning.” The assumption was also linked to my experiences as an early college liaison for a large North Carolina community college.

Secondly, it was assumed that early college liaisons that have been in the position for two years or longer would have had experiences that reveal the essence of the phenomenon being described. One of the main justifications for setting this guideline was so that collected data would reflect liaisons that had (a) experienced leadership, (b) accumulated social capital, and (c) participated in the academic growth of a significant number of students. It was also assumed that early colleges that have been in business for four years or longer – institutions that have senior-year high school students – would be significant partners with the higher educational institution with which they were affiliated, and that their liaisons would have played a large role in shaping these established partnerships. Finally, it was assumed that interviews with liaisons and other data related to 14 North Carolina early college liaisons would result in proper data saturation, so that common themes would be evident within collected data.

Among the study’s delimitations is the fact that it only represents liaisons who worked for 14 North Carolina early colleges. Web site searches and a list of early college liaisons created during research indicated that 65 of the state’s 74 early colleges would have possibly qualified for the study (i.e., they had been open for four years or longer and were affiliated with community colleges). Therefore, study participants represented slightly less than 22% of qualified early colleges, although, in reality, this percentage is probably higher, due to the unlikelihood that all nonparticipating early colleges’ liaisons had been holding the position for two years or longer. This delimitation, though, is

appropriate, because the goal of a phenomenological study is to provide detailed description about the lived experiences of participants vis-à-vis a particular phenomenon, and, because all participants had been working for at least two years as an early college liaison, they had experienced the phenomenon of “boundary-spanning” that defines the position. Furthermore, the number of participants was quickly deemed appropriate, as the data saturation that Wertz (2005) recommended for a phenomenological design occurred quickly on many points related to the research questions. In addition, and possibly most importantly, all participants appeared to be, in the words of Moustakas (1994), “intensely interested” in the phenomenon of being an early college liaison (p. 107). Although it would be a falsehood to say that all participants displayed the same level of intensity, every person who was interviewed had an obvious passion for helping young students navigate the college experience, and they provided a wealth of data that described North Carolina early college liaison leadership. Another delimitation was that the study focused solely on the early college liaison, and did not examine the relationship that other early college employees have with the spanning of K-12 and community college cultures. However, because the liaison is typically the only community college employee who works directly for the early college, this delimitation is justifiable.

Early colleges in North Carolina are not always affiliated with community colleges, and this presents an additional delimitation. Some early college partnerships are between school districts and four-year universities (T. Habit, personal communication, March 29, 2012). These partnerships were not examined or described in this study. Although such partnerships have many similarities to those in which community colleges are involved, they, no doubt, contain variables that do not exist among early college partnerships with

two-year institutions. Therefore, it was decided that descriptions of liaisons' leadership experiences in a university setting could stray from the essence of similar experiences in a community college setting.

Implications of the Study

At a time when dwindling resources have resulted in an increased call for academic innovation in the form of partnerships, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities has recommended an increase in the amount of educational personnel who can bridge K-12 and higher education (Eddy, 2010). "Work on seamless educational systems," Eddy wrote, "builds on the ideas and ways to best support student learning and potential, thus underscoring the need for alignment" (p. 14). Because of this need, it is useful to describe the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons, because these professionals navigate the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2003) that is formed through a high school-community college partnership. The leadership of these individuals, especially during times of conflict and scarce resources, is a perfect example of the "adaptive work" that requires nimble leadership (Heifetz, 1994).

In addition to providing much-needed information about leadership in the setting of educational partnerships (Eddy, 2010), this study could help policymakers determine if the liaison position is worth funding after North Carolina News Schools Project grant money expires at the end of an early college's five-year funding period. The extensive evaluation of early colleges by the American Institutes for Research and SRI International (2009b) indicated that the liaison is crucial to the effective melding of secondary and postsecondary academic cultures. In addition, early college principals have expressed their concern that this important position – which plans curriculum,

coordinates professional development, and facilitates scheduling – could be at risk when an early college’s grant cycle ends. This study could lend itself to the seemingly nonexistent research focused on early college liaisons through its descriptions of the position’s leadership activities and potential (Vargas & Quiara, 2010).

Furthermore, this study touched upon gaps in the early college literature: The paucity of research related to educational staffing that supports the model, the bridging of public secondary education with that of a community college, and the specific role of the liaison in establishing an early college (Fischetti, MacKain, & Smith, 2011). Finally, and, perhaps, most importantly, the study could become an essential brick within the vast wall of literature about educational partnerships, by being one of the very few studies focused on participants’ lived experiences within those partnerships. The lack of research has been noted by Miller and Hafner (2008), who expressed confidence that experiential studies could reveal important details about how educational partnerships are planned, initiated, and developed.

Terms and Definitions

The following are the terms and definitions that were used in this study:

Achievement gap. Differences in academic achievement between White students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, and students of different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006).

Adaptive work. A work environment in which conflict arises due to a required change in values, beliefs, or behavior. Such an environment forces colleagues to adapt to change and navigate conflict (Heifetz, 1994).

At-risk student. Although the definition of at-risk students can include children with disabilities (Welch & Sheridan, 1995), for the purposes of this study, at-risk students were defined as (a) ethnic minorities, (b) economically disadvantaged, and (c) first-generation college-goers (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). For the purposes of this report, an “at-risk student” is synonymous with a “nontraditional student.”

Community college. Two-year colleges that feature an open admissions policy and offer students academic credentials (degrees, diplomas, and certificates) in programs of study that (a) transfer to four-year colleges and universities or (b) provide career- and life-enhancing skills related to vocational and technical fields; continuing adult education; work force and economic development; and community enrichment (Kane & Rouse, 1999).

Dual credit. Academic credit that is recorded simultaneously on a student’s high school and college transcript after successful completion of a college course (Andrews & Barnett, 2002).

Dual enrollment. An enrollment status wherein a student simultaneously takes college and high school classes. A result of dual enrollment is that students receive dual credit upon course completion. These courses can be offered on a high school or college campus (Andrews & Barnett, 2002; Robertson, Chapman, & Gaskin, 2001).

Early college. A small, autonomous high school that partners with an institution of higher education to provide students with the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit (NCNSP, 2004c).

Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI). An initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that provides start-up funds for early colleges (AIR & SRII, 2009b).

Early college liaison. The key coordinator for the academic and administrative relationship between an early college and its higher education partner. The early college liaison is typically a college employee (AIR & SRII, 2009a).

Educational partnership. A collaboration involving at least two organizations that can meet “education and economic goals at the individual, institutional, and state levels” (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010, p. 333).

First-generation college-goer. A student who represents the first generation of a family to attend college (AIR & SRII, 2005).

High school reform. Changes to the academic and physical structure of American high schools, which have been initiated as a response to soaring high school dropout and college remediation rates (Quint, 2006).

K-12. Kindergarten through 12th-grade public education.

Middle college. “Alternative high schools located on college campuses that aim to help at-risk students complete high school and encourage them to attend college” (United States Department of Education, 2007a, p. 1).

Nontraditional student. Students who are (a) ethnic minorities, (b) economically disadvantaged, and (c) first-generation college-goers (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989).

North Carolina New Schools Project. A public-private partnership that (a) awards funds and (b) provides academic and administrative leadership to the vast majority of early colleges in North Carolina (NCNSP, 2004a)

P-16. A pre-school through college education system (Hamblen County Foundation for Educational Excellence and Achievement, 2010).

Political frame. In organizations, the “process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 181).

Social capital. In sociology, the theory that relationship-building facilitates productive activity that otherwise would not be achievable (Coleman, 1988).

Tech Prep. Federally funded career-technical programs that provide academic pathways from high school to college, and often include dual enrollment (Brown, 2001; McDavid, Boggs, & Stumpf, 2005; Waller & Waller, 2004).

Conclusion

This study investigated the leadership and “boundary-spanning” experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. The overarching research question for this study was “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?” In addition, several subquestions addressed relationships, challenges, bridging of academic cultures, social skills, student advocacy, and conflict management related to the early college liaison position. The study was framed by the concepts of adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994), in which professional relationships which sometimes require “leading without authority” are tempered by conflict and uncertainty; Bolman and Deal’s (2003) political frame, an environment that requires the skills of bargaining and negotiation; and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2001), or the characteristics that ease collaboration among diverse groups.

To capture the essence of the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons, the study incorporated an interpretive, phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is used to describe lived experience in relation to a phenomenon, and it is useful to depict leadership through the eyes of a professional, the early college liaison,

who does not have high-ranking status within an educational institution. The study also described how early college liaisons “live in two worlds,” by bridging two very different cultures: K-12 and community college, and how, through this bridging, early colleges meld with their higher-education partners.

Although the study was limited to 14 early college liaisons, the number of participants was plentiful enough to reach a data saturation point, so that an essence for early college liaison leadership was established. A description of this essence is a much-needed addition to the current early college literature, and is beneficial to the growing body of research related to educational partnerships and leadership.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This phenomenological study describes the leadership experiences of early college liaisons. Early college liaisons are tasked with bridging the culture of higher education and K-12 public school systems. By their nature, community college-high school partnerships are resource-sharing entities that can result in conflict and negotiation, particularly in times of limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Heifetz, 1994). To frame the culture-spanning leadership duties of the early college liaison, it is important to understand dual enrollment, the early college movement, and other joint endeavors that, historically, have included a “champion” (Eddy, 2010) who cultivates the collaboration and resource-sharing of an educational partnership. The following is a review of the literature that pertains to dual enrollment, early college, and similar academic partnerships. It also provides context for the study’s conceptual framework.

This literature included historical perspectives on dual-enrollment partnerships and their benefits and challenges, as well as an in-depth look at early colleges and their impact on the state of North Carolina. Several different dual-enrollment scenarios have been analyzed in empirical literature, and a number of scholars have taken note that these arrangements require a person who is designated to manage the partnership. There is a paucity of research, however, specifically focused on such liaisons. Furthermore, no empirical studies related to the early college liaison could be found within the literature. Research focused on professionals who manage dual-credit partnerships is needed, because such programs have grown rapidly for decades and have permanently altered the scope of academic programming at American community colleges (Edwards & Hughes, 2011; Welsh, Brake, & Choi, 2005). Concurrent-enrollment programs have different

characteristics at each participating community college; however, all programs share the common trait of providing high school students with opportunities to earn college credit (Jordan, Cavalluzzo, & Corallo, 2006). In addition, dual-enrollment collaborations are intended to support smooth matriculation to college from high school (Education Resources Information Center [ERIC] Development Team, 2000). The literature revealed that dual-credit programs take various forms, including tech prep, middle colleges, and early colleges. The literature also showed that these programs – in all formats – often serve underrepresented youth, such as students who are minorities or who are considered to be “at-risk” of not completing high school. Edwards and Hughes (2011) summed it up well when they wrote that

Today, many educators, researchers, and policymakers view dual enrollment as a strategy to help a broader range of students make the transition from high school to college. We are in the midst of a national movement to increase the college attainment of our population, which means encouraging college-going and supporting college persistence among those who have little college experience in their families, those who are lower- and middle-achievers in high school, and those who lack motivation for continued education. For such students dual enrollment can be an introduction that helps them understand what college requires and offers and may enhance aspirations and encourage future college attendance by showing them that they are indeed capable of doing college-level work. In addition, dual enrollment can reduce the cost of college by providing college credit that is often low- or no-cost and potentially shorten the time to a degree.

As an element within the “national movement” referenced by Edwards and Hughes (2011), the early college liaison is a force in the transformation of the American high school. The liaison is a product of the dual-enrollment phenomenon, and this is reflected in the bridging of K-12 and higher education that is a requirement of the position. Considering the national expansion of the early college model – partnerships that feature a secondary institution housed on the campus of a higher education partner – the liaison represents what dual enrollment has become, and, perhaps, what it will grow into. Certainly, high school-college partnerships are becoming more prevalent on the nation’s higher-education campuses, particularly in an era when public accountability is increasing and governmental resources are declining.

Historical Background

High school-postsecondary partnerships and integration are nothing new; collaborative programs between the two educational levels date back in some form to the first half of the 20th century (Andrews, 2001; Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; Boswell, 2001; Hébert, 2001; Kisker, 2006; Marshall & Andrews, 2002; Stoel, 1988). Alignment of high school graduation requirements and college entrance standards can be traced to the late 1800s, when the National Education Association (NEA) repeatedly convened a panel of experts between 1893 and 1918 to address the issue (Azinger, 2000; Stoel). A number of years later, Leonard Koos’ 6-4-4 plan in the 1930s aimed to create a seamless system for grades 1-14 that included junior high schools and junior colleges (Kisker). In addition, advanced placement (AP), secondary courses for which students earn college credit upon passing an end-of-course exam, has been available on high school campuses since the 1950s (Boswell; Stoel). Stoel recalled how college credit-bearing opportunities

quickly became a fixture in American education, and cited the fact that, by 1956, more than 1,100 high schools in the United States were offering AP credit.

Over the years, AP has been a means for students to get a taste of college before leaving high school. Stoel (1988) pointed out that “the assurance of mastering a difficult college-level examination can ease the transition to college enormously” (p. 14).

However, secondary-postsecondary transitions are oftentimes anything but smooth. In many cases, especially upon entrance to a community college, high school graduates are subject to academic remediation through developmental coursework that bears the costs of tuition but provides no academic credit (Crist, Jacquart, & Shupe, 2002).

The preparation problems that many students face upon entering college contrast with the dilemma that some advanced students encounter while still in high school – the challenge of having a scholastically meaningful senior year. Research has found that many advanced high school students complete graduation requirements while still juniors (Bailey et al., 2002; Collins, 2012; Edwards & Hughes, 2011). Pierce (2001) expounded on this problem, when he wrote that:

Today, there is a growing consensus that for some students, the junior and senior years in high school are poorly used. This is particularly true for students who have a clear goal to attend college upon graduation from high school. These students typically take a carefully planned curriculum and complete their requirements for graduation from high school and entrance to college during or by the end of their junior year. At that point, many students coast during their senior year rather than take courses that require a high level of effort. (p. 4)

In offsetting the trend that Pierce described, Bailey et al. stated that dual enrollment is oftentimes “seen as a way to encourage students who might otherwise ‘slack off’ to engage in demanding coursework during the final year of high school” (p. 21).

Dual Enrollment

Overview. Dual-enrollment programs are found in all regions of the United States, and 42 states have official policies and statutes focused on the practice, which is also commonly referred to as concurrent enrollment (Collins, 2012; Edwards & Hughes, 2011; Lowe, 2010; Speroni, 2011a; Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education [WICHE], 2006). According to the Community College Research Center (CCRC) (2012), these secondary and postsecondary partnerships allow high school students to enroll in college classes, giving them the means to earn high school and college credit simultaneously.

Nationwide, dual enrollment is huge. During the 2010-2011 academic year, there were slightly more than 2 million dual-credit enrollments in the United States, and 82% of the country’s high schools reported offering concurrent-enrollment options to their students (Thomas, Marken, Gray, Lewis, & Ralph, 2013). This is an amazing leap from a decade ago, when, in 2002-2003, dual enrollment accounted for about 1.2 million enrollments at 71% of the nation’s high schools (CCRC, 2012; Collins, 2012). This almost 67% increase in enrollments is indicative of the fact that dual-enrollment, in all of its forms, is becoming progressively more important to the “national movement to increase the college attainment of our population” referenced by Edwards and Hughes (2011). For comparison, the rapid development of dual-enrollment programs can be juxtaposed with national high school enrollment growth – since 1995, young students

taking community college coursework has increased by more than 100%, while the overall high school population has grown by less than 20% (Speroni, 2011b). On the other side of the high school-college coin, postsecondary institutions have largely subscribed to the dual-enrollment phenomenon. According to Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2009), 98% of public two-year colleges and 77% of public four-year colleges in the U.S. allowed high school students to take courses for college credit in 2005.

Considering the growth that has occurred in the last 10 years, dual enrollment is one of the most prevalent avenues for providing high school students with access to postsecondary learning opportunities (Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007). The practice has existed in North Carolina since the early 1980s. House Bill 1044, commonly known as the Huskins Bill, which was ratified by the General Assembly in 1983, allowed community colleges and Local School Administrative Units (LSAUs) to form partnerships that would “provide for college courses, to be offered to qualified high school students with college credits to be awarded to those high school students upon the successful completion of the courses” (North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], 2008, p.14). By the end of the decade, state legislation had been passed that waived tuition for all high school students taking community college courses (NCCCS, 2008), and, in 2011, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the NCCCS developed the Career and College Promise program, which provides specific curricula aimed at giving high school students prescribed academic “pathways” leading to college transfer credit or a college certificate or diploma (NCCCS, 2012).

Tech prep. Since the 1980s, tech prep partnerships have been primary avenues for providing high school students with tuition-free college courses that teach job-related skills. Tech prep combines dual-credit coursework with career exposure and internship opportunities. Kiker's (2007) opinionated article about Georgia's P-16 education initiative embodies the spirit of such programs, which mesh secondary and postsecondary technical and vocational curricula. Kiker wrote:

Every state should . . . promote the alignment of secondary and postsecondary education, workforce development, economic development, adult education and welfare programs into a more comprehensive system focused on students' educational advancement, wage progression and improving the standard of living for all. (p. 38)

Tech prep is federally funded dual-enrollment programming that meshes high school and college credit. According to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act Amendments (1998), tech prep is a combined course of study involving two years of high school and two years of college coursework that "provides technical preparation in an area such as engineering technology, applied science, a mechanical, industrial, or practical art or trade, agriculture, a health occupation, or business, or applied economics" (p.7).

In providing a link between two levels of education, one of the fundamental goals of tech prep is to strengthen bonds between high schools and colleges (United States Department of Education, 2008). This relationship is typically cultivated through the development of a tech prep consortium. According to Waller and Waller (2004), "a tech prep consortium is a collaboration of secondary and two-year postsecondary educational

entities working together in coordination with business and industry to implement tech prep programs” (p. 626).

The Perkins Act’s definition of tech prep education references industrial and mechanical trades (Miller & Gray, 2002), terms that hark back to the 19th century’s Industrial Revolution. However, career-technical curricula have become quite complex in modern times, and many of the target careers require advanced math, science, and language skills (Laanan, Compton, & Friedel, 2006). As such, these occupations – and, therefore, tech prep education – are indelibly tied to local economies. Brown (2001), in an article focused on Texas tech prep consortia, touched on the community college’s role in the development of tech prep curricula and its link to workforce development:

By virtue of their mission, community and technical colleges play a pivotal role in the coordination of multiple levels of educational, economic, and community partnerships that link public education with business, industry, and labor. Tech prep and school-to-work initiatives exemplify these partnerships. (p. 61)

Such consortia can be found across the United States. About 7,400 high schools – approximately 47% of such institutions in America – have a tech prep program. In addition, the vast majority of community colleges in the U.S. participate in a tech prep consortium, and two-year postsecondary institutions are the primary college-level providers of tech prep education in the country (United States Department of Education, 2007b; Laanan et al., 2006). As with overall dual-enrollment, tech prep is widespread in the United States. In 2010-2011, more than 601,000 of the nation’s total 2 million dual-credit enrollments were in tech prep areas of study (Thomas et al., 2013).

North Carolina is no exception to the national trend. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 391,412 high school students and 128,964 college students enrolled in career-technical education in the state during the 2004-2005 academic year (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2009). In North Carolina, tech prep serves two major goals: (a) to prepare students for work in technical, high-wage fields, and (b) to provide students with opportunities for a “seamless educational program” from the beginning of high school until the completion of a two-year college credential, whether it be a certificate, diploma, degree, or apprenticeship (NCCCS, 2009).

Middle colleges. Although tech prep programs challenge high school students with rigorous college coursework, there is little question as to the type of student they target – due to participants’ career goals or other factors, it is typically the pupil who may not be inclined to attend a four-year college or university. The focus on this demographic began after the publication of Parnell’s (1985) book *The Neglected Majority*, a seminal work that focused on middle-achieving students, which has been acknowledged as an inspiration for dual-enrollment programs that are not necessarily designed for high-achievers (Beebe & Walleri, 2005). In contrast to early forms of dual enrollment, which served students with high grade point averages (Bailey & Karp, 2003), middle colleges are a good example of dual-credit partnerships that cater to middle- and under-achieving students. According to Mattis (2008), middle- and under-achieving students are “high school juniors or seniors with a ‘C’ grade average and little or no motivation to attend a postsecondary institution” (p. 7). The growth of programs that serve such “at-risk” youth have grown in recent years, as educators and policymakers have looked beyond the

academic elite for dual-enrollment opportunities (Bailey et al., 2002; Dutkowsky, Evensky, & Edmonds, 2006).

In North Carolina, many dual-enrollment programs are specifically geared toward serving underrepresented youth, including students who are minorities or who are considered “at-risk.” These programs include middle college high schools and early college high schools, which are typically housed on college campuses (Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; Jacobson, 2005; Seal, 2004; Trevino & Mayes, 2006). In an article focused on academic support at middle and early colleges, Born (2006) provided a combined definition for these two types of dual-enrollment programs:

Middle college-early colleges . . . offer an accelerated learning experience in a personalized, supportive environment to students who have traditionally been underserved in college. These blended institutions are cosponsored by community colleges and school districts and are physically located on a college campus.
(p.50)

However, more so than early colleges, middle colleges are typically focused on introducing older high school students to college academics and culture. Despite their common advocacy for underrepresented youth, most middle college high schools differ scholastically from the majority of early college high schools, and perhaps the largest contrast is that middle colleges simply put students on a path toward postsecondary education, while early colleges focus largely on the completion of a collegiate credential. Essentially, middle colleges are designed to (a) prevent students from dropping out of high school, (b) expose at-risk students to a college environment, and (c) allow students

an opportunity to earn a limited number of college credits prior to high school graduation (Borsuk & Vest, 2002; Cunningham & Wagonlander, 2000; Jordan et al., 2006).

Early colleges. Perhaps the single biggest difference between middle colleges and early colleges is the amount of college credit that can be earned by the latter's students. Because students typically enter the program as high school freshmen, early colleges provide them with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and a two-year college degree simultaneously (NCNSP, 2004a). Under the umbrella of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), more than 240 early colleges have opened nationwide in the past decade (Jobs for the Future, 2013). North Carolina leads the nation in early colleges, and there are now 74 in the state (T. Habit, personal communication, March 29, 2012). The North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) is the public-private entity that funds startup grants for North Carolina early colleges, and has done so since 2004 (NCNSP, 2004a).

Early colleges that are sponsored by ECHSI and NCNSP were created to serve nontraditional students who are considered to be at-risk of academic failure, not because of their learning abilities or discipline concerns, but because of characteristics that are beyond their control. These nontraditional pupils are (a) ethnic minorities, (b) of low socio-economic status, (c) learning English as a second language, and/or (d) first-generation college-goers (American Institutes for Research & SRI International [AIR & SRII], 2009b). To accelerate the learning experience of these students, early colleges and community colleges collaborate to provide dual-enrollment programming that satisfies high school and college requirements simultaneously. In combining these two institutions, the "NCNSP's goal is to spark and support deep instructional change by

purposefully and dramatically rethinking traditional high schools' organization to promote more effective teaching and learning" (NCNSP, 2012, p.1). To this end, North Carolina early colleges are bound by six nonnegotiable design principles (NCNSP, 2012):

- Ready for College: To prepare all students for college and work.
- Powerful Teaching and Learning: To provide rigorous, problem-based instruction.
- Personalization: To have a staff that develops relationships with students.
- Redefine Professionalism: To utilize shared governance and NCNSP teaching philosophy.
- Leadership: All staff members participate in the collective pursuit of exemplary academic outcomes.
- Purposeful Design: Schools are designed so that "the organization of time, space, and the allocation of resources" (NCNSP, 2012, p.1) lend themselves to design principles one through five.

Benefits of Dual Enrollment

Early college data. Within the framework of the above design principles, and in targeting nontraditional student populations, research in North Carolina has produced some intriguing data vis-à-vis the state's early colleges. An experimental, five-year study managed by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's SERVE Center has compared students who were admitted to early colleges via lottery to a control group of students who applied, but were not admitted, to an early college. Researchers examined North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) statistics related to more than 700 students, and analyzed survey data collected from nearly 600 students, while

accounting for validity by ensuring that “treatment and control students were statistically comparable on the majority of baseline characteristics” (Edmunds, 2010, p. 4). SERVE Center’s process was as follows:

One group, the study’s treatment group, was randomly selected in the lottery to attend the Early College. The other group, the study’s control group, was not selected in the lottery and, thus, went somewhere else, most often to the regular district high school. Students in the two groups, treatment and control, should have the same background characteristics such as incoming achievement, motivation, and demographic characteristics. The only difference between the two groups would then be whether or not students attend ECHSs; this means you are comparing results for two groups that are the same – apples to apples. Any difference in outcomes could be considered to be an impact of ECHS because the students were randomly selected to attend the school. (Edmunds, p. 3)

In addition, according to SERVE Center, when compared to the control group, a significantly higher percentage of North Carolina early college students had

- taken Algebra I by the end of ninth grade (97% vs. 76%);
- successfully completed Algebra I by the end of ninth grade (81% vs. 67%); and
- taken a college preparatory math class (97.5% vs. 76.3%).

Furthermore, the study determined that, when compared to the control group, the early college students had a minor -2.1% gap in Algebra I between White students and minority students and a 0% gap between the same demographics in English I. This was compared to respective -13.6% and -9.2% gaps for the students who attended a traditional high school. Furthermore, early college students had fewer suspensions and unexcused

absences, higher levels of academic engagement, and more positive academic experiences than their counterparts (Edmunds).

Providing a pure statewide comparison between all public high schools and all NCNSP early colleges, the NCNSP (2010) released data that show that, while the overall graduation rate stood at 74.2% in 2010, the early college graduation rate was 89.9%. In addition, early colleges trumped overall high schools in African-American male graduation rate (85.4% for early colleges and 59.6% statewide) and dropout rate (0.6% for early colleges and 3.75% statewide).

Finally, regarding college courses, early college students are “receiving better grades, on average, than college-age students in all the core academic areas” (Public Schools of North Carolina, State Board of Education, & Department of Public Instruction, 2011, p.12). North Carolina early college students passed 75% of their college classes with a grade of “C” or better in 2010, while other dual-enrolled students passed at a 70% rate. In addition, early college students passed 69% of their college math classes with a “C” or better, and only 59% of other dual-enrolled students performed at the same level (NCNSP, 2010). These state figures are on par with national data, which show that, in 2008-2009, early college students, on average, earned 17.3 college credits and carried a 2.9 college GPA. Disaggregated data indicate that, during the same academic year, Hispanic males who attended early colleges accumulated an average 17.7 college credits and a 2.96 GPA, while African-American males garnered 17 credits and a 2.64 GPA (Hoffman & Webb, 2010). Because early college students have only recently entered four-year colleges and universities in North Carolina, data are scarce on the achievement level of those students following matriculation from two-year institutions.

North Carolina early colleges are also making strides qualitatively. A case study by Ongaga (2010), in which the author interviewed 21 students of different economic and ethnic backgrounds, indicated that families pursued early college for their children because the tuition-free program saved them money. He also determined that students attributed their academic success to the “caring relationships” (p. 380) between students and their teachers, parents, and classmates, which is likely indicative of the NCNSP design principal of “Personalization” listed above.

Targeting under- and middle-achieving youths. As can be seen in the early college research conducted by Edmunds (2010) and Ongaga (2010), dual enrollment serves myriad students. It has the flexibility to cater to the ambitions of advanced pupils who have met the majority of their graduation requirements, as well as to the needs of students who require exposure to college. Originally created for high-achievers, dual enrollment has – at the behest of policymakers and grant funders – recently targeted middle-achieving and under-achieving youths who, traditionally, have not been considered strong candidates for college admission (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Dutkowsky et al., 2006). The reasons for the push to target these students can easily be tied to data:

- Slightly more than 40% of college freshmen entering public two-year institutions enroll in at least one remedial course upon entering college (Parsad, Lewis, & Greene, 2003).
- 72% of White students graduate from high school as opposed to 51% of African-Americans and 52% of Hispanics (Lerner & Brand, 2006).
- Low graduation rates are plaguing American education. Nationwide, the rate is about 70% and, in North Carolina, approximately 74% of incoming freshmen

complete their high school diploma (Lerner & Brand, 2006; NCBCE & CTQ, 2007; North Carolina New Schools Project [NCNSP], 2010).

In addition, the price of not attending and completing college is skyrocketing. According to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2003, 2009), ACT, Inc. (2006), the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (2010), and Barnett and Stamm (2010):

- Median earnings for a person who graduates with a two-year associate degree are slightly higher than \$40,000 per year, as compared to about \$10,000 less for someone who only has a high school diploma. Furthermore, the median earnings for a person who completes a bachelor's degree are higher than \$50,000.
- Students who earn an associate degree typically earn about \$400,000 more during their working life than counterparts who discontinue their education after graduating from high school.
- Compared to college graduates, high school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed.
- Almost 80% of the jobs that are being created in the 21st Century will require a college credential.

As can be seen, people who do not complete high school are becoming less and less qualified to enter the modern work force. In addition, college coursework and credentials have become increasingly important to the financial, and, presumably, overall well-being of Americans.

Educational access for rural areas. In opening doors to postsecondary academics, dual-credit classes often serve underrepresented youths through exposure “to

college expectations, culture, and curricula” (Hunt & Carroll, 2006, p. 39). For first-generation students, specifically, dual-enrollment coursework is seen as an avenue to increase academic preparation and exposure to college (Hugo, 2001). Certainly, such exposure can be critical in the nation’s rural areas, where, because of geography, access to higher education can be particularly valuable to college-bound students (Johnson & Brophy, 2006). Catron (2001) noted that (a) low per-capita income in most rural areas, and (b) the fact that community colleges in such areas are often “a first choice of higher education” (p. 55) are indicative of the benefits that can be derived from earning high school and college credit simultaneously.

Catron (2001) also touched on the fact that the geography of rural areas – including long distances between students’ homes and college campuses – is also a significant reason that dual enrollment programs, especially ones that offer distance learning options, are popular in the nation’s low-population regions. Natural disasters, community labor needs during harvest time, and unpredictable weather are other reasons that scholars have put forth in documenting distance-savvy dual-enrollment programs’ importance to rural populations (Belcastro, 2004; Spears & Tatroe, 1997).

Gertge’s (2008) examination of Colorado legislation that paved the way for state-funded dual-enrollment programs is another case in point. The author provided a longitudinal study of a community college program that served students in a rugged, mountainous service area of more than 11,500 square miles that was home to only 75,000 people. Through the use of both distance learning and five community centers, the college was able to cater to high school students in 25 school districts, 10 of which included less than 150 K-12 students. Through his empirically based research, which

identified and tracked participation level among all of the area's high school juniors and seniors over a five-year period, Gertge discovered that:

- Student participation had a high correlation with access to a community center.
- Tuition breaks supported by local school systems had a positive effect on enrollment.
- Students engaged in both college transfer and career technical education.
- Dual enrollment served as a relationship-builder among the college and high schools.

Increasing attainment, reducing costs. As indicated in Gertge's (2008) study, another benefit of dual enrollment is that it provides students with a larger breadth of curricula than would be found at the average high school. This is particularly true in rural areas. Lowery and Harris (2000) steeped their advocacy for rural dual-enrollment opportunities in statistics pointing to the effectiveness of small schools. They pointed out that small-school students are more likely than their large-school counterparts to pass core subjects and standardized tests, and that small schools are less prone than large ones to violence and misbehavior, statistics that are backed up by Lawrence et al. (2002) in an expansive cost-effectiveness analysis of small schools. Lowery and Harris indicated that, although small schools are effective, they often lack a broad curriculum. Because of this, they wrote, community college dual-enrollment programs can be particularly beneficial to students in rural areas. Expansion of curricular options – and, thus, exposure to subject matter that may not be typically accessed – is also mentioned by Bailey, Hughes, and Karp (2002) as being a benefit of dual enrollment.

Despite the literature's focus on expanded curriculum and learning opportunities, though, the underlying theme in most studies is that dual enrollment equals financial savings, for both students and institutions (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012; Johnson & Brophy, 2006; Karp & Jeong, 2008). A review of four state concurrent-enrollment policies revealed that they all mention the qualitative educational and life-enrichment benefits that dual credit can provide for high school students (North Carolina Community College System, 2008; State of Colorado, 2001; State of Georgia, 2008; West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, 2010). According to Karp and Jeong, some of these perceived benefits are:

- Easing the transition from high school to college.
- Reducing college costs by speeding up time to diploma or degree completion.
- Lowering the need for remediation at the postsecondary level.
- Helping students get used to attending college.
- Increasing student aspirations regarding educational goals.

In addition to these advantages for individual students, at least one state has determined that dual enrollment has benefitted its economy. In Iowa, where public school systems pay colleges for dual-enrolled students' tuition (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2006), economists performed a cost-benefit analysis. In research presented to Iowa community college presidents and trustees, the Strategic Economics Group reported that, in 2005, dual enrollment cost the state \$9.8 million, but resulted in \$52 million in savings. These savings were determined by estimating that Iowa would have spent \$22 million on future financial and educational assistance to the more than 27,000 students who participated in dual enrollment, and that these students' families

saved \$30 million through participation in tuition-free programs. In addition, the group found that these savings boosted consumer spending in the state by about \$60 million, increased Iowa's gross domestic product, and lowered the unemployment rate ("Iowa Dual Enrollment," 2008). Although other states have not completed studies as rigorous or detailed as Iowa's, scholars have indicated that dual-credit programming's ability to reduce students' time to degree completion and accelerate entry into the work force have had and will have a large, positive impact on the U.S. economy. This is predicted to be especially true in light of the fact that, in coming years, an increasingly large portion of the nation's work force will require postsecondary education (Barnett & Stamm, 2010; Ganzert, 2012).

Drawbacks and Challenges of Dual Enrollment

Despite all of the good news, not everyone is convinced that dual enrollment is the answer to improving the academic performance of high school students. Among the various dual-credit scenarios, tech prep has taken the hardest hit from empirical researchers. In Miller and Gray's (2002) study about Pennsylvania tech prep, for example, the authors found that a relatively small number of students completed the tech-prep program of study. Although they wrote that most of the study's participants did graduate from high school, it was only after dropping out of the tech-prep program.

Sweat and Fenster (2006) examined the effect that tech-prep programs have had on Georgia students' speed toward graduation. The authors determined that tech-prep students graduated at about the same rate as nontech-prep students, and they also found that, despite their participation in college classes, tech prep students did not perform at a higher level than nontech-prep students. Cellini's (2006) findings were even more

pointed in criticizing tech prep, when she found that the program was failing in its goal to promote college enrollment. However, Cellini focused on four-year – not two-year – college enrollment. Therefore, although she found that “tech-prep participants are more likely to complete high school and attend two-year colleges than their nonparticipating siblings,” she also concluded that “the probability of attending a four-year college declines with tech-prep participation” (p. 409).

Tech prep is not the only form of dual enrollment that has been criticized. Alaie (2011) was very suspect of the early college model in her article documenting the experience of 37 students who enrolled in a postsecondary biology class, and used her research to highlight the challenge of first-generation college-goers who participate in dual enrollment. Regarding the study’s participants, they entered the class after passing an assessment test, but, despite lectures bolstered by private instruction, the vast majority struggled with poor attendance and low grades. In finding that only one of the 37 students matriculated to a four-year university and performed well, Alaie warned that early colleges can be counterproductive because poor academic performance can result in a young student losing interest in a particular subject, or, even worse, education in its entirety.

Ongaga’s (2010) case study, in addition to highlighting some of the more positive aspects of early college, also found that early college students faced many challenges, including rigorous coursework and the growing pains of being ensconced in a new school on a college campus. Such challenges are not uncommon. Hoffman and Webb (2010) identified the challenges of high school credit requirements, school autonomy, flexible scheduling, creation of a memorandum of understanding, and leadership issues as barriers

to the smooth operation of an early college. In addition to these considerations, cultural differences between secondary and postsecondary educators can be a huge obstacle in the management of an educational partnership (Azinger, 2000; Huber & Williams, 2009).

Certainly, student-teacher relationships in a typical K-12 school differ greatly from those of students and professors at a community college. Although community colleges and public schools have a long history of collaboration, postsecondary faculty members tend to pride themselves on a degree of academic freedom that is unavailable in the vast majority of public K-12 schools. Furthermore, K-12 educators, unlike their college counterparts, are subject to the principle of *in loco parentis*, a legal concept that charges teachers with protecting children in a school environment (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). There are large administrative discrepancies also, considering that school safety and closely monitored academic achievement are hallmarks of K-12 education, whereas open-door access and lifelong learning characterize the community college mindset (Azinger, 2000). Lastly, what Ausburn (2002) coined the “freedom versus focus dilemma” (p. 225) is a very real consideration: The fact that, when given the freedom to academically participate in a college environment, young students often have a hard time balancing autonomy, self-motivation, and personal discipline.

The North Carolina early college is designed, in part, to navigate and contend with the many challenges that arise in a closely-knit educational partnership that bridges cultures and institutions. The NCNSP has several requirements linked to the grant funding that is used to sustain its affiliated schools. An early college and its partnering institution are required to develop a memorandum of understanding that “articulates the roles, responsibilities, governing structures, and agreements that reflect true partnership”

(NCNSP, 2008, p. 1). In addition, NCNSP has multiple requirements for each early college, postsecondary partner, and affiliated school district. School districts and the high school partner must provide adequate leadership; conform to the design principles; and revise policies and procedures as necessary to overcome barriers to the NCNSP's guidelines for instructional innovation. College partners must agree to provide classroom and office space that fits the needs of the early college, as well as include early college leadership in college governance and strategic planning. Lastly, the postsecondary institution is required to "identify a college liaison to serve as the chief advocate for and support to the early college high school" (NCNSP, 2008, p. 2).

The Champion in Educational Partnerships

Tech prep directors. Despite some of the perceived failings and drawbacks of dual enrollment, partnerships and collaborations between secondary and postsecondary education are of primary importance to policymakers (Eddy, 2010). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), for example, identified closure of the gap between high school preparation and postsecondary entry as one of its top 10 policy issues for 2011 (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2011). It is the heightened importance of collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions, perhaps, that has created the need for personnel to manage relations between the two entities.

In tech prep, consortia are formed and, typically, a director is appointed to oversee K-12/higher education pathways. As a representative of the institution that forms an academic bridge between high school and the world of work, the director of a tech prep consortium is typically a community college employee. This person is expected "to lead

in the research, organization, development, and implementation of all components of tech prep at all of the consortium's sites" (McDavid, Boggs, & Stumpf, 2005, p. 279).

According to the Center for Occupational Research and Development (CORD) (1999), this is no small task:

Whether attempting to get new consortia up and running or taking over established consortia, new tech prep coordinators face a daunting challenge. They must have vision and determination. They must be able to ensure that time and resources are used efficiently and that every activity that falls under their supervision is focused on positive results. (p. 15)

As indicated above, the director of a tech prep consortium serves many roles in relation to the development and sustenance of career-technical education. In fact, a director's liaison duties alone can almost constitute the time requirements of a full-time job. Tech prep coordinators typically serve as an intermediary to (a) state educational bodies, such as the department of public instruction and/or the community college system; (b) business and industry representatives; (c) civic and local government organizations; (d) community college faculty, staff, and administration; and (e) secondary schools' faculty, staff, and administration (McDavid, Boggs, & Stumpf, 2005).

According to Bragg, Reger, Brown, Orr, and Dare (2002), coordinating such widespread appeal for tech prep initiatives requires an array of leadership talents. Citing Fullan, the authors noted that successful tech prep leaders worked in a "highly collaborative way" and "gained support for core concepts by engaging competent leaders in schools, colleges, businesses, and community groups" (p. ix). In other words, the mark of an effective tech prep consortium director is maintaining wide appeal to a number of

stakeholders, while grasping the essential ideals of articulated secondary-postsecondary academic credit.

Top leadership. Much like a tech prep director, the early college liaison is a position that facilitates “blurring of the boundaries” in an educational partnership (Allen & Murphy, 2008). Despite the small body of research about the early college liaison, there are several studies indicating that buy-in from top leadership (e.g., presidents and superintendents) is a must for any successful endeavor that involves sustained commitment from two institutions (Ascher & Schwartz, 1989; Eddy, 2010; Hoffman & Webb, 2010; Spangler, 2002). According to Huber and Williams (2009):

Many partnerships are doomed to be underwhelming based on the sheer scale of intercultural and interpersonal differences. The worlds of public school, higher education, nonprofits, and businesses are so profoundly disparate that one can almost hear an audible sigh of relief when grants run their course or programs are terminated. (p. 32)

However, when power brokers are interested in seeing a large project through, there is a much better chance that it will develop momentum. This assumes, of course, that one partner does not indiscriminately dominate the other, which can taint the relationship between two educational entities (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

“Boundary spanners.” Moving beyond top leadership, though, Eddy (2010) identified an educational partnership’s “champion” as being arguably more important to an alliance’s health. Such a person, she wrote, is someone who has the power to leverage the mechanisms of a sound combined effort. Using professional development schools (PDS) – university-bound programs that provide continuing education for K-12 teachers

– as an example, Eddy referenced culture-spanning as duty one for a liaison who connects two educational institutions. She wrote that

Relationship building is at the heart of the reality of the work. The cultures of higher education and K-12 systems differ, resulting in faculty members and teachers having different reward structures in place for their work contributions, different levels of control over their time, and different hierarchies in place. The clash of culture requires bridging the two environments for collaborations to flourish. (pp. 59-60)

Within her extensive treatise about educational partnerships, Eddy identified P-16 educational reform and dual enrollment as two areas that require extensive use of best practices. Dubbing personnel who facilitate collaboration between P-12 and postsecondary institutions “boundary spanners” (p. 14), she defined their role as being “to envision the benefits of the partnership for all partners and to trumpet them as they persuade others of the project’s merits” (p. 28).

Such a person should have influence within one, if not both, of the organizations, and should have access to information and leadership, so that decisions can be facilitated. “The champion,” however, should not necessarily be the organization’s official leader. In fact, Dallmer (2004), who used narrative inquiry to reflect on her life as a graduate school student and liaison to a PDS, and, later, a university department chair, recommended that consensus building trumps directives from leadership. She wrote that such collaboration should not be ordered from above. Rather, the savvy liaison can use bargaining and negotiation to create meaningful work, even in cases where different cultures and philosophies result in conflict (Eddy, 2010).

The early college liaison. The early college liaison is a position that spans cultures and philosophies within the framework of a high school-college partnership. In part, the early college liaison's duties are to (a) help develop plans of study that guide students simultaneously through the requirements of a high school diploma and two-year college degree, (b) coordinate high school and college schedules and calendars, (c) enroll and register students, (d) work to provide adequate college coursework for high school students, and (e) coordinate professional development between college and high school faculties (NCNSP, 2004b). In these roles, the liaison can become invaluable to an early college high school's success, and, according to Vargas and Quiara (2010), it is hoped by many North Carolina early college principals that the position be sustained through local funding after state grant money expires.

Eddy (2010) insisted that the social capital of the "champion" is imperative to the success of an educational partnership. She depicted the effective champion as a person who, regardless of official status, has access to information and major stakeholders, combined with trust-bearing relationships on both sides of the partnership fence. In addition, the powerful partnership manager commands "respect, commitment, and integrity" (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010, p. 337). Liaisons who do not cultivate these lofty constructs across partners run the risk of role conflict, wherein they put one organization's goals before the goals of the partnership (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that early college partnerships be managed by people who have an understanding of (or at least an appreciation for) both K-12 and higher education (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

Miller and Hafner (2008) recommended that school-college partnerships be managed in settings that facilitate freedom of collaboration. Certainly, when two distinct professional cultures come together for a common cause, especially a cause as intense as high school reform, a “champion” should be given the task of making sure that the figurative train stays on the track. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities, as cited in Eddy (2010), has made a case for the importance of “boundary spanners” (p. 30) between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Such spanners would have one foot firmly planted in the K-12 world, and another planted in the college world, thus allowing for a streamlined partnership that could nimbly and effectively address modern educational problems. Especially in light of the dearth of literature focused on the early college liaison, the position is an excellent lens through which to view the “boundary spanning” capabilities of an educational partnership’s “champion.”

Conceptual Framework

To frame this phenomenological study of early college liaison leadership experiences, literature focused on leadership, organizational theory, and sociology was consulted. Heifetz’s (1994) concept of “adaptive work” focuses on the leadership skills that are necessary to shepherd collaboration in environments where conflict can occur. Considering that early college liaisons are charged with managing the relationship between two organizationally and culturally different entities, conflict is highly likely. However, because data indicate that North Carolina early colleges are making significant academic strides (Edmunds, 2010; NCNSP, 2010), it is important to gain a better understanding of how the relationship between high schools and colleges is resulting in

such data. The early college liaison is a pivotal element in this relationship, and an assumption of this study was that the leadership skills required in “adaptive work” are important to the liaison’s role.

To navigate the “adaptive work” of educational collaboration, human-relations skills are necessary on both sides of the partnership, especially when conflict arises. Bolman and Deal’s (2003) “political frame,” a theory that views organizations as “competitive arenas characterized by scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage” (p. 18), was used as a backdrop for the proposed study. The liaison – a “champion” for a high school that must ease itself onto the campus of an established college – works within the political frame of a secondary-postsecondary partnership. Certainly, in a time of dwindling state resources, management of the conflict that arises in such a partnership takes on heightened significance. This study describes liaisons’ lived experiences in this environment.

The early college liaison does not typically possess the “legitimate power” (French & Raven, 1968) that comes with top leadership in an organization. Therefore, the liaison must find ways to influence partners that do not reflect the power dynamic of a superior-subordinate relationship. Several studies have indicated that the sociological theory of social capital is a prime component for analyzing how middle-ranking people influence educational partnerships (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Eddy, 2010; Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Social capital was defined by Eddy as the abilities and personal traits necessary to effectively build relationships. Furthermore, Putnam (2001) described “bridging social capital” – social capital that

facilitates diverse groups of people “coming together” – as particularly important in the melding of cultures.

Conclusion

Dual enrollment was originally designed to cater to the needs of high-performing students. However, educators and policymakers have found that, through the application of several models, dual credit is also a viable option for “at-risk” and “nontraditional” students (Bailey et al., 2002; Dutkowsky et al., 2006). These pupils include ethnic minorities; recent immigrants; first-generation college-goers; and middle- and under-achieving students (Mattis, 2008; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). In recent years, the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) and the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) have spearheaded the growth of early colleges in North Carolina. Early colleges are dual-enrollment programs that allow students to simultaneously pursue a high school diploma and two-year college degree. In addition, they are high schools that are typically located on college campuses (NCNSP, 2004c). As such, early colleges are among the most comprehensive dual-enrollment models in the nation.

The “adaptive work” highlighted by Heifetz (1994) is inevitable when two organizations share scarce resources. Because of this, bargaining and negotiation are of paramount importance to the early college mission, which, in part, is to transform nontraditional high school students into college graduates. As part of its grant-funding structure, the NCNSP has required that a college employee facilitate the melding of the high school and the community college when an early college is created (NCNSP,

2008a). This position – the early college liaison – is the “champion” (Eddy, 2010) of the early college.

The literature shows that a “champion” can be a prime factor in a dual-enrollment partnership, and, in the North Carolina early college model, the champion is a required element. However, because the literature also reveals that the champion of a dual-enrollment partnership is typically not a person who holds a powerful position within the community college, it is important to understand how the champion performs as a leader and negotiates change (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Heifetz, 1994). This phenomenological study has filled a gap within existing dual-enrollment literature by using the early college liaison as a lens through which to view the experiences of leadership and boundary-spanning as they were lived by the “champions” of 14 comprehensive dual-enrollment partnerships located in North Carolina.

This study’s contribution to existing literature is timely: In addition to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ declaration that closing the gap between high school and college is a top national priority (AASCU, 2011), North Carolina has made college-readiness its number-one objective for high school students (Niolet, Bonner, & Johnson, 2010; Office of Governor Bev Perdue, 2009). North Carolina’s former Governor Beverly Perdue wrote that the state’s “ultimate goal ... is for every N.C. student to graduate from high school ready for a career, two- or four-year college, or technical training” (Office of the Governor, 2010, p. 3).

In addition, the fact that dual-credit enrollments surged from 1.2 million in 2002-2003 to 2 million in 2010-2011, an increase of almost 67% (Thomas et al., 2013), combined with the projection that 80% of the nation’s new jobs will require a

postsecondary education (Barnett & Stamm, 2010), indicates that “champions” for high school-college collaboration will become increasingly important to American education. Early colleges can provide the type of academic horizons that are of primary importance to policymakers; therefore, a detailed description of the early college liaison’s leadership experiences – in navigating scarce resources and negotiating conflict – is very important to understanding the secondary-postsecondary partnerships that are becoming more and more prevalent in American education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. The vast majority of early colleges in North Carolina are affiliated with the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP), an organization that partially funds and provides instructional coaching to its partner schools. A portion of NCNSP support funding is dedicated to the salary of a college employee who is charged with facilitating the academic and administrative relationship between the high school and college. This position, the early college liaison, (a) coordinates dual-credit curriculum; (b) aligns professional development opportunities involving both secondary and postsecondary staff; and (c) develops policies and procedures for high school students located on a college campus (NCNSP, 2004b, 2008). The liaison, however, does not typically possess the “legitimate power,” of high-ranking college personnel. According to French and Raven (1968), one form of “legitimate power” is role relation. If a person has prominent status on an organizational chart, for example, that person has authority over persons who are lower on the chart. Because the early college liaison typically does not possess such status, and in light of the fact that the position is unique, it is important to understand how the liaison “leads from the middle” by spanning two different academic and administrative cultures: high school and college (Eddy, 2010).

The overarching research question was “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?” The subquestions were:

1. What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?
2. What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the “boundary-spanning” process?

3. How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in “boundary-spanning” between K-12 schools and community colleges?
4. What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?
5. How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?

Research Design Overview

This study engaged an interpretive, qualitative research design for collection and analysis of data focused on the leadership experiences of early college liaisons in North Carolina. The research was designed to interpret leadership and “boundary-spanning” (Eddy, 2010) across K-12 and community college cultures through the lived experiences of the liaisons. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative research attempts “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Because of this, qualitative inquiry recognizes the importance of the subjectivity of lived experience, and the qualitative researcher aims to garner meaning within the framework of this subjectivity, while remaining as neutral as possible toward participants and the data that are gathered (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In addition, the interpretive nature of qualitative study is focused on the essence of participant experiences as revealed through data that “reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). Such experiences are not quantifiable.

Design selection. Three qualitative genres were considered for this project: grounded theory, case study, and phenomenology. Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology through which the researcher attempts to generate a theory, rather than

describe a phenomenon. Data are collected and systematically scrutinized, and, during data analysis, it is hoped that “a general explanation of a process, action, or interaction” will be generated (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). Because I had already started to develop a theory – rooted in the conceptual framework and research questions that have been acknowledged above – I felt that grounded theory did not fit this study. My interest in the experiences of the North Carolina early college liaisons, and the stories that could be told from their perspectives and through their words, pushed grounded theory aside very quickly.

A genre that was more carefully considered was case study. Case studies are focused on analyzing problems or questions among a group of entities that are “bounded” by a certain class or category (e.g., gender or religion) (Creswell, 2007). To be sure, the people in this study were tied to one another, especially considering the criteria that were used to qualify participants. All liaisons who work for New Schools Project-affiliated early colleges, for example, have similar job requirements and salary-funding structures. To examine these points, a collective case study, in which the working lives of several individuals would be analyzed, could be appropriate, and, in fact, is recommended for further study.

In the end, though, I determined that phenomenology was the qualitative methodology that would best serve this study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), a qualitative research design’s “justification should ... flow logically from the research questions and from the conceptual framework” (p. 7). The more I considered this stance, the more I realized that phenomenology – a genre that seeks to mine participants’ *experiences* in relation to a *phenomenon* – would be the best fit for this

study. The study's conceptual framework is rooted in theories that hint at (and in some cases, directly address) the leadership skills that are needed for someone who does not have the "legitimate power" associated with a high-level management position (French & Raven, 1968, p. 264). Furthermore, the overarching research question ("What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?") and its accompanying subquestions were designed to garner liaisons' stories *through their eyes*. It was my intention to investigate the leadership experiences of participants from their perspectives, and phenomenology was the best fit for generating these viewpoints. Finally, the dearth of experiential literature related to liaisons finalized my decision to pursue a phenomenological study. During my review of scholarly works related to dual enrollment and educational partnerships, I could only locate one dissertation that focused on high school liaisons (Murray, 2010), and, in that study, which was not related to early colleges, the author incorporated a collective case study to reach her conclusions. Therefore, in the interest of breaking new ground, along with the other reasons listed above, I finally decided that phenomenology would be the most appropriate qualitative methodology for my dissertation study.

Intent of the design. Phenomenology is a qualitative research framework that is designed to elicit descriptions of participant experiences (Creswell, 1998). Because participant subjectivity and researcher interest (albeit neutrally framed) are essential to reaching sound qualitative conclusions about personal experience (Moustakas, 1994), a phenomenological research design was deemed appropriate for studying the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. According to Langdrige (2008), "the heart of phenomenology is description of 'the things in their appearing' through a

focus on experience ‘as lived’” (p. 1132). As such, the aim of phenomenological research is to reveal the essence of a phenomenon. Furthermore, phenomenology is rooted in finding commonality among numerous descriptions of a phenomenon through participants’ words (Hein & Austin, 2001). Finally, phenomenology, according to Langdridge, is a primary lens through which to view power and politics. He wrote that, “through the application of aspects of the lifeworld . . . it is possible to critically examine lived experience such that experiences imbued with power and politics may be identified” (p. 1136).

In this study, the power and politics-related phenomena were the leadership and cultural “boundary-spanning” (Eddy, 2010) of the early college liaison. Because the liaison position is not typically associated with high-level authority at a North Carolina community college, it was intended to describe how the liaison facilitates the adaptive, conflict-prone work (Heifetz, 1994) that results within politically oriented organizations with limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2003). In the case of the early college liaison, the incumbent is charged with navigating the political and educational marriage of an intensive high school-community college partnership, and the success of this navigation can greatly hinge upon the liaison’s ability to build relationships and span cultures via the “bridging social capital” highlighted by Putnam (2001).

The intent of this study’s phenomenological research design was to examine the leadership experiences of early college liaisons in North Carolina. Marshall and Rossman (2011) state that it is of utmost importance for a qualitative design to correspond with a study’s research questions and conceptual framework. In this chapter, the phenomenological design and issues of trustworthiness, ethics, site,

participant selection, data collection, and data analysis are all addressed and explained. All of these design aspects were carefully considered during the gathering and handling of data that described the essence of early college liaison leadership and “boundary-spanning” experiences in North Carolina. “Phenomenological researchers,” Finlay (2009) wrote, “generally agree that our central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings. We aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (p. 6). This study’s phenomenological research design was dedicated to describing the essence of early college liaison leadership as it was “concretely lived.”

History and Philosophy

To adequately explain a phenomenological research design, it is important to briefly provide background on the history and philosophy that are its foundation. Phenomenology began with German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who believed that reality was manifested in one’s consciousness. In Husserl’s view, objectivity is not separate from one’s perception of the world – on the contrary, what is objective, or concrete, is what is ascertained through one’s sensory perceptions (i.e., personal subjectivity) (Groenewald, 2004). In tying consciousness to phenomena, Groenewald explained Husserl’s philosophy this way:

To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin. (p. 4)

Husserl and other existential philosophers who came after him were adamant that, for a researcher to understand phenomena that result from consciousness, one must describe – rather than explain or quantify – the phenomena through the words of a person or persons who have experienced the phenomena (Sadala & Adorno, 2002).

Moustakas' (1994) example of one's perception of a tree provides the layman with an illustration of Husserl's concept of *Lebenswelt* ("life world") (Finlay, 2008; Wertz, 2005). Moustakas cited Gurwitsch when he described perception in terms of the *noesis* (the perceiver) and *noema* (the perceived). In observing a tree, the *noema* is the reality of the perceiver. The objective tree is not the reality of the *noesis*. As the perceiver moves around the tree, the tree is observed from different vantage points. The form of the tree, which is ever-changing, is the observer's reality. This reality, then, as opposed to the objective tree, is the perceiver's phenomenon. In Finlay's words, "the life-world comprises the world of objects around us as we perceive them and our experience of our self, body and relationships" (p. 1).

Moustakas' (1994) explanation of perception and Husserl's concept of the "life world" were extended by Giorgi (2009), a leader in phenomenological psychology who is noted for his central role among a group of researchers at Pittsburgh's Duquesne University in the 1970s (Finlay, 2008). Giorgi indicated that quantitative analysis falls short when applied to "describing" a phenomenon, and postulated that mathematics and the sciences represent a "closed system" that is bound by natural laws, whereas descriptive phenomenology requires the researcher to simultaneously abandon the idea that a phenomenon, as experienced by another person, can be "interpreted" and embrace the concept that it can only, through collected data, be "described." This, Giorgi wrote, is

rooted in the fact that the “phenomenological attitude neither adds to nor subtracts from what is ‘given’” (p. 78), but, rather, accepts the description of a phenomenon’s essence as the be-all, end-all. For Giorgi, “essence” is “what makes the object a specific example or instance of the type of phenomenon it is” (p. 88).

As indicated by Giorgi (2009), modern phenomenological psychology is rooted in the description of a participant’s conscious experience of a phenomenon. To gather information about such experience, the researcher must go directly to the source – the person who has experienced the phenomenon. Such data collection is possible only through communication that can be provided from the participant, such as written or spoken words (Langdrige, 2008). For Giorgi (1997), phenomenological research has three non-negotiable characteristics: It (a) is descriptive, (b) seeks essence (i.e., specific examples of a phenomenon), and (c) involves a process (known as “bracketing”) wherein the researcher, at least temporarily, separates feelings, emotions, and experiences from the data collection process.

Giorgi’s (1997) insistence that the researcher keep subjectivity in check is a major point in the phenomenological milieu. Although this study’s data collection is explained in detail later in this chapter, it is important to acknowledge here that a phenomenological approach calls for rigorous analysis of interviews and transcripts. Because the researcher in a phenomenological study can (and, some say, should) have a personal interest in the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994), the researcher must take measures (i.e., “bracketing”) to separate a subjective worldview, to a certain degree, from the data collection process (Langdrige, 2008). Such measures, as recommended by Husserl, Giorgi, and others, are of utmost importance to the trustworthiness of phenomenological research (i.e., the

credibility and dependability with which others can accept a study's findings) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Bracketing

Phenomenology is more reflexive (i.e., subject to the self-examination of the researcher) than objective (Rolls & Relf, 2006). Largely because of this reflexivity, bracketing is a prime component in phenomenological research. Initially championed by Husserl, bracketing is the act of identifying and curtailing personal bias. Such bias can exist due to a personal relationship with the phenomenon being studied, or can be related to knowledge that one has accrued through scholarly investigation of the phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001). The subjectivity of phenomenological inquiry requires that the researcher look beyond personal feelings, so as to focus on participants' descriptions of a "lived experience," and, therefore, uncover the essence of the phenomenon (Langdrige, 2008; Sadala & Adorno, 2002). However, most scholars agree that the researcher cannot fully achieve separation from the phenomenon, especially if the researcher has a deep, personal connection to it. Although Husserl advocated separation from subjectivity to the point of detached objectivity, modern philosophers and psychologists have reached the conclusion that bracketing – though essential – is a process in which the researcher accepts a personal relationship to the phenomenon, and then takes measures to stem these feelings and knowledge during data collection and analysis (Ashworth, 1996; Langdrige, 2008).

My relationship to the phenomenon. I have been the director of dual-enrollment programs at a large community college in North Carolina for more than five years. The college partners with two North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early colleges,

which are located in different counties. As director of high school partnerships, I oversee the college's stake in early college-related business. Prior to becoming the director of dual enrollment, I was an early college liaison for one-and-a-half years. During this time, I learned that relationship-building and communication, among other things, are essential to developing a sound working relationship between K-12 and college faculty and staff. In addition, upon accepting the liaison position, I quickly became aware that physical resources, such as classroom space and instructional equipment, were not easily shared at a growing institution that had limited financial and structural resources. Although I didn't know it at the time, I had been thrust into an example of Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame, an environment characterized by conflict and limited resources. As time went by, though, I began to realize that the more I got to know high school and college staff members, the easier it was for me to facilitate the melding of K-12 and community college cultures. However, in addition to developing bridging social capital (Putnam, 2001), I was developing leadership skills. Being in a position with no supervisory duties, I was learning how to "lead without authority" through conflict (Heifetz, 1994), to help achieve a learning environment that was healthy for high school students located on a community college campus.

In providing this context, it is appropriate that I relate two watershed moments that took place during my brief career as an early college liaison. The first happened soon after I accepted the position. I had been an adjunct faculty member prior to accepting the liaison job; however, I had not been exposed to dual enrollment, except for the occasional high school student who enrolled in my classes, and had never taught an early college student. Therefore, I was familiar with some of the college's staff members, but was not

fully aware of faculty attitudes in relation to the early college. Early in my tenure as a liaison, while running into an administrator on campus, I was introduced to a faculty member. Rather than shake my hand, the faculty member immediately recoiled and told me that the early college, which was still new at the time, was a terrible program that would never amount to anything. It was precisely at this instant that I realized that dual enrollment, and the early college concept, were not roundly appreciated nor embraced by college faculty members. The incident was not isolated. As I made my rounds across campus, I came to realize that there was a high level of skepticism for the program among college faculty, and, at the same time, an enthusiastic belief in the program among high school faculty.

The second incident involved a highly respected faculty member, who I had engaged in conversation about the value, or lack thereof, of having young students in college classes. He argued that, because young students' brains had not fully developed, they were unqualified to participate in some of the more cerebral courses that involved adult themes such as love, sexuality, etc. Furthermore, he said, they had not experienced such adult phenomena, and, therefore, could not adequately contribute to class discussions and activities that were related to these topics. I did not argue with his opinion; however, I had been told by a senior college administrator that, at the early college principal's request, I should allow select early college freshmen to take courses that included topics such as these. Because I had had the conversation about brain development with the instructor in question, I decided to see if he would be willing to let me register four early college freshmen into one of his classes. He reluctantly agreed, on the condition that he be allowed to interview them prior to their entrance into the class,

and that I monitor their progress throughout the semester. During his interview with the four students, he warned them about the adult themes that the class would include, and one of the four students decided not to enroll. The crux of the story is that all three freshmen who enrolled in the course received a grade of A in the class. After this, the instructor became more involved with the early college, and even began teaching some classes exclusively to early college students. Because of this experience, I began to truly believe that the early college – with its academic supports and the close relationships that students had with high school staff – could be a valuable experience for young, motivated learners. In addition, it could change the mindsets of college faculty who, though well-respected and knowledgeable, were initially wary of the idea that high school students could succeed in college coursework. The experience made me a firm advocate for the early college concept.

Considering my personal relationship to early colleges and the position of early college liaison, it was a challenge for me to set aside the experiences that I had had vis-à-vis leadership, politics, and social capital as they related to “boundary-spanning.” However, through bracketing and research design, my relationship to the study’s focus became an advantage, rather than a hindrance, in mining and describing the lived experiences of early college liaisons in North Carolina, and this was largely due to the rapport that I was able to easily build with the majority of the study’s participants. Some scholars recommend that the researcher’s acknowledgement of personal biases be a part of the bracketing process, so that readers are fully aware of the relationship that the author has with the subject (Hein & Austin, 2001; Langdrige, 2008). I fully embraced this concept as I crafted and implemented this study. In considering all of this, though, it

must be noted that subjective feelings and the researcher's knowledge should never interfere with a study's goals. Finlay (2009) provided this caveat related to the self-reflection of the researcher:

One critical danger of engaging researcher reflexivity is that of falling prey to navel gazing. The researcher needs to avoid preoccupation with their [*sic*] own emotions and experience if the research is not to be pulled in unfortunate directions which privilege the researcher over the participant. The focus needs to stay on the research participant and the phenomenon in its appearing. (p. 13)

Because phenomenological research is concerned with the "life-world" of the participant, and not the researcher, bracketing was required, on my part, to uncover the essence of the phenomenon that was this study's subject (Ashworth, 1996).

How bracketing was performed for this study. Although some scholars argue that bracketing is only required prior to data collection, and others are of the opinion that bracketing is best performed during data analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012), I chose to do both. This was because of my close relationship and personal experience related to the position of early college liaison. In addition, it was because bracketing, according to Moustakas (1994), is essential to establishing the credibility (and, therefore, the trustworthiness) of any findings that are associated with phenomenological research. Finally, I pursued it in consideration of Giorgi's (2009) thought that, although a researcher's knowledge can be useful during data collection, "we should not let our past knowledge be *engaged* while we are determining the mode and content of the present experience" (p. 92).

Finlay (2009) espoused a “phenomenological attitude,” wherein the researcher accepts personal subjectivity but aims to “see the world freshly, in a different way” (p. 12). In an attempt to faithfully collect and analyze data that truly revealed the essence of a descriptive phenomenon, I carried out the following bracketing exercises during the course of the study:

- 1) Note-taking: I took notes during the data collection and data analysis processes, and wrote these notes during all interviews, during transcription of interviews, and during the coding process that followed transcription. The notes served as observational commentaries on the settings of data collection, and helped me understand my feelings and biases during the data analysis phase, so that I could acknowledge any personal elements that might have altered my perceptions of participants’ experiences.
- 2) Disqualifying data: During the postinterview note-taking process, while reading transcriptions, I eliminated participant passages that were generated from interview questions that, in retrospect, were leading or appeared to seek preconceived answers.
- 3) Bracketing interview conducted by professor: Prior to the start of data collection, I met with Western Carolina University’s Qualitative Research Group, which is composed of professors and graduate students who are interested in or engaged in qualitative research. During the session, I was interviewed by a seasoned researcher about my background and my experience as a liaison. My time with the group helped me begin to grasp the

interview approach that I should take to avoid letting my biases taint data collection.

- 4) Bracketing interview conducted by me: Phenomenological researchers often engage in pilot interviews prior to data collection. In the case of this study, I conducted a pilot interview with an early college liaison who was not a participant in the study. The interview helped me uncover personal biases and emotions that could have been detrimental to data collection (Rolls & Relf, 2006). In addition, it allowed me to improve my interview skills, and to better understand the fact that my experiences were not necessarily aligned with the experiences of others who had held the position.

It was of the utmost importance that bracketing, otherwise known as “reduction,” took place during this study. The process was essential in attempting to grasp the essence of early college liaisons’ leadership experiences and was imperative in my attempt to produce trustworthy results that would be important to the growing bodies of early college and leadership literature. In the words of Sadala and Adorno (2002),

Phenomenological reduction is the fundamental resource that ensures a reliable description of a phenomenon. This reduction highlights the intentional character of consciousness turned towards the world once it brackets the reality conceived by common sense and cleanses the phenomenon of everything that is ‘unessential’ and accidental in order to make what is essential visible. (p. 283)

Considering my professional history, untainted description of the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons could not have been achieved without a rigorous bracketing process. Such a process was a pillar of this study.

Participant and Site Selection

Sampling technique. The participants in this study were liaisons who were employed with New Schools Project-affiliated early colleges housed at North Carolina community colleges. Currently, there are 74 NCNSP early colleges in North Carolina (T. Habit, personal communication, March 29, 2012). However, not all of them are located on the campus of a community college, and some of them employ liaisons who only dedicate a minor portion of their duties to managing the relationship between the postsecondary institution and the early college. According to the American Institutes for Research and SRI International [AIR & SRII] (2009a),

There is a huge variation in how much of the college liaison's time and effort is dedicated to the (early college), ranging from 5 to 10 percent to full-time The amount of time that the liaison devotes to the (early college) is crucial; a 5–10 percent time commitment may be the result of a “low-maintenance” situation or because the liaison has a competing workload. (p. 64)

For the purposes of this study, it was crucial to include liaisons who dedicated the vast majority of their professional time to working with an early college. Therefore, participants were selected from the pool of North Carolina liaisons whose full-time job duties are early college-related. Although AIR & SRII indicated that some liaisons are deans or other high-ranking college administrators, participants who fit this description were not selected. This was because the intention of this study was to investigate the “lived experiences” of informants who have had the experience of “leading from the middle,” and not, as in the case of a dean, “leading from the top.”

Although Ashworth (1996) warned against ranking one member of a group's "worthiness" against other members of that group, this study did not select early college liaisons at random. Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling, based on their experiences with early college (Groenewald, 2004; Morse, 2007). Because job experience and political maneuvering were considered to be essential elements of the phenomenon, only liaisons that had been in the position for two full years or longer were considered for this study. In addition, all liaisons were affiliated with NCNSP-associated early colleges, because they were subject to the same funding rules and, to a certain extent, the same culture as other liaisons in the sample. Finally, to be considered for this study, a liaison had to have worked with an early college that had been in business for a minimum of four years at the time of data collection. This ensured that the liaison was associated with a school that was firmly ensconced in the community college within which it was housed.

Number of participants. Unlike some research traditions, phenomenology is not laden with scholarly recommendations for participant selection. Creswell (1998) indicated that up to 10 subjects is ideal for such research, and Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants for a phenomenological design. However, other scholars have avoided providing a suggested number for reaching data saturation. Moustakas (1994) indicated that there are no concrete criteria for selecting informants, and stated that the willingness of participants to engage in audio-recorded interviews is much more important than any other selection rule of thumb. Wertz (2005) wrote that "essential criteria include: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, (and) is willing to

participate in a lengthy interview” (p. 107). He also indicated that the number of participants needed for a study depends on the type of phenomenon that is being described, and that, whatever the topic, data collection should stop at saturation point, or, in other words, when participants’ words start to become redundant. Morse (2007) insisted on two criteria for a “good informant” in phenomenology:

1. Experiential fit: People who have lived through the experience or phenomenon that is being explored.
2. Qualities of a good informant: Participants who are willing to share their experiences related to the phenomenon.

Morse (2005) made it clear that one of these “good qualities” was the ability to engage in a back-and-forth session with the interviewer. She wrote that,

Because the *quality of the data* is determined by the willingness of the participant to talk, to reflect, and to describe, and his or her ability to share the experience with the researcher, the researcher must consider the personal traits of participants with inviting them to the study. (p. 530)

Heading into this study, there was no guarantee that participants would be amenable to sharing their personal stories at length. However, by confining participants to the criteria listed above, it was hoped that they would have similar experiences and be able to share significant thoughts about those experiences.

Selection of participants. Participants were initially solicited through a recruitment email, which was sent to 57 liaisons throughout the state (see Appendix A). The email listed the criteria for inclusion in the study, and several liaisons responded that, due to the criteria, they did not qualify. However, eight potential participants responded

in the affirmative. Included in the email was a statement that I would follow up with a phone call. To conduct this phone call, I used a recruitment telephone script (Appendix B). In the days that followed the initial email, I called the eight potential participants who had responded to the email. One was disqualified due to a very short tenure as an early college liaison, but seven qualified. To solicit further participants, I used the recruitment telephone script, leaving messages with several liaisons and contacting several others on the first attempted call. Some liaisons were not interested in participating at all, and some were interested but did not qualify. One potential participant had retired from the position of liaison, and others did not meet one or more of the qualifying criteria. During the course of acquiring participants, two liaisons who had initially committed to the study backed out, one for personal reasons and the other because of a recent transition out of the position.

In the end, 14 liaisons participated in this study. They were not limited to any region within North Carolina, and were selected solely upon the employment and school characteristics listed above. Using the North Carolina Community College System's (NCCCS) Fire and Rescue Training Regions list as a guide (NCCCS, 2010), six participants were from the Western Region of the state, four were from the Central Region, and four were from the Eastern Region. For reference, the Western Region consists of Charlotte and all points west; the Central Region is Raleigh and all points between Raleigh and Charlotte; and the Eastern Region is anywhere in the state east of Raleigh.

Data Collection

Process. Navigating the seemingly endless literature focused on phenomenology is a major challenge for the budding researcher (Caelli, 2001). However, one quickly

discovers that, because phenomenology focuses on subjective experience, in-depth interviews are, by far, the genre's main data collection method, with written descriptions being a distant second (Ashworth, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Giorgi, 2009; Groenewald, 2004; Hein & Austin, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Langdrige, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). The object of phenomenological data collection is to garner a description of a person's perception of a phenomenon; therefore, personal expressions – whether verbal or written – are essential to a researcher's understanding of a participant's "lifeworld" (Langdrige).

After making initial and follow-up contact with the study's 14 participants (see Appendices A and B for recruitment email and telephone script, respectively), I set up days and times for an interview, and also told them that I would be sending them two prompts, one for a written reflection about their leadership experiences as an early college liaison (Appendix C) and one for documents that I wanted to collect prior to or upon visiting them (Appendix D). I also, at that time, emailed them a letter of informed consent (Appendix E), so that participants would be fully aware of the scope and possible ramifications of the study prior to data collection of any sort.

The majority of data collection occurred during a three-week period in November 2012, and I interviewed 10 of the 14 participants during a one-week span early in the month. During this week, I logged about 1,200 miles on my car as I drove to some of the state's most eastern parts and several central counties, and, then, back to the state's western region, where I reside. One of the measures that I used to establish credibility of the study was to triangulate the data by gathering it through three different types of source materials – written reflections, documents, and interviews. Triangulation,

according to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p. 252). More information about attempts to establish trustworthiness is included in the “Trustworthiness” section below.

Types of data that were collected. Written reflections were submitted by all participants prior to the interview process, so that I had an idea of each person’s view of educational leadership and “boundary-spanning.” The prompt (see Appendix C) included these instructions:

Please describe the leadership experiences you have had as a North Carolina early college liaison. Include the leadership skills that you have developed while working to bridge K-12 and community college cultures, resources, and environments. Feel free to include information about the relationships that you have developed with K-12 and community college administration, faculty, and staff in your pursuit of helping high school students adapt to a community college setting. Also, please describe how you have developed as a leader, if at all, during your time as an early college liaison.

The written reflections were accompanied by documents (see Appendix D) that were submitted by each liaison prior to or during the face-to-face interviews. Documents included, but were not limited to:

- Job descriptions.
- Organizational charts.
- Brochures, fliers, or other materials related to early college.
- Demographic or academic descriptions of early college student bodies.

The main sources of data, though, were face-to-face interviews conducted with each participant. All interviews were recorded using two battery-operated, tapeless recording devices (Samson Zoom H2, 2007; Sony ICD-PX312, 2011). Recordings from both devices were immediately downloaded to a laptop computer after each interview. The rationale for using two devices was to better ensure that (a) the interviews would be captured in the event that one device malfunctioned, and (b) transcribed data was an accurate reflection of what participants said, in light of the fact that one recording device might better capture a participant's words than the other device. I transcribed each interview as quickly as possible after completion of the interview; however, because transcription took approximately one hour for each 10 minutes of interview data, it was very work-intensive and took several weeks to complete. All interviews ranged from one hour to one hour and 20 minutes in length.

Interviewing details. Experts from various qualitative genres agree that several things are important in the interview process. Renowned ethnographer Spradley (1979), for example, concurred with phenomenologist Giorgi (2009) that the interviewer should (a) build rapport with the participant; (b) keep the participant talking, through the use of follow-up questions; (c) keep the informant on track, so that the conversation never strays far from the theme of the interview; and (d) ask questions that are descriptive, seek examples, and mine the interviewee's experiences.

To these ends, the interviews, which I recorded and transcribed, were semi-structured, and followed what Patton (2003) and Turner (2010) referred to as an "interview guide approach." With this method, the interviewer does not have a set of fully developed questions but identifies topics, so that the interview, though flexible,

remains focused. Turner admits that there is some danger in the interview guide approach. He wrote that, unlike more structured interviews, there is a greater chance that interview guide questions and, therefore, answers, could vary widely among participants. However, using the interview guide approach is sound for phenomenological research. According to Giorgi (2009), variation in participant answers is common and expected in phenomenological interviews. To remain agile, I used Giorgi's advice and made the interviews reciprocal, so that I could ask as many follow-up questions as necessary, to glean data from unanticipated questions.

In addition to embracing the loose structure recommended by Patton (2003) and Turner (2010), I was specifically guided by Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) recommendations for phenomenological interviewing. Kvale and Brinkmann espoused that phenomenological interviews should be *inter views* (note that "inter" and "views" are separate words) in which the interviewer and interviewee share information. The conversational tone of the interviews that I conducted was intended to build rapport with participants, as well as to garner thick descriptions of leadership and "boundary-spanning" from their viewpoints. To strengthen variation and well-roundedness during the interview process, I tried, as much as possible, to include Kvale and Brinkmann's nine types of interview questions (pp. 135-136), which are listed here with brief descriptions:

1. **Introductory:** Questions that ask the participant to describe a phenomenon.

These questions typically begin with phrases such as "Can you tell me about...," or "Do you remember an occasion when...?"

2. Follow-up: Questions that are often phrased by repeating significant words, so that the participant expounds on the topic.
3. Probing: Questions that seek to gain more detail about a topic. These questions can start with a variation of “Tell me more about...”
4. Specifying: Follow-up questions that attempt to garner more-precise descriptions about a topic.
5. Direct: Pointed questions that specifically address aspects of a participants’ relationship to an aspect or aspects of a phenomenon.
6. Indirect: Questions that investigate a participant’s attitude by referring to attitudes of other people (e.g., fellow employees or students).
7. Structuring: Questions that refocus an interview that has strayed away from the main topic that is being studied.
8. Silence: Although this is not a question type, it is included by Kvale and Brinkmann. This refers to allowing a participant to self-reflect and then, hopefully, expound on an answer.
9. Interpreting: Questions that are asked to ensure that the interviewer is interpreting the participant’s answer correctly. Such questions typically start with phrases such as “Do you mean that ...?” or “Is it correct that you feel that ...?”

The interview protocol that was designed for this study (Appendix F) focused on participant experiences related to leadership and “boundary-spanning” while working with an early college. All interviews were conducted on the campus of each liaison’s respective community college or early college. As recommended by Giorgi (2009) and

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interviews were gateways for dialog, with the intent of allowing participants to share feelings about the phenomenon of “boundary-spanning.”

These interviews were the main data collection tool used for this study.

Data Analysis

The data that were analyzed for this study included participants’ written reflections about leadership and “boundary-spanning,” submitted documents, and face-to-face interviews. All interviews were transcribed to documents using the Microsoft Office Word (2010) program, and, upon completion, were printed to paper for initial analysis. Phenomenology calls for rigorous reading and rereading of transcribed interview data, to uncover the essence of the phenomenon being examined (Caelli, 2001; Giorgi, 2009; Hein & Austin, 2001; Moustakas, 1994), and this study was no exception. Each interview and its accompanying written reflection were read in full at least four times, so that I could familiarize myself as much as possible with the participants and the data they generated. In addition, the field notes I compiled were consulted frequently, to aid in the recall of what I was thinking during interviews. Because most notes were taken in the margins of a printed copy of the protocol that I used as my interview guide (Appendix E), I was often able to tie my notes (and, therefore, my thoughts) to specific questions or parts of questions.

Some phenomenology scholars consider the act of “horizontalizing” essential when analyzing phenomenological data (Langdrige, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). When horizontalizing, the researcher considers every word, phrase, or statement that is relevant to the phenomenon as equal to all other words, phrases, or statements about the phenomenon. Moustakas considers horizontalization to be a form of bracketing, because,

with each pertinent word or phrase being equally important, the researcher is able to consider each one as a new horizon to explore during the journey toward the essence. He wrote that

Horizons are unlimited. We can never exhaust completely our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider them or view them. A new horizon arises each time that one recedes. It is a never-ending process and, though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited. (p. 95)

The word-for-word consideration that Moustakas touted was considered during this study, but it was by no means the only lens through which collected data were examined. Context was also examined vis-à-vis sections of interviews and entire interviews, and this is reflected in Chapter Four, the “Findings” section of this report. However, I used the spirit of horizontalizing for bracketing purposes. In an attempt to push subjectivity aside and consider all relevant data equal, I read and reread transcribed data, in an effort to allow my initial impressions of the data to mature. In doing this, I found that the most revealing data were not found in individual words, but in large “chunks” of data – phrases, paragraphs, and, sometimes, multiple pages – that represented liaisons expounding at length about the “boundary-spanning” phenomenon.

Initially, I coded and themed data by hand, using highlighter inkpens, to target recurring ideas related to the leadership of early college liaisons. I then extracted words and/or phrases from the raw data that described the phenomenon of leadership and “boundary-spanning” and clustered them into themes. Handwritten codes and themes were listed on paper. Initially, 101 codes were assigned to the data, and 15 large themes

developed. During a second reading of the data on paper, I reduced the data into 80 codes and eight broad themes. After this, I loaded all data into ATLAS.ti (2013), a computer program that is used in qualitative data analysis. Considering the large amount of data that I was analyzing, I decided, after reading Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and speaking to several doctoral students, that the use of a computer program would help me speed up the coding and theming process, and provide me with easy access to passages that could be inspected quickly and repeatedly. Using ATLAS.ti, I read all transcripts again and began to further reduce the number of codes and themes that I had attached to the data. At this point, I used the memo feature in ATLAS.ti to create memos, which, according to Marshall and Rossman (2011), are informal, reflective writings that aid in generating thoughts about patterns that emerge from the data. Prior to creating the memos, I solicited the responses of two Western Carolina University professors and several graduate students who were working on their dissertations, to establish that my reasoning for and approach to the memoing process was sound. They indicated that they perceived no problems with my method.

Through the memoing process and another full read of all materials, I was able to, again, disaggregate the data and attach them to the themes that are included in this report. It was these themes that I used to determine the essence of the phenomenon of “boundary-spanning” and leadership as it applies to North Carolina early college liaisons. I used the themes to determine the different topics that are experienced by liaisons in relation to the phenomenon. Because analysis had to answer the study’s overarching research question and subquestions, I categorized all themes according to the question

and subquestions, and reported my findings in sections that correspond, largely, to the subquestions.

Some stronger themes were found in data that were collected from every single participant, and some themes were only found in the words of a few participants. Most themes were generated by about half of the study's participants. In addition, subthemes, smaller themes that were categorized under larger themes, were found throughout the data. These themes and subthemes are listed and expounded upon in Chapter Four. The goal of the study was to determine, from these themes, subthemes, and categories, the essence of lived leadership experiences for these North Carolina early college liaisons.

Through thorough analysis of written and recorded data, and by bracketing to minimize bias and researcher subjectivity, I aimed to exemplify what Finlay (2009) and Giorgi (2009) called the "phenomenological attitude." Giorgi explained the phenomenological attitude this way: "One has to dwell with the data, change and vary it imaginatively, which includes imagining the opposite of what one might desire to express, until one finds an expression that is suitable" (p. 132). This attitude was of paramount importance to the data analysis process, because it helped me find, not necessarily what I was looking for, but what, I think, represents the true essence of the descriptions that were collected, transcribed, coded, and themed.

Trustworthiness

Determining the credibility of any empirical study is critical. Although providing positivist "proof" is not the goal of qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is indicative of the amount of credibility one can claim in relation to data collection, data analysis, and reporting of the findings (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2011; Miles &

Huberman, 1984). To establish trustworthiness, several measures were taken during the proposed study. These measures, unlike similar methods used in quantitative studies, were not aimed at validating and generalizing the research findings – they were focused on providing true reflections of participants’ “lived experiences” through the descriptions and themes that took form within the phenomenological data.

Along with the bracketing that was described earlier in this section, I used several procedures to determine trustworthiness. These procedures were suggested by both Creswell (1998) and Glesne (2011) as effective in establishing qualitative credibility:

1. Triangulation of the data. The use of multiple sources (interviews, written reflections, documents, and researcher notes) drew overlapping themes from the data, and showed that these themes were common to the experiences of the participants.
2. Peer review and external audit. Scholars and doctoral students who were knowledgeable about qualitative research but were not engaged in the study were queried, to provide feedback about the research process. The basic premises of the study were described to Western Carolina University’s Qualitative Research Group, which is composed of professors and graduate students who are interested in or engaged in qualitative research. In addition, I met with two university professors and a group of doctoral students multiple times during the data analysis phase of the study, to discuss analysis methods and preliminary findings.
3. Member checking. Each participant was provided with a transcript of his or her interview. The participant was encouraged to read the entire interview, to

ensure that the data were captured accurately. None of the participants elected to ask for any substantive alterations or clarifications related to the data, although minor typographical errors were cited on multiple occasions.

4. Thick, rich description. This phenomenological study was an examination of the phenomenon of early college liaison leadership. Extensive written passages about the working lives of the liaisons were designed to help readers “sink into” the data, and, therefore, experience the participants’ viewpoints about the phenomenon being studied.
5. Audit trail. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a description of all research activities is essential to trustworthiness. Raw data, memos, notes, reflexive writings, and any reports created through the use of computer programs have been retained and will be kept on file for a minimum of five years after final submission of the dissertation.

The intent of this study was to provide an account of the lived experiences of early college liaisons relating to leadership and “boundary-spanning.” Therefore, the following issues posed by Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 1998) were taken into account during data analysis: (a) sufficient bracketing, so that I did not influence participant responses; (b) accurate transcription of interviews, to convey proper meaning; and (c) consideration and elimination of alternative conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness, though important, is meaningless if a study is not conducted ethically. “If a researcher encounters an unanticipated difficulty that brings up ethical issues,” Giorgi (2009) wrote, “then, always, in a conflict between ethics and science,

ethics triumphs” (p. 123). Ethical considerations were addressed before data collection began, and these considerations were made known during initial contact with prospective participants.

Among the recommendations that Christians (2005) provided, three were part and parcel of this study:

- 1) Letter of informed consent and other notifications. An informed consent letter was signed by and obtained from all participants prior to the beginning of data collection (see Appendix E). This letter acknowledged that participants could stop the interview at any time, if they felt it was in their best interest. In addition, I clearly explained the reason for research and my obligations prior to obtaining participants’ consent, via the informed consent letter, the recruitment email (Appendix A), the recruitment telephone script (Appendix B), and in person prior to starting the interview. Furthermore, I warned participants in advance that data collection would partially focus on working relationships, and, therefore, could cause angst or feelings of tension.
- 2) Confidentiality. The confidentiality of all participants was respected, and all participants were told in advance that their names, and the names of their colleges and early colleges, would not be used in this study. I have maintained my promise to the participants, and interviews and written content have remained cloaked in confidentiality. Furthermore, I am the only person who has observed the raw data in its entirety, and, until the data are destroyed, will be the only person to do so. This will be done to ensure that observed and published data cannot be linked to a certain individual or institution.

- 3) Accuracy. Accuracy was my goal in this study, and the trustworthiness measures listed above (triangulation; peer review; external audit; member checking; thick, rich description; and audit trail) were incorporated to strengthen the accuracy of this study's descriptions of liaison leadership.

Fortunately, the content of this dissertation study did not immediately risk the health or well-being of participants. However, because professional reputations could be affected by the study's findings, ethical measures were taken to ensure a clear understanding between me and the informants about what was being studied and how the information was to be used. I'm confident that these measures helped me produce a study that is an important addition to the early college and leadership literatures, one that will not adversely affect the lives of the people who donated their time to the research.

Conclusion

In this study, I attempted to describe the leadership and "boundary-spanning" experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. Giorgi (as cited in Caelli, 2001) was adamant that phenomenological research has four major characteristics. He wrote that a study must be (a) descriptive, (b) bracketed, (c) aimed at exploring the relationships between people and phenomena, and (d) focused on the essence of human interpretation of phenomena. With this dissertation – through rigorous data collection, data analysis, and bracketing – I endeavored to produce a neutral account of "boundary-spanning" through the eyes of liaisons. According to Finlay (2009):

Phenomenological research characteristically starts with concrete descriptions of lived situations, often first-person accounts, set down in everyday language and avoiding abstract intellectual generalizations. The researcher proceeds by

reflectively analyzing these descriptions . . . by offering a synthesized account . . . identifying general themes about the essence of the phenomenon. (p. 10)

This study examined the position of the early college liaison because it carries several duties that require leadership skills (e.g., coordinating curriculum, organizing professional development, and advocating for first-generation students) despite a lack of “legitimate power” (NCNSP, 2004b, 2008; French & Raven, 1968). Furthermore, the liaison position requires the ability to span the differing cultures of K-12 and higher education (Eddy, 2010). Because of these challenges, a descriptive, phenomenological study was appropriate for determining the essence of leadership from the early college liaison perspective.

The overarching research question that was addressed was “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?,” and a descriptive phenomenological design was deemed best for addressing the study’s research problem. Although, due to my professional background, I have a certain degree of bias toward the topic, I am satisfied that, with thorough and consistent bracketing, I was able to provide neutral descriptions, through the words of the liaisons, related to the phenomenon that was being studied. In addition, the rigorous data analysis methods that are recommended by phenomenologists strengthened the credibility of the study’s findings. Triangulation of these methods, as well as triangulation of trustworthiness measures, resulted in a study that provides a thick, rich description of leadership and “boundary-spanning” as it is lived by early college liaisons in North Carolina.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. A phenomenological research methodology was used to glean the lived experiences of education professionals who undertake the “boundary-spanning” that is required for management of a community college-high school partnership. This qualitative genre was chosen because of its focus on the acquisition of subjective data that provide an unfettered eyewitness account of a phenomenon. In the case of this study, the overarching research question was “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?” The subquestions were:

1. What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?
2. What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the “boundary-spanning” process?
3. How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in “boundary-spanning” between K-12 schools and community colleges?
4. What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?
5. How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?

This chapter contains the study’s findings as they relate to the research question and subquestions above. The research question was answered through data culled in relation to the subquestions; therefore, the chapter is largely organized in relation to the subquestions. An opening section addresses some of the essential findings related to

liaisons' leadership experiences as a whole, but it is intended that the entire chapter provide a representation of the collective leadership experiences of study participants.

For the purposes of this study, it was important that all participants met specific criteria, so the data would reflect the combined experiences of seasoned liaisons working for North Carolina community colleges. To this end, it was a requirement that each participant in the study:

1. Worked for a North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early college that was partnered with a North Carolina community college.
2. Had been employed as an early college liaison for at least two years prior to data collection.
3. Worked for an early college that had been in operation for no less than four years at the time of data collection.
4. Had a majority of job duties (more than 50%) that were dedicated to the early college, and a minority of duties (less than 50%) that were dedicated to other community college-related areas.

Because of these criteria, the findings contained in this chapter do not necessarily reflect the experiences of early college liaisons who are not employed in North Carolina, nor who do not possess one or more of the other characteristics listed above. However, liaisons across the state participated in this study. In an attempt to provide simple counts of participants' characteristics, tables have been provided throughout this report. These tables have little qualitative value; however, they were created to give readers a quantitative understanding of participants' distinguishing attributes. For example, although gender was not considered as being a determinant of participants' relationship to

Table 1

Gender of Participants

Sex of Liaisons Who Were Interviewed	<i>n</i>	%
Female	11	79
Male	3	21

Table 2

North Carolina Locations of Participants

NCCCS Region within which Liaisons' Colleges were Located	<i>n</i>	%
Western	6	43
Eastern	4	29
Piedmont	4	29

the liaison role, it is interesting to note that female was the dominant sex of interviewed liaisons. Table 1 shows the gender breakdown of the study's 14 participants, and Table 2 indicates their regional locations. The regions are listed in correspondence with the North Carolina Community College System's (NCCCS) Fire and Rescue Training Regions list. For reference, the Western Region consists of Charlotte and all points west; the Central Region is Raleigh and all points between Raleigh and Charlotte; and the Eastern Region is anywhere in the state east of Raleigh (NCCCS, 2010). It should be noted that, due to round-off error, the percentages in Table 2 equal 101%.

In North Carolina, early colleges are funded, in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), by a private-public partnership called the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) (NCNSP, 2004a). Among the requirements for each community college-high school partnership supported by NCNSP grant funding is the identification of "a college liaison to serve as the chief advocate for and support to the early college high school" (NCNSP, 2008, p. 2). The liaison is the only

college position funded by the grant, which supports the opening and first five years of an early college (NCNSP, 2008). According to the NCNSP, the college liaison's roles include (a) assisting in the development of a plan of study that maps out a student's path to completion of an associate degree, (b) helping coordinate high school and college schedules and calendars, (c) aiding in the registration of students into college classes, (d) developing college policies and procedures related to early college students, (e) facilitating the academic assessment of students into college courses that are designed for high school graduates, (f) planning curriculum between the secondary and postsecondary partner to avoid redundancy, and (g) working with community college department chairs to develop pertinent coursework (NCNSP, 2004b). In addition, liaisons are charged with coordinating professional development and curriculum alignment between college and high school faculties.

Healthy business partnerships – educational or otherwise – do not happen overnight, and numerous scholars have found that resource-sharing; mismatched calendars; and cultural and organizational differences create obstacles for the smooth alignment of secondary and postsecondary institutions (Azinger, 2000; Hoffman & Webb, 2010; Huber & Williams, 2009). Because of these challenges, this qualitative study's conceptual framework was rooted in three theories:

- Heifetz's (1994) outlook on "adaptive work," which postulates that leading through conflict requires change agents to "diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the realities that they face" (p. 22). An addendum to "adaptive work" is Heifetz's view about "leading without authority," in

which the protagonist “seeks informal authority from those across organizational or factional boundaries” (p. 186).

- Bolman and Deal’s (2003) “political frame” theory, which argues that bargaining, negotiation, and relationship-building are top leadership qualities required in political organizations with limited resources.
- Putnam’s (2001) assertion that a leader who possesses “bridging social capital,” which is composed of the abilities and personal traits necessary to build solid relationships, is most effective in bringing diverse groups together.

The liaison position was designed to temper the distinctions between the “two different worlds” found within a college-high school partnership. Such partnerships are resource-sharing entities that can result in conflict, particularly in times of limited resources. This study was designed to mine the experiences of early college liaisons, middle-ranking “bridge-spanners” who, despite the political nature of their educational partnerships, are employed to be “champions” for under-represented students and their educational attainment.

The Two Worlds of the Early College Liaison

Overview. During the gathering and analysis of this study’s data, it quickly became apparent that participants viewed the early college liaison position as tantamount to, as one interviewee put it, “living in two different worlds.” The facets of an early college liaison’s professional life, as listed in the NCNSP’s (2004b) description above, are not, on an individual basis, exclusive to the liaison position. However, the combination of them within one community college employee’s job description is evidence that the position calls for a high degree of knowledge about both the secondary

and postsecondary “sides” of a high school-community college partnership. The “two worlds” of the liaison are indicated by the differences between the K-12 and higher education spectrums, and the findings that follow show that the liaison must be competent in and knowledgeable of both types of education – and their rules, parameters, and goals – to be successful.

Early colleges are relatively new institutions, which, through dual enrollment, aim to provide high school students with the means to complete college credentials. As would be the case with any major new endeavor, change management – and change’s omnipresent partner, conflict – are inevitable parts of the early college liaison’s world. In addition, the fact that the early college liaison position, much like the early college concept, has been a part of the North Carolina educational landscape for less than a decade is testament to the fact that some uncertainty was evident in the first years of the position’s existence. All of these themes surfaced, loud and clear, during the collection and subsequent analysis of participant data.

Differences between community colleges and high schools. Sharing of resources; scheduling challenges; and organizational and cultural differences between K-12 and postsecondary educators have been cited as common pitfalls of an early college partnership (Azinger, 2000; Hoffman & Webb, 2010; Huber & Williams, 2009). Possibly because of these factors, participants were particularly cognizant of the differences between community colleges and high schools. Differences in scheduling, instructional styles, and disciplinary practices were all cited by numerous liaisons as being part of the early college “package.”

Scheduling. Although the length of college and high school semesters, and their beginning and ending dates, often differ, participants did not mention this as troublesome. However, they did expound upon the fact that, despite being tasked with bringing high school and college faculties together for professional and curriculum development, college instructors' schedules differed significantly from those of high school teachers. Although several liaisons said they had held occasional group meetings with both types of faculty members, they also indicated that opening the doors for subsequent one-on-one communication between individual faculty members was much more realistic and fruitful than hosting large gatherings.

Another major challenge, according to participants, was the fact that some colleges' courses, as opposed to high school classes, ran during entirely different times of the day, resulting in what one liaison described as "bump-ins and headbutting over overlapping in the classrooms." This seems to have been particularly acute in the early years of community college-high school partnerships, when early colleges were still struggling to find "dedicated spaces" on college campuses. Unlike most college instructors, high school teachers often have sole possession of their classrooms, and, according to a number of participants, this was a sore point during the first years of some early colleges.

According to participants, students and parents, too, had a hard time dealing with the differences between community college and high school schedules, especially in light of the fact that the vast majority of participants' early colleges served a very high percentage of first-generation college-goers. Liaisons cited parents complaining that they couldn't provide students with transportation on days when the college was open and

district high schools (and, therefore, public school busing) were closed. One participant referenced the fact that her college's inclement weather policy of canceling classes during wintry mornings, rather than pushing their beginning times back and condensing the class period, caused great confusion for students, "because most of their parents have never been to college, and so, that was a hard concept to get them to understand."

Instruction. Despite high praise for the early college mission and concept, which will be discussed later in this chapter, study participants expressed great concern about another aspect that proved to be confusing for students – differing styles of instruction between college professors and high school teachers. Citing the early college design principle of "Powerful Teaching and Learning: To provide rigorous, problem-based instruction" (NCNSP, 2012), several liaisons expressed concern that early college students are forced to navigate the multiple differences between the projects and activities that are found in the high school classroom, and the traditional, lecture-based instruction that occurs in many college courses. One liaison said,

It's very different, the teaching in a high school environment, especially this type of environment, the innovative high school environment, versus the community college, where you're going to get a lot of lecturing, and there's not going to be as much interaction, and the students have to do a lot of problem thinking, they have to really delve deeply into their text, and they have to learn how to ask questions, and, you know, it's not just information on the surface they're looking for, to really think about what they're doing in the college classes.

According to another participant, this difference in instruction is tied, at least in part, to high school teachers being answerable to school systems for student performance:

I'm not trying to generalize every college professor, and I'm not saying that they don't care, but at the college level it's about the student's willingness to dig for it. On the high school side, there is a definite accountability on that teacher's shoulders, that every student learn, you know, that whole proficiency thing, the testing, and all those pieces that the college doesn't have to jump through, those hoops.

However, the main difference cited by participants between college instructors and their high school counterparts was training. One liaison expressed great concern that high school teachers, no matter what their original professional background, are required to be licensed and trained in pedagogy, while community college instructors, though content experts, are less likely to have formal training in educational practices. "We're asking students to go from this model of innovation," she said, "to sit quietly in a room, and do reading, and, you know, process lectures, and, you know, things that they've probably never done before." The training of college instructors vis-à-vis classroom management was also referenced repeatedly as a difference between college and high school, with some liaisons expressing either (a) concern that college instructors were too "soft" on high school students, or (b) that instructors were simply unwilling to discipline students, and expected the liaison to aid in classroom management.

Discipline. Individual instructors' classroom management practices were not the only discipline-related college-high school differences that liaisons mentioned. Most participants indicated that their colleges had "no tolerance" policies for certain offenses – recreational drug use and sexual harassment among them – that were above and beyond the disciplinary practices of the partnering school districts.

According to liaisons, these differences resulted in close collaboration between early college principals and community college student development officers when disciplinary action was needed. All three liaisons who provided detailed descriptions of disciplinary incidents involving early college students indicated that these counterparts worked together to either (a) make disciplinary decisions on a case-by-case basis or (b) develop policies and procedures that provided specifics about when a student would be subject to college disciplinary practices (e.g., when in public campus spaces) and when a student would be bound by high school practices (e.g., when in an early college classroom).

“I didn’t sign up for this.” Perhaps the differences between community college and high school are indicative of the change and conflict that all participants except one cited as being a part of their early college experience. Space and resources were repeatedly noted as being sources of conflict, especially in the early years of participants’ schools, when student bodies were growing annually. Because the phenomenon of space utilization is so interlocked with the relationships and social skills liaisons cited as being important to their success, it will be discussed at length in a later section of this chapter. However, an even more prevalent theme that liaisons addressed was the attitude of college instructors who, at least initially, expressed disinterest or even disdain for teaching high school students. Eleven participants cited this as a prominent part of their early college liaison experience, in a number of different contexts.

Most participants who spoke about instructor skepticism linked to high school students mentioned college faculty concerns about students’ academic ability and maturity. One liaison described a group of professors who formed a subcommittee to

investigate a newly formed early college, saying “they were scared to death, and some of them were downright angry, you know, ‘I went to school to teach at a college because I didn’t want to teach high school students.’” However, a more prominent theme than anger was instructors’ concern for young students’ academic ability, as well as a feeling that the arrival of the early college was a slap in the face to the status of the community college system. Referring to instructors’ feelings about the NCNSP and NCCCS, one liaison said:

In some ways, I think, on the community college side, there was a feeling that, of, kind of, like, that we had been slighted, that, “oh, these folks think our classes are so easy that high school kids can do it, but they’re not making Chapel Hill do it.”

In a somewhat similar vein, other liaisons indicated that college instructors expressed concern that early college students didn’t have the maturity to handle the rigors of a college class.

In a couple of cases, lack of explanation from postsecondary leadership about a pending early college may have played a role in faculty doubt. Two liaisons mentioned that their early colleges were not adequately publicized to faculty and staff prior to opening, and that this disconnect took years to overcome. Furthermore, in a few cases, executive insistence – sometimes described as forceful – may have played a role in faculty attitude toward an early college. In the words of one liaison,

The president was very open to hearing me as far as what I thought were some of the issues for getting this program up and running, he was very open to that, and I told him, I said, “that’s one of the main things I hear constantly, ‘I didn’t sign up for this,’” and he very bluntly put it to the faculty, “this early college is here to

stay. You will teach them the same way you teach any traditional student, and, if you have a problem with that, then we will give you a very good reference,” and that’s exactly the way he put it.

As the years have gone by, though, most liaisons reported that college faculty acceptance of the program has grown, largely due to student success rates. One liaison described the community college’s acceptance of her early college this way:

I definitely think it has progressed in a positive way. What used to be theoretical is now real, and where there was no example of student success, there are good examples of student success, students graduating, students doing well in classes, documented cases of teachers saying that their early college students in their classes do better than their traditional students in their classes.

Uncertainty during the early years. In the mid- to late-2000s, the early college liaison was a newly created community college position. Furthermore, the early college concept was foreign to the North Carolina educational landscape. Although dual enrollment had existed in the state for almost 20 years, early colleges were breaking new ground in both academic intensiveness and college-high school intimacy. Probably not surprisingly, the liaison position – and the “two different worlds” that it spanned – was remembered by a number of participants as marked with uncertainty. Eleven participants voiced strong opinions about the ambiguous nature of their jobs, and, although most expressed increased feelings of comfort related to their roles, to a person they said that the job was not fully what they expected when they were hired.

The uncertainty expressed by study participants was not due to lack of a current job description (all participating liaisons submitted one during the research process);

rather, it appeared to be linked to the one or more of the following: (a) initial unknowns related to the level of personal leadership that, according to most participants, the job requires, (b) a previous liaison who did not devote adequate time to the position, or (c) perceived lack of guidance from community college hierarchy. It should be noted that the NCNSP has altered its recommended job description since the inception of the state's first early colleges (NCNSP, 2004b, 2011), and, thus, it is possible that new liaisons may not have the same experiences of uncertainty that were divulged by the majority of participants in this study.

The theme of leadership is vital to this study, and the descriptions of liaison leadership experiences were varied, with all participants except two categorizing the job as a leadership position. Upon accepting the post, the element of leadership surprised a handful of participants, who expressed sentiment that their leadership skills have been forced to grow during their tenure. One liaison talked about turning fear into strength:

When I first started, I did a lot of stuff afraid. I had never done, you know, some of the public presentations before, I had never chaired some of the committees, I had never been asked for my opinion on anything very much, so I had to really grow into what I had to be, and there was a lot of times I just had to do the research before I went in, I had to really start to look at systemic issues, and just prepare the best I knew how for whatever situation I was going to be in.

A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant, who said he found himself championing a program that represented, as he put it, "two entities that just don't naturally work well together," the high school and the community college. Yet another

found that his leadership skills blossomed because, with leadership changes at the principal, superintendent, and community college vice president level, he became a constant in an atmosphere of change.

The theme of change was also related to liaisons themselves, with employment turnover being linked to ambiguity during participants' early days on the job. In some cases, the previous liaison had been an academic vice president or dean, who had been able to devote little time to the job's daily tasks. In other cases, liaisons' predecessors had been, according to some participants, unorganized employees who had failed to build meaningful relationships with college faculty and staff. Interviews indicated that both types of forerunners left the new liaison with a relatively blank template for the day-to-day processes listed in the job description. One liaison gave this experience a positive twist, and described the lack of a blueprint as, ultimately, a plus:

I think my biggest learning curve was when I came here, I did not have a specific outline of what I was supposed to do You know, when I came in, it was like, "Alright, here's your position," and I was just like, "Okay," you know, I wasn't really sure what I was supposed to be doing, you know, but that was, I'll say, even though that was a weakness, that was also, kind of, the strength of it, is then, I began to just observe everything, and say, "Well, this doesn't really make sense, I'm not sure why we're doing it this way."

Training and Professional Backgrounds of Early College Liaisons

Overview. Considering the ambiguity that most participants attached to their early years on the job, it is important to understand the professional skills and mindsets that those liaisons possessed when they began their tenures with their respective early

colleges. The first subquestion for this study's research focus was "What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?" Documents, written reflections, and interview data were used to determine these aspects of the liaison leadership experience, as well as to explore each participant's professional relationship to his or her community college and high school. Data showed that, despite guidance from the NCNSP and the NCCCS related to job duties, early college liaisons vary greatly in their organizational placement. In addition, participants had many commonalities among their backgrounds, similarities that far outweighed differences, but also exhibited varied degrees of professional depth related to their positions.

Other points of interest were the characteristics that made participants, in their eyes, a good fit for the liaison role. Résumés and work experiences were not sole determinants of whether or not participants believed themselves to be successful advocates for high school students on a community college campus. Many factors played into this milieu, and data showed that leadership skills, relationship-building, and social capital were all considered important to participants in their pursuit of being an effective go-between for the community college and its partnering high school.

Table 3

Organizational Division of Participants

College Division	<i>n</i>	%
Curriculum and instruction	10	71
Student services	4	29

Place within the organization. Prior to a close-up view of the training and professional backgrounds of participating liaisons, it is important to point out that, organizationally, participants' job placement varied. Table 3 shows a simple breakdown

of interviewed liaisons' college divisions. Although a majority of interviewees were employees of their college's department of curriculum and instruction, four were housed in student services. Community college scholars have noted significant differences between curriculum and instruction and student services divisions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Hirt & Frank, 2013; Keyser, 1989; Matson & Deegan, 1985), writing that student services exists to facilitate enrollees' access to and success in instructional environments (e.g., the classroom).

According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), student services divisions are typically composed of employees that provide support mechanisms such as financial aid, registration, admissions, and recruitment, to name a few. Curriculum and instruction divisions, meanwhile, are typically composed of academic departments and the faculty that teach departmental curricula. While placement of the liaison within the organizational structure of a community college is worth mentioning, it is only a sidebar to their leadership experiences, and might be a worthy subject for further study related to the position.

Table 4

Who Liaisons Reported to Within Their Organizations

Type of Administrator	<i>n</i>	%
Vice president	6	43
Dean	4	29
Associate dean	2	14
Other administrator	2	14

In addition to participants being housed in different college divisions, liaisons in this study reported to varied positions in their respective institutions, and Table 4

provides a glimpse into participants' reporting structures. Although close to half of the interviewees reported directly to a vice president, others exhibited alternative hierarchical situations, with some reporting to deans or associate deans, and, in two cases, administrators who oversaw all dual-enrollment partnerships for their liaison's college (e.g., early college, middle college, Career and College Promise).

Placement of the liaison on a college's organizational chart could be indicative of the position's influence on upper management. Putnam's (2001) theory of social capital has been cited as essential to middle-ranking professionals' ability to influence leaders in educational partnerships (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Eddy, 2010; Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). The placement of the liaison underneath a vice president, in particular, is reminiscent of the musings of the early college liaison quoted in a 2005 study who said, "I don't consider [the position of liaison as] power – I consider it the ability to talk to the person who has the power" (American Institutes for Research & SRI International [AIR & SRII], 2005, p. 63).

Work experiences. Overwhelmingly, participants' professional backgrounds included several years of employment in one or more educational setting, with all 14 indicating they had direct work experience in education prior to becoming an early college liaison. Considering the nature of the liaison position, it is not surprising that experience in education was prevalent among study participants, nor is it surprising that most interviewees had extensive experience at their respective institutions. According to Vaughn (2009), a partnership's "champion" must be able to bring together diverse stakeholders and, certainly, a person with vested interest in an organization is more likely

to possess the bridging social capital (Putnam, 2001) needed to meld two naturally different institutions. Of the 14 participants, eight had been hired from within their organization, and six were new employees to their respective colleges when they accepted the liaison position, which is reflected in Table 5. Table 6 provides information about participants' professional backgrounds, with several liaisons being represented in more than one category.

Table 5

Participants' Employment Status Upon Being Hired by Institution

Type of Employee	<i>n</i>	%
Hired from within organization	8	57
New hire	6	43

Table 6

Work Experiences Prior to Becoming a Liaison

Types of Work Experience	<i>n</i>	%
Elementary or secondary teaching	9	64
Noneducation-related profession	6	43
Postsecondary nonteaching	6	43
Secondary nonteaching	6	43
Postsecondary teaching	4	29
Education-related business	2	14

Teaching experience. As can be seen, two-thirds of the study's participants had experience in teaching at the K-12 level, with one having taught elementary, one who taught middle grades, and the remainder being former high school teachers. Length of experience in these settings ranged from a semester of student-teaching to 15 years. One participant had this to say about the benefits she experienced as a result of her K-12 teaching experience:

When I took the college liaison job, the secondary ed person, the career readiness person, all of those people I worked with at the school, the counselors, every single one of them, so when I got this job, it was not like I had to get them to buy into what we were doing, you know, they actually did. The principals, we all met and I, and I think that it was so much easier – if I had a problem, I knew exactly who to call.

As indicated here, the experience of being a K-12 teacher, and the understanding of secondary education that came with that experience, were, in several cases, expressed as being great boons to the assimilation of early colleges residing on the campus of a postsecondary institution.

Likewise, past postsecondary teaching experience, although less prevalent among study participants, was seen as a benefit to navigating a college-high school partnership, especially in the realm of student relations. Four participants had taught on the community college level for multiple years prior to being named liaison, and one of them noted that his teaching style in literature class meshed well with the NCNSP's (2012) design principle of Powerful Teaching and Learning, with its classroom-facilitation approach:

To me, it's more about class discussion. I want to, you know, kind of find out what the students are thinking, get them actively engaged, no passive recipients I'm more interested in the students' response, and their thoughts . . . so, I try to give them a little more, I guess, ownership or power, over what's going on in the class, and they still have to articulate it in an essay, but it's not so much of me, kind of, you know, in control.

Another liaison gave extensive details about how her experiences with catering to the diverse learning styles, ages, and personalities of an adult community college student body had helped her in managing not only young early college students, but the multiple adult constituents of her early college partnership, as well.

Nonteaching educational experience. Several participants also recalled extensive nonteaching experience related to both secondary and postsecondary education. From the secondary side, two had athletic coaching experience at the high school or middle school levels, two had been administrators in a high school setting, three had done stints as high school counselors, one had been a recruiter for an at-risk youth program, and one had been a student activities coordinator.

Participants' postsecondary nonteaching experiences were almost exclusively in student services-related areas. A couple of liaisons were former financial aid officers; one was an admissions counselor and academic advisor; and one was a former testing and assessment coordinator. Again, these past jobs were seen as being beneficial for relating to early college students and other constituents, concepts that will be explored extensively in the section of this chapter centered on professional relationships.

Business-related experience. Work experiences in a school or college setting were certainly the most prevalent among study participants; however, a few liaisons reminisced about their tenures in business-related fields, some of which were linked to education. One spent 12 years as an "educational services provider," working on national and local levels by administering technology-related instructional workshops for teachers. This liaison recalled that her experience in that job played a major role in her decision to become involved with the early college and its innovative, nontraditional approach to

education. Another liaison expressed that her background in the corporate world had been a tremendous help to her as a liaison. “It’s been neat,” she said, “because I’ve used everything. I’ve used the education part, I’ve used the professional part, the sales part, the marketing, I mean, the job has, just, kind of, rolled all of that in.”

One participant had been co-owner of an overseas manufacturing business, and one had spent the better part of a decade working as a machine operator in a manufacturing facility after high school graduation, prior to going to college and completing two degrees. Other former occupations cited were writer, biologist, accountant, and mental health counselor. To a person, all participants admitted that, no matter what their professional background, it had helped them communicate with young students and advocate for the early college.

Professional Relationships Developed during “Boundary-Spanning”

Overview. Participants’ words about their professional backgrounds included the prominent theme of forming and sustaining relationships with various stakeholders. This study’s second research subquestion was “What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the boundary-spanning process?,” and this section provides an analysis of data relating to this question. Relationships and relationship-building are seen by Bolman and Deal (2003) and Putnam (2001) as essential to navigating politically charged organizations and bringing diverse groups together, respectively. Liaisons who participated in this study personified these leadership theories, and saturation was reached quickly as participants talked about both collegial and adversarial relationships linked to community college faculty and staff; early college faculty and staff; community college leadership; and early college principals.

In addition, and possibly most interesting, a strong sense of isolation, usually linked to an individual's not being directly attached to any "department" or "team," was explored by six liaisons. Table 7 shows the frequency of the professional relationships cited by participants as most important in the early college "boundary-spanning" process. Because "isolation" is not a person, it is not included in the table. However, findings on the theme of isolation are reported in this section. It should be noted here that liaisons were also very vocal about their relationships with early college students and parents, and those aspects of participants' working lives will be described in the section about maintaining student advocacy, which is the final major section of this chapter.

Table 7

Professional Relationships Cited as Important in "Boundary-Spanning"

People Liaisons Interact with Most Frequently	<i>n</i>
Community college faculty and staff	14
Early college principal	14
Community college leadership (deans, vice presidents, presidents)	13
Early college faculty and staff	12

Relationships with community college faculty and staff. Liaisons took pride in their close associations with college faculty and staff; however, the ease of these relationships did not come without long periods of trial and error for the majority of participants. All liaisons except one indicated that it took them years to work through the conflict and change that followed their high school's debut onto a community college campus. Most participants described two major hurdles related to faculty and staff: the inclusion of young students in postsecondary classes, and issues related to dwindling college space and resources, which intensified during an early college's physical growth.

However, a very interesting pattern emerged from the data: While liaisons expressed continued frustration related to space, all 14 of them indicated that faculty acceptance of early college students had improved dramatically over the years.

A number of broad themes linked to participants' relationships with community college faculty and staff emerged from the data: (a) a strong sense of liaisons and faculty working together to facilitate student learning; (b) the act of "building bridges" with colleagues through being seen as "one of them;" (c) a commitment to developing bonds with staff members of all types; and (d) the difficulties associated with space and resources. This section will synopsize these findings, and will show that participants' perceptions were that college faculty and staff relationships were of paramount importance in fostering student success.

Working together to facilitate learning. All study participants expressed the sentiment that building relationships with community college employees was a major investment in their early college's success. Some described hosting meetings with faculty shortly after taking the job, to gauge instructors' concerns about the program, and all spoke about constant communication with professors who were teaching early college students. The intensity and depth of these relationships oftentimes seemed to reflect the impact that a growing early college was having on its partner institution. One liaison touched on several points in a rich, uninterrupted passage that presents an almost complete snapshot of the relationships-as-investments phenomenon that all participants described in their interviews and written reflections:

Those first, probably three years, we were permeating the campus further and further, and it was just so critical to me, and it was intentional that, along the way,

I had to establish positive relationships – it was an investment, because those relationships were either going to serve me well over the course of time, or they were going to bite me in the butt, so to speak, you know, because if you come to me with an issue with a student, and you didn't feel supported, didn't feel like I did anything about it, didn't feel like I supported the end that you needed to have happen, then that was going to spread by word-of-mouth, and every other instructor that you talked to was going to, even if they hadn't had our students yet, they were going to go into it with that feeling. On the flipside of that, if you and I had a situation to arise, and you needed my support, and you felt supported, and you felt like there was a favorable outcome, even if the student didn't pass the class or it wasn't favorable in that sense, but you felt like it was a cohesive collaboration to support the same end, that, likewise, was going to spread. So, it was a very, very intentional focus on maintaining and building and creating those positive relationships based on doing what I said I was going to do, just in integrity of my professionalism.

The themes of “maintaining and building and creating” relationships with community college faculty resonated through participants' words with great frequency. Sometimes the relationships were described as being tense, but they were always portrayed as collaborative efforts geared toward making a positive impact on students' lives.

In crafting these relationships, liaisons described learning from college faculty as much, if not more, as leading them. Through constant communication about students' academic performance, attendance, and classroom behavior, several participants spoke at length about working hard to achieve good chemistry between teacher and pupil. One

participant talked about how, through a constant back-and-forth with certain instructors, she would work “to get to the point where my students were successful, and figure out from them [the instructors] what they were doing, and, then, use those skills to work with other faculty.”

Not all descriptions of liaison-faculty interactions were positive. Several liaisons said they would never be able to convince all their college’s faculty members of the benefits of the early college concept; however, none of the participants expressed an overall negative impression of postsecondary instructors. In fact, their descriptions of faculty interactions – especially over time – were overwhelmingly positive. In comparing community college faculty to their four-year college counterparts, one liaison described the beauty of working with instructors who have experience serving the diverse learners found at most public two-year colleges:

It’s a smaller environment, so you can tell if a student is not doing well, an instructor can tell immediately, almost. “Okay, this student isn’t at the same level as all the other students,” so, I feel like they are more patient in that aspect, because my kids are possibly on the same level as a 35-year-old student, depending on how long they’ve been out of school.

In addition to being described as “patient,” community college instructors were also portrayed as collaborative with liaisons, students, and early college faculty members. A number of liaisons described the act of introducing secondary and postsecondary instructors to one another, then being able to step away to let the two teachers communicate among themselves about how to best align the continuum from high school to college:

What I have done is, kind of, open dialogs between departments, so, you know, like, my biology teacher is emailing and speaking with my college biology teacher, and the premise of that is, you know, “I want to teach them in the high school what’s going to help you when they get to the college, so what do you need to be sure that I cover?”

Another liaison spoke about hosting panel discussions composed of college instructors and successful high school upper-classmen, so that younger early college students could get tips about how to be successful in college classes.

Being seen as “one of them.” Although some study participants did not have the luxury of being a member of their community college’s staff for more than a few years, all liaisons exhibited varying degrees of integration into their institution’s culture. Having a network of friends was a prominent theme, especially among participants who had been at their colleges for a significant length of time. Familiarity with the institution appeared to be a key component of success, and liaisons who had extensive backgrounds at their colleges – as employees, and, in one case, as a student – provided rich data indicating that being seen by faculty and staff as “one of them” was crucial to building social capital and forging long-lasting relationships that served their respective early colleges well.

Participants repeatedly spoke about the value of friendship. Although all spoke about their professional relationships, about half of the liaisons indicated that, even outside of work, they had close friendships with a number of the college faculty and staff that were involved with the early college. A number of the colleges were located in rural parts of North Carolina, and the subtheme of living in a small community – and the inclusive social activities that often mark such communities, such as sporting events and

attending church – were mentioned on multiple occasions in relation to faculty and staff relationships. However, the most prominent portrayals of interaction with community college employees were described within the professional arena. For one participant, this interaction began when she was a student at the community college. “I was a student here before I worked here,” she said, “then I worked here in a different capacity before I came to this position, so I’m very familiar with the faculty and staff on a couple of different levels.”

Although the student-faculty paradigm was mentioned as being a part of only one participant’s professional experiences, her recollection contained hints of a common theme: Deep relationships were crucial to liaisons’ work lives. Some of these relationships were portrayed as being formed consciously and quickly, and others were the result of a long tenure at the college. One liaison described taking a bit of a crash course in getting to know certain people on campus:

What really helped me in doing so – it’s changed a lot for me this year – is that I decided to work the summer as an advisor in the advising center, and I met a lot of people from all different departments, and we’d go out after, you know, it was, like, social, after helping all these students through orientation and everything. So, now, I’ve got this new network of friends who are part of the college.

Proactive engagement with members of the college community, such as that described in the passage above, had a significant presence in most participants’ interviews and written reflections. This was particularly true for liaisons who taught college classes, and, because 11 participants listed teaching as being among their duties, the theme of

collegiality with faculty members flowed naturally from their experiences in the classroom. One liaison, who taught study skills and English on the college level, said:

I had three years' worth of knowing people here at [the college], and, that helps, because I think it's difficult for a liaison to come in and not know the college folks. I don't know how you build all those bridges instantaneously. I think it's really helpful if you already have a lot of that background work in place.

According to several participants, the conscious effort needed to “build all those bridges” included the calculated use of a previously established reputation to promote a fledgling program. One liaison spoke at length about using her past experiences – in the classroom and otherwise – to massage the early college concept into an initially skeptical professional community:

It was very hard, because whatever I would need it was a battle. The only saving grace I had was when I was in student services, I did teach ACA [a college study skills class] to traditional students, and so I would attend some of the faculty things, and so the faculty would see me as one of them, and then, because I was in student services, the staff and administration of the college would see me as one of them, so, then, I was able to go into both of those camps and do some PR work, to talk about, you know, “this is an exciting program for the state, this puts [the college] on the map, we get [state funding] for these students,” you know, “we’re trying to do what we can to make these good students for you and your classes.”

Developing bonds with staff members of all types. To a person, all interviewed liaisons described the importance of building relationships with a wide cross-section of their college’s community. Most participants focused on community college faculty

members and leaders; however, breadth of relationships was almost as important as depth when it came to portraying daily interactions. Front-line staff members, such as administrative assistants, facilities coordinators, maintenance workers, security guards, and student services personnel, were all mentioned as being valuable parts of liaisons' professional networks. In the words of one liaison,

It's the student record girls, it's the, you know, the curriculum facilities lady, that, when I need the auditorium, you know, from all day on September 23rd, and she makes that happen – she's the one that I'm going to remember – “here, I went by Krispy Kreme, ya'll have fun.” So, you have to build those kind of relationships in a very practical way, and then you have to be friendly to, also, those deans and department heads, too. And you have to almost, you don't cater, really, to anybody, but you have to play in both worlds. You have to be somebody that's a worker, so those type of people understand that you respect what they do, and, then, you also have to come across as being somebody with authority, so those other authority figures respect you in their arena. It's really a very, it's a balancing act.

Such a “balancing act” was repeatedly referenced by participants as being crucial to maintaining a college atmosphere that was accommodating to young students. From the bookstore to the library to the hallways, liaisons spoke about getting to know front-line staff in the context of ensuring that the early college – and, therefore, its students – would be accepted. Their efforts were also represented as being a large factor in helping college staff realize that the liaison is a supportive role that could aid them with any early college-related issues.

The actions that liaisons described vis-à-vis building campus-wide relationships are prime examples of Putnam's (2001) theory of social capital. Putnam wrote that social capital helps a community (a) resolve problems, (b) progress steadily, and (c) understand the interconnectivity of its members. Certainly, all three of these concepts apply to the words and actions of study participants, and, oftentimes, the eventual beneficiaries of liaisons' many professional relationships were the students. Although students' well-being in relation to instruction was most referenced, administrative considerations were also prominently described. For example, according to one participant:

Even the security guards, you know, I hang out and talk to the security guards or whatever, you know? So, like, the parking guy now, he'll come in every once in a while, and say, "Hey, one of your students is parked over in a faculty space. I'm not gonna give him a ticket. What should I do?," you know, and, so, you know, you've made a friend, so to speak, where they're not just gonna be vicious about it.

Difficulties associated with space and resources. Participants did not represent all aspects of college faculty and staff relationships as being positive, and one repeated subject of discord was early colleges' jockeying for space and resources. One liaison's quip about "bump-ins and headbutting" on space-related issues has already been noted, but it is worth referencing again, due to the fact that so many of her counterparts at other colleges expressed similar sentiments. Although it is prudent to note that only one side of the story is represented in this study, incidents such as these were sometimes described as contentious. In recalling a strained relationship with the coordinator of a satellite campus, one liaison hinted that he was at odds with the staff member's views about facilities usage:

Probably my biggest frustration is the director down there says, “We don’t have room,” you know, “you can’t use any of this room, we just don’t have room.”

Every time I go down there, it’s like a ghost town on that end; I never see people in there, or I’ll see class of two people, two or three people in there, doing some kind of remediation of some sort, you know what I mean? I just don’t think it’s an effective use of space.

In this particular case, the participant referenced what he perceived to be retaliation against early college employees that was tied to space and resources. Describing classroom technology housed in lockable cabinets, he said,

The director down there started locking all the cases, so now, my instructors would come in there ready to teach, and they can’t get into any of it, so now they’re having to track down someone, and it’s almost like they’re locking it just to spite the high school folks, coming up with, in my opinion, not legitimate excuses about why they would do that.

Although the director’s actions may or may not have been truly malicious, locked cabinets and restricted access to college-owned technology were mentioned by multiple liaisons; therefore, such practices did not appear to be uncommon.

Strained liaison-staff relationships seemed to be particularly acute in situations where an early college was located on a satellite campus or site. Some participants in these situations spoke about site coordinators who had not been forewarned by upper-level administration that an early college would be coming to their locations, and who, probably not surprisingly, were protective of their rapidly dwindling space. One liaison described a shockingly quick and comprehensive absorption of a satellite campus:

The first year, there were only 50 students, so we only had three classrooms, but I remember, there was a huge meeting . . . the next year, where we were looking at, “oh, we’re going to have 50 more students!” Nobody had thought about, well, we’re going to need three more classrooms. We’re going to need office space, you know, all these things that were not, the cafeteria, there was nothing out there, really, for them. And, I remember, the director at the time out there was trying to protect what she thought was her job.

To be fair, facilities coordinators, site directors, and others of similar rank were not the only community college employees that were referenced as being displaced or put-out by early college growth. All liaisons had a tale to tell about the effect that their early college’s expansion had on faculty and staff relationships, and, more often than not, it was a story with a negative bent. Academic programs were relocated at the majority of represented early colleges, and, although there were some positive outcomes, most liaisons focused on the negative impacts such moves had on their relationships with co-employees. Certainly, the aforementioned differences between high schools and their partnering community colleges – instructional, philosophical, and otherwise – played a role in these growing pains. One liaison spoke at length about the awkwardness of her high school’s location immediately above the college president’s office, and how rubber had been installed on a classroom floor to deaden the noise. Although recent financial constraints had prevented the college from relocating the high school, the liaison said a move was planned in coming years.

Relationships with community college leadership. Noise concerns aside, the majority of liaisons described the relationships they had with community college

leadership as among the most important to cultivate. As was seen in a previous section, many liaisons reported to vice presidents; therefore, no doubt, there was an element of self-preservation linked to some participants feeling the need to remain on good terms with executive leadership. However, none of the liaisons directly referenced this sentiment; rather, they focused on the ways in which their relationships with college leadership helped facilitate the early college's success. Most of the relationships were illuminated in a positive light, and hints of dissonance related to college leadership were present in the words of only two liaisons. Executive positions referenced the most were president, vice president, and dean.

A few liaisons viewed college leaders as mentors, and a high percentage of them indicated that upper-level managers were among the biggest supporters of their respective early colleges. Generally, liaisons expressed comfort with seeking the help of college administration on issues such as space, resources, and academic offerings. In addition, a couple of participants mentioned executive leadership that was active in early college-student interaction, and two liaisons served on committees with their college's presidents, with, in one case, the president participating on a committee that was chaired by the liaison.

In their nationwide analysis of early colleges, the American Institutes for Research & SRI International (2009b) stated that "commitment of high-level leadership" (p. 63) was just as important as "an active and engaged college liaison" (p. 59) in managing the success of a high school-college partnership. This marriage of higher- and lower-ranking college employees was evident in the words of several study participants, and some liaisons expressed gratitude that their leaders provided direction that was devoid of micromanagement. This was particularly true for two participants who were not their

early college's original liaisons, both of whom, according to them, had to become change agents upon accepting the position. One of the liaisons said:

I got into this job, and, to be frank, things here were kind of a mess, and, so, I've worked through a lot of changes, but I've been graciously given a great president, really good vice president, who are willing to, just, let me try things, which, sometimes, for leadership, all of that can be scary, but they've been so great to me.

This sentiment was taken even further by the other liaison, who described a close alliance with a college leader:

[The dean] always said, "I don't want you to see me as your boss." He always said, "We're more of a partnership. You tell me what you need and I'll try to get it for you, and I'll argue for you, and I'll back you up on these things, as long as it's productive for the program."

Descriptions of relationships such as these intimated a high level of comfort with and access to postsecondary leaders. "I feel completely comfortable going to the deans, going to my vice president, going to the vice president of academic programs," one liaison said, "I feel completely comfortable going to them with any issues that I'm having." In a couple of cases, this accessibility was extended to early college students, with leaders at one college available for presentations about academic policies and procedures, and leaders at another college being involved in the recruitment interview process for prospective early college students. Presidents, too, were described as being supportive of early colleges, and not just in words, but also in deeds. One participant, referencing her college's president, said:

He's extremely supportive, very very supportive, and, so, if I see a situation, or I see something that I think is important, or needs to be done, or a direction we need to go in, he's open and always there for that, and very, I've never known him to turn anything flat down.

Although one participant expressed sentiments that her college's president was somewhat less than enthusiastic about the associated early college, this was an isolated viewpoint, and lack of executive support was not, in any way, a theme across interviews or written reflections.

Relationships with early college personnel. Participants' recollections about relationships with early college employees mirrored the ups and downs of their interactions with community college faculty and staff. Unlike the high percentage of favorable responses associated with college leadership, though, liaisons' thoughts about early college principals were about half positive and half negative. The irony in this unevenness was that, unlike college leadership, principals were cited as having intensive, daily collaborations with liaisons. Perhaps these close working relationships, when compared to the less-frequent interactions between participants and college executives, provided more opportunity for dissonance.

Certainly, the theme of trust was prevalent in participants' more positive thoughts about principal-liaison interaction. Student discipline; coordination of scheduling and facilities; and catering to pupils' academic needs were all mentioned on multiple occasions as requiring close collaboration and mutual respect. One liaison provided a comprehensive glimpse into the working relationship he had with his principal, when speaking about the transition that took place when a new early college leader was hired:

The new principal was very much for innovation, very much for trying new things, and, so, a lot of the things that I suggested to the other principal, that she told me couldn't happen, you know, because of restrictions, were literally done the first semester that the new principal came in. So, when the new principal came in, I, kind of, jumped on that opportunity to change the dynamics of the relationship between the liaison and the principal, and it's worked out, I mean, you know, I mean, we butt heads every once in a while, but it's more like, she describes it as a husband-and-wife kind of thing, you know. I mean, we're very close, and I know she genuinely has the students' best interest at heart, I have no doubt that's the case, and I think she feels the same way, so, we work really well together.

The feeling of partnership described above was a major theme when participants talked about principal relations. Although not necessarily equals, principals and liaisons were portrayed as being comanagers of the early college vision and mission. Constant communication – one participant quipped “we were on the phone yesterday, like, 29 times” – and shared decision-making were mentioned by all participants. “Our principal often comes to my office to discuss situations, seek feedback and mull over options for resolution,” one liaison wrote. “She and I work extremely well together and share a mutual respect that was developed immediately in our relationship.”

Negative aspects of the liaison-principal paradigm were referenced almost as much as positive ones. One point of contention was the funding structure for the liaison position. A portion of the early college grant money provided by the News Schools Project is earmarked for the liaison's salary. “These funds,” according to the NCNSP (2004b), “will go to the fiscal agent for the project and are then distributed to the higher

education partner in cases where the fiscal agent is the local LEA [local education agency]” (p. 1). All of the liaisons interviewed for this study were affiliated with LEAs that, as fiscal agents, distributed or had distributed funding for at least a portion of their salaries. Although it must be noted that the majority of participants did not express issues with this funding structure, four liaisons indicated that the scenario had caused friction with their principals. However, every person who experienced this espoused the fact that, despite the flow of money, their allegiance to the postsecondary partner held firm. One liaison expressed this sentiment when asked about the issue:

That was one of the issues that [the principal] and I disagreed on when she first became principal, because she was very, you know, quick to tell me, “well, we pay part of your salary, so why won’t you do that?” Well, because I’m a college employee first.

The thread of primary identification with the community college side of the partnership ran true for 13 of the study’s 14 participants. This, however, did not typically mean that liaisons and principals were considered equals. Only one participant described a partnership that, she said, held the principal and liaison on an even plane:

I think we’re at a place now where we’re laterally the same, it’s not on a subordinate position, either one of us. She gives me a lot of support. There are times when she disagrees with what I need and I disagree with what she needs, but we still have that overarching “what is best for the students?,” and we get along, I think, pretty well.

Although working together in the best interest of students was definitely a prominent subject across interviews, the Janus-faced nature of the liaison role was a strong

component in descriptions of participant-principal friction. Typically, such conflict was described as being a byproduct of a principal who made overbearing requests to the community college. This was mentioned by several liaisons, one of whom contrasted this phenomenon with the fact that her chain of command was often slow to respond to the principal's demands:

The principal, being a principal, wants things to happen right now. Well, she doesn't understand that I've gotta go through four people to get what you want, you know, just because you want this done right now, I've gotta make sure it's okay with academic programs, and my vice president, I've gotta talk to the, you know, five or six things are going to have to take place, and you want in on Monday, well, it may be Thursday before it actually gets done.

Other liaisons offered evidence of dysfunctional relations with their early college's leader – “I stayed as far away from that end of the building as I could” one participant reminisced about a former principal – but, rather than personal dislike, the theme that surfaced most often was a frustration that liaisons had with principals who, due to training or leadership style, approached the running of their early college as if it were a traditional school. Citing the bell schedules, fire drills, and constant student supervision found in typical high schools, one liaison put it this way when referencing an early college assistant principal: “It's his goal every day to make sure nobody's wearing a hat.”

Other subthemes explored included (a) principals occasionally treating community college faculty as if they were high school faculty (i.e., attempting to exert authority over a position that was not in the principal's chain of command); (b) liaisons acting as buffers between principals and community college faculty and staff; and (c)

principals who, without consulting the liaison, would address a concern directly with college leadership. However, despite these issues, across all participants, collegiality and working together with the principal to help students navigate the world of college were, without question, the most prominent themes.

This teamwork was also evidenced in liaisons' thoughts about other early college staff members. Although high school faculty were rarely mentioned, and, therefore, are not addressed at length in this study, early college counselors were spoken of frequently. Because participants were tasked with developing plans of study, coordinating schedules, and planning curriculum, they tended to work closely with counselors. Referencing her early college's counselors and the invaluable knowledge that they contributed to fostering student success, one participant said "they always know what's going on, what their kids need, and what they don't like."

Isolation. One of the more interesting themes that emerged during data collection was a sense of isolation among six participants. Possibly because it is a byproduct of being a "boundary-spanner," a person who is hired to have an understanding of both secondary and postsecondary education, sentiments of such isolation evoked emotions of frustration and loneliness. These participants spoke about not having a "team" or "department" on either the high school or community college side of the partnership. Liaison interactions with college faculty, college leadership, and early college staff members have all been documented above; however, even though all interviewees discussed these relationships extensively, a sense of being, as two liaisons put it, "an island," surfaced several times.

A few liaisons intimated that, oftentimes, they worked alone to achieve certain goals for the early college. These tasks were typically college-oriented (e.g., registration, scheduling, compiling reports); however, despite the fact that some of these chores would be hard or impossible to share, they represented, in the words of participants, the singularity of the liaison's job. Recalling a conversation with his college supervisor, one liaison said:

[He] was like, "probably the rest of the college doesn't know what you actually do, and how, sometimes, intensive, that the position can be," and that's fine, I kind of knew that coming on. As a liaison you're kind of an island, you know, you don't have a department here, you know, it's just – you're it.

Another participant expressed almost the exact same sentiment when she said:

Usually when you get a job, you're part of a group, you're part of a unit, you're part of, you know, a department. And I'm not really a part of a department I don't have people, you know! So, that's why my people have sort of become the early college, and, yet, they're not really my, they're not employed by this school [the community college].

Although the participant quoted above chuckled when she said "I don't have people," her light-hearted approach to the situation was still indicative of the uniqueness of the liaison's role. "Living in two worlds," though professionally stimulating to some, was a point of frustration for others. Liaisons often talked about lack of understanding from both their high school and community college colleagues, and about bearing the burden of being the odd person out from both sides of the fence: "I feel like I'm a punching bag," one participant said, "because I get it from both sides; it's like, you know,

the early college isn't happy all the time with what I have to say, and, then, the community college is not always happy." The same liaison, later in the conversation, reiterated this uncomfortable role. "I've never been yelled at in a job situation before," he said, "until I started working as an early college liaison, and I've been yelled at by at least three employees who were frustrated with things that were beyond my control."

Mistreatment from colleagues aside, perhaps the lack of fully identifying with one "side" or the other in an early college partnership is a natural part of the liaison role. Certainly, collected data indicated that the job is an amalgamation of both the similarities and the differences between high schools and colleges, but, across participants, differences were a particularly conspicuous emphasis. One liaison, in her written reflection, described these feelings after accepting the job:

Nothing in my experience prepared me for the high level of diplomacy and constantly shifting sands of trying to found a new educational entity that did not mirror the mission and expectations (much less the procedures) of either of its host institutions. Early college was not a traditional high school in many areas, but neither was it like the community college where it was housed. I found my leadership skills tested in ways I had never imagined.

Leadership Skills Used by Liaisons in the "Boundary-Spanning" Process

Overview. None of the participants in this study, in the traditional sense, were managers. Job descriptions and organizational charts showed that, on paper, the liaison is not a supervisory role. Because most research subjects reported to community college leaders, the position, organizationally, can be situated relatively closely to top-level administration; however, unlike many of their colleagues who reported to the same

college leaders – department heads, deans, and associate vice presidents – liaisons were not tasked with providing direct oversight to any college employees. Therefore, participants’ leadership was steeped in being able to influence colleagues “from the middle.” Heifetz (1994) outlined the traits that are necessary for, as he coined it, “leading without authority”:

Over time, a person who begins without authority or leads beyond whatever authority she has may have to construct, strengthen, and sometimes broaden her base of informal authority in order to get more leverage. . . . To involve the relevant factions in the community, she may need people across boundaries to believe that she represents something significant, that she embodies a perspective that merits attention. When that happens, she has to respect both the resources and constraints that come with authority, formally from her own group, and informally from beyond. Just as leading with authority requires protecting voices of dissent, a leader without authority will have to “take counsel” from her adversaries, incorporating in her strategy whatever wisdom of theirs connects to her central thesis. As she seeks informal authority from those across organizational or factional boundaries, she has to place her cause in the context of the values of her opposition. In addition, she may have to learn from her antagonists in order to correct for the possible narrowness of her own views. She is not just teaching; she is being taught. (p. 186)

The story of early college liaison leadership is not necessarily one of “opposition” and “antagonists”; nonetheless, Heifetz’s words apply on multiple levels. Study participants revealed that gaining leverage for the early college through the embodiment of “something significant” – accelerated education for first-generation college-goers, and the benefits their learning could have for the college and community – and the ability to “take counsel” from various viewpoints, whether they were secondary or postsecondary in nature, were critical to creating an atmosphere in which an innovative high school could excel. This narrative was a big part of early college liaisons’ leadership skills as they were depicted in participants’ words – it was a tale about multifaceted abilities that propelled midlevel employees, “leaders without authority,” to manage partnerships that are designed, according to the tenets of the North Carolina New Schools Project, to accelerate learning and provide students with meaningful and rich life experiences.

Table 8

Leadership Skills Cited as Important in “Boundary-Spanning”

Types of Leadership Skills Identified	<i>n</i>	%
Collaboration	14	100
Communication	11	79
Ability to “lead from the middle”	8	57
Facilitating improvement	6	43
Having vision	6	43
Sound decision-making	6	43
Use of data	6	43
Confidence	5	36
Creating or changing culture	5	36
Discipline	4	29
Problem solving	4	29
Serving others	3	21
Understanding of dual missions	3	21
Leading by example	2	14

Leadership skills cited by study participants were varied. Table 8 on the previous page displays some of the more prominently addressed qualities, with communication and collaboration topping the list. To be certain, some participants had very different views than others about leadership and the liaison job – two participants, for example, said they did not consider the position to be a leadership role. However, even these liaisons described a number of the listed qualities, and, therefore, their words, whether they considered them to portray leadership or not, will be examined in this section. Some of the smaller themes that surfaced will be examined first, and larger themes will be addressed subsequently.

Facilitating improvement. All participants spoke about their experiences with marshaling change. For six liaisons, descriptions of change included innovative ideas about process improvements, professional development, and students' academic success. On several occasions, these improvements were accompanied by alterations to the status quo. Some of these changes caused friction and others boosted collegiality, but all were done in the spirit of improving the early college. One liaison described his experience this way:

I began to just observe everything, and say, "Well, this doesn't really make sense, I'm not sure why we're doing it this way," and, when the new principal came in, we were really able to say, "Well, this doesn't make sense, maybe we should do it this way," and, you know, and a lot of it has resulted in more work for me, but the program is running smoother, and I feel like now, now that we're getting more settled.

Specifics associated with facilitating change included altering procedures associated with scheduling of classes, registration, placement testing, academic probation, college course

withdrawal, academic progress reports for early college students, and the development of regularly scheduled leadership meetings.

As can be seen, the theme of “facilitating improvement” was mostly associated with the development of new administrative processes. Some participants seemed to have a natural bent for the trial-and-error that comes with changing established procedures. “I guess it’s just the way my brain works,” one participant said, “internalizing the “What’s the process of this?” . . . if I see that there’s gotta be a better way, I’ll start trying to figure it out.”

Two of the seemingly more radical changes were initially off-putting to some early college stakeholders, but, according to the respective liaisons, the developments have since proven fruitful. The first, allowing early college students to register themselves through the community college’s computer system, was initially challenged by the partnering high school’s administration. The second, the development of a more strict college course withdrawal policy, caused rancor among students. According to the involved liaison,

I went and told all the students, “No one withdraws from classes, and, if you want to withdraw, you have to meet with me, and the principal, and you have to give us a really good reason why it has to happen,” and, the principal was totally on board with this, the students were totally furious with it, and, you know, I had a lot of angry students in my office, yelling and screaming, and you can imagine the anger when they’d come to me to withdraw, and I would find out they didn’t do their homework, and I would say, “No, you earned an F, you can take an F.”

Having vision. Facilitating improvement – procedural or otherwise – was repeatedly tied to liaisons’ ability to see the “big picture” of the early college mission. Throughout conflict and change – whether it applied to or was manifested by students, professionals, or the college community at large – liaisons portrayed themselves as being at least partly responsible for keeping stakeholders focused on the early college’s goals. One liaison’s take on leadership was reflective of this mindset:

I think leadership, to me, is having the big picture in mind, and, then, being able to marshal resources, whoever it might be, to get it done, to, you sort of see the vision, you know what you need to do, you step in if you need to, but you can also, I think, manipulate mood to get to the point you need to.

According to participants, “manipulating mood” and the ability to “sell” the early college concept – that, in the right environment, high school students can succeed at the college level – was no easy task. Liaisons repeatedly referenced being goal-oriented and driven by organizational vision in their quest to integrate the early college. This vision was most often portrayed as being imparted to fellow professionals, but some liaisons mentioned that instilling these goals into first-generation college-goers was also important in their jobs. Regardless of whom the liaison was trying to influence, though, the fact remained that part of the work was to be a “boundary-spanner” between the high school and the college, and that both “sides” needed to be considered within the frameworks of vision and goal-setting. According to one participant,

You have to be looking out for either the next battle that might come up, with a ripple effect, or the domino effect that’s going to happen from this decision. If we decide not to do this, what happens? Or if we decide to do this, what happens?

And you have to view it from both camps, you know, how does it impact the college, and how does it impact the high school?

Sound decision-making. The balance of weighing the impact that decisions might have on partnering institutions was typically tempered by liaisons' proverbial "North Star" – early college students' success. Participants often spoke of detachment from their own feelings when making choices for the greater good, and a number of liaisons emphasized tailoring their decisions to benefit either their community college or the high school students who attended the college. Making decisions to benefit the high school – as a brick-and-mortar institution, rather than as a collection of pupils – was rarely mentioned, although the subtheme did surface during discussions about space and resources.

Sound decision-making and group dynamics were lumped together on multiple occasions – early college leadership teams, which usually included members of both high school and college hierarchies, as well as the liaison, were repeatedly referenced as being essential to achieving institutional goals. One liaison viewed these meetings as one of her avenues for making an impact on the program and its advisory group. "You talk about leading the leaders," she said, "that, in those meetings, is where you see things, you bring things up, and you do, you put it out there for them."

It was apparent during data collection that all liaisons had a desire to usher in positive change for their program. However, sentiments of leadership for personal gain were almost absent from their collective words. Rather, what emerged from multiple participants was a separation from personal feelings during the decision-making process. One liaison, in particular, was adamant that all decisions be based on student need:

I'm not saying I'm here for a popularity contest, but I do, you know, want to be able to get along with all staff members, and, you know, that doesn't always happen, and they don't understand. Sometimes people don't understand that decisions are made based on students, not staff members. There may be certain decisions that I may not even agree with, personally, but I know it's best for the students, and that's one of the qualities of a leader, too, as well – you've got to take your own personal beliefs out of it, the, I guess, decision-making process, you've got to take that, got to remove that, and see what's best for the organization.

Creating or changing culture. A belief in the greater good – that the early college program is an innovative avenue for bettering the lives of first-generation college-goers – was, to quote Heifetz (1994) above, the “something significant” (p. 186) that several liaisons cited as they worked to influence the culture of their community colleges and, occasionally, their high schools. Liaisons often talked about building culture (a) for students, so that they understood the rigors of the early college program, as well as the motivation and skills needed for success, and (b) for parents, especially those of first-generation college-goers, so that they could grasp the nuances of college academics and services.

However, the most prominent subtheme related to changing culture was revealed in participants' recollections about “boundary-spanning” for partnering faculties. Building relationships, creating a collegial environment, and fostering avenues for communication between college and high school instructors who taught similar subjects were all mentioned by multiple liaisons. Descriptions of these parts of participants' work lives were evidence that the early college liaison must be the “champion” that Eddy

(2010) described as being essential to a successful educational partnership. One liaison who talked at length about building rapport between college and high school faculty said:

I think it's transparency, you know. When we face specific situations, being very transparent about "This is how the public school has to operate in this situation," and, I hate to use this term, but it is what it is, in this type of situation, so, always laying that out for whichever group that I'm speaking with, to make the other culture very transparent, or just explain to them because, you know, in most situations, I know our faculty at the public school side has not had any experience being community college instructors, and our faculty from the community college have not had any experience in being public school instructors, and, so, their expectations of students, their expectations of students' behavior, is very different.

Confidence. Despite the many successes chronicled vis-à-vis bringing two educational communities together in the interest of "something significant," participants' words indicated that, no matter how potent the significance was, 100% buy-in for the early college concept was rare. For a few, this was a point of frustration. For most, it was a confidence-builder. Multiple liaisons stated that their position forced them to become leaders, and the cause they represented was a point of honor, as well as, in their opinions, sound educational practice. One liaison said:

I'm not a person who really is going to take a lot of crap . . . I mean, if someone approaches me in a negative way about something, then I can say, "Well, you know, this is a program we have, it's an awesome program. You're playing a part in where these students are going to wind up, where their future's going to lead them,

what goals they set for their future, your attitude is going to help determine how they feel about education, and it's our responsibility, as educators, to do our job."

Such sentiments permeated the responses of liaisons that, like the one above, leveraged their belief in the early college concept as they worked to, as one person said, "separate what needs to be done versus what people want you to do." The same liaison, who also referenced developing "thicker skin," continued – "When I was younger," she said, "I had to be on everybody's good side, and, to be successful here, that's just not possible."

Passionate references to becoming a stronger leader such as this one were not isolated, and the five liaisons who spoke directly about confidence indicated that their mission gave them the internal strength they needed to become the early college's "champion." Again, it is worth referencing Heifetz (1994) and his theory of "adaptive work." "Adaptive work," he wrote, "consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the realities that they face" (p. 22). Considering this, perhaps the confidence-building that early college liaisons experienced was a reflection of Heifetz's thoughts about "leading without authority": Participants, in many cases, were forced to become leaders through the act of bringing together occasionally opposing viewpoints for the success of a new entity, the early college. A passage from one liaison's interview painted a particularly vivid portrait of confidence-building that resulted from her multi-faceted role:

I'm doing stuff I never thought I would do before, didn't even know I was capable of doing, didn't know I had the skills, the desire, didn't know I enjoyed it, the challenge, and it's because of this job, because I've had to do it. You know, you're

put in a situation where, you know, it is up to you, and the kids are looking to you, like, “okay, what are we going to do next?” Like, when we had the lockdowns and things like that, you know, I might have wanted to hide under my desk, too, but you’ve got, I was with 71 kids in a band room, and they’re looking at me, like, “okay, you tell us it’s going to be alright,” so, that’s not something you plan for, but that’s something, you just have to go do it. So, your leadership, my leadership very much has been what has to happen, and I’m the only one who can make it happen, so I’m really going to do it, and, I’ve not been classically trained in leadership.

Discipline. Few liaisons included discipline among their duties, and job descriptions were devoid of the concept. However, in conversation, four participants spoke about their role in student discipline, which, typically, was related to behavior in college classes. Although a large percentage of liaisons mentioned discipline, it was usually in reference to the actions of a principal or college student affairs personnel. For a few, though, it was just another piece of the “boundary-spanning” process. One liaison described recently having a “heart-to-heart” with a class, where she “went in and read the riot act to them, and threatened their lives, and the whole nine yards.”

Although this was said tongue-in-cheek, the description of the incident was, again, indicative of the “living in two worlds” that is the responsibility of the liaison. In all described cases, the task of being a disciplinarian was more complex than simply motivating children to behave – it was also an avenue for liaisons’ support of college instruction, and, furthermore, it was a sign of one of the differences between the high school mentality related to discipline and its college counterpart. One liaison chuckled as she recalled an instructor who used her name to improve students’ attendance:

He says they're scared of me, and I don't want the kids to be scared of me, but he likes to be able to say, "if you miss another day, I'm telling [the liaison]." . . . They're, they're not gonna chase you down, they're college professors, but they're gonna let you know they'll put someone on that, and that's me.

Problem solving. As can be seen by the leadership skills described above, the early college liaison represents the center of the early college model. The liaison is connected to students, parents, administrators, instructors, and most other personnel on both the high school and community college sides of the partnership. Although maintenance of a collegial atmosphere across all constituents was a professed goal of some participants (one asked rhetorically, "I'm the type of person, I want everybody to be happy, why can't we find that happy medium?"), this was not described as being an objective that could be easily achieved. In fact, the art of problem-solving was listed by multiple liaisons as being an ongoing part of their normal work day.

Although problem-solving was mentioned in the context of improving student services-related processes for students (e.g., registration, scheduling, testing, etc.), it was typically referenced in relation to the student-faculty paradigm. A few liaisons reported having to solve the problem of creating a mechanism for college instructors to provide progress reports about student performance, and others entered the job with much more complex problems to tackle. One, for example, reported having to provide support processes to assuage an entire faculty that was, in her words, "completely done-in with the early college" due to, she said, a perceived lack of oversight on the part of a former liaison. The most often-mentioned problem was the one of putting "the right students in with the right instructors." This situation was echoed repeatedly as being a significant

leadership challenge, and represents the belief espoused by some liaisons that, for early college students to succeed, they needed understanding and patient instructors who were not averse to teaching young students. For some, this was a problem that took years to solve.

Communication. The majority of participants stated that their early colleges, in the first years, were susceptible to complex problems involving faculty interaction with students, public perceptions about the program, and a student body that had to quickly conform to the rigors of college. To be sure, these complications were not resolved overnight. When queried about the skills that were used to shepherd partners through these inevitable pitfalls, one answer stood out among all others: communication. Eleven participants spoke at length about the communication methods they used to diffuse conflict; promote student success; and share policies and procedures.

Liaisons talked about several communication methods – from the lunchroom to the boardroom; some casual, some formal – used to constantly exchange information with early college stakeholders. These methods included student manuals, newsletters, brochures, blogs, drop-in conversations, meetings, data, public speaking, email, Google Docs, and spreadsheets. No matter what the format, though, participants expressed a common theme – a need to keep as many constituents as possible informed about the presence, nature, and, in particular, the successes of the early college program. “I understand how both sides work,” one participant said about communication, “so I can bridge the gap. . . . I’ve had to develop ways to make that knowledge available, and, then, also, present that knowledge to both parties.”

Publications. One of the primary methods cited for disseminating information was the written word. A number of liaisons displayed their desktop publishing skills, submitting documents and publications they had created that highlighted various facets of their early colleges. The brochures and fliers answered simple questions such as “What is early college?” and “Who can attend?” to complex descriptions of the schools’ curricula and the success rates of their students. Some included data that compared early college students’ collective performances on end-of-course testing with that of other schools in the county or state. Others promoted student life, listing the activities and learning opportunities (e.g., project-based learning, use of technology, etc.) that the schools afforded their students. Areas such as “Important Student Qualities” (e.g., maturity, regular attendance, etc.) and “Family Participation” were also featured.

Lists of frequently asked questions; demographic statistics (including both ethnic and parental educational attainment data); and college policies and procedures, such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) information, were also covered in the documents that participants supplied. One brochure even included an in-depth description of the early college liaison position, which gave prospective parents and students insight into the college support they would receive upon being admitted to the early college.

Academic progress. Publications such as brochures about the early college concept and admissions policies were cited by liaisons as being very helpful with educating the public about the early college, as well as college stakeholders who might be somewhat removed from the school, such as board of trustees members. However, participants indicated that the main recipients of regularly provided information about

early college students were postsecondary faculty and leadership. This, again, likely goes back to the concept of “leading without authority” (Heifetz, 1994), where the protagonist reaches “across organizational or factional boundaries” to “place her cause in the context” of other players (p. 186).

The tie-ins that “leading without authority” have to liaisons’ maintenance of student advocacy will be analyzed in a later section; however, it is prudent to brush up against those interrelationships here, at least as they apply to liaison communications with college faculty and leadership. Certainly, there were described elements of self-interest, related to the school as a whole (and not necessarily the respective participant), in liaisons’ communications to instructors and executives. Shared facts about grade point averages in college classes, amount of state funding generated through student enrollment, and facilities needs were all listed as being important facets of promoting the high school to the college community. One liaison indicated that she felt it was her duty to give leadership as much information as possible, in the interest of informed decisions:

I think leadership is a guiding force that makes people come to a decision. It may not be the actual right decision, but giving them all of the, I try to give them everything that’s out there, and let them decide which road that they want to take . . . it’s my job to follow through to make sure that they do what, what, what, in the, I say, in the goal and the mission of the college. It may not be exactly what I feel like they should do, but I feel like I am there to provide support.

Communication between liaisons and instructors was portrayed as being as important, if not more important, as providing executives with information. A number of liaisons talked about the labor-intensive lengths they went to ensure that department

heads reserved enough spaces or staffed enough classes for the early college students. In addition, they indicated that, as students' academic advisors and watchdogs, they were tasked with staying abreast of pupils' performance in college classes. One liaison's system of communication involved the use of a shared Google Doc, and, through this document, she was able to keep the principal, counselors, and parents informed about student progress:

I sent that form out and I said if you have a pressing issue right now, like you're in class, something's not working, shoot me the form, so at least I have it documented. So, all of the instructors have been using the form – they still will email and give me, like, a whole overview of how everybody's doing, but if they have a specific problem with specific students they shoot me the alert form, and then it goes into a spreadsheet, and so my principal and the counselor have access to it, and so do all the advisory teachers so, if they have an advisory student who pops up, they can have their advisory meeting, they can call their parent and they can see what's going on.

Data. Participants described the use of data as being very important to their jobs. Sharing hard facts about student progress, whether it was through the avenues listed above or simply through presentations and public speaking, was highlighted by most as being a liaison duty. Again, sharing of information related to student demographics, grade point averages, and first-generation college-goer rate were all cited as being important to the communication process. Several liaisons submitted documents or printed PowerPoint slides that showed academic progress and the amount of funding that was generated by early college students through the North Carolina Community College

System's full-time equivalency funding formula, which determines the amount of state funding that a North Carolina community college receives (NCCCS, 2007).

Roadblocks and other challenges. Although communication was cited as an essential element to liaisons' – and therefore, schools' – success, it was not always described as a positive experience. Mismatched computer networks, email accounts, reporting structures, and online learning formats were just some of the infrastructural differences that were listed as roadblocks to smooth communication between high schools and their partnering colleges. One liaison said that, because her partnering institutions used completely different computer programs for their communications, including the booking of rooms and the relaying of important information, such as lockdowns, it was up to her to personally provide that information to the high school. Although this situation provided an inconvenience at an institution that was seemingly filled with high-end technology, it was not as off-putting as the feeling that one liaison described when reminiscing about being the go-between for college and high school information sharing:

As a college liaison . . . we're always stuck in the middle, you know, and sometimes we're just the messenger, you know, but, I guess we do play a role to where a lot of folks think that we do make a lot of these decisions, and, so, we get the backlash from it, and that's challenging. I mean, it was very challenging for me, because I don't like controversy, and, so, and I don't like feeling like I always have to, I guess, defend myself, you know, and, so, that has been a challenge, but I just try to communicate, I mean, just make sure everyone is aware.

Collaboration. Communication, at least when it goes back-and-forth between partners, is a form of collaboration, and the leadership skill of working with colleagues to “bridge the gap” was directly referenced by nine participants as a key part of their jobs. In addition, it was inferred by the five who did not name it specifically, because all liaisons spoke about working with high school and college groups to achieve goals related to the early college. Typically, collaboration was referenced within the framework of high school and community college faculty members convening to discuss students and curriculum; however, the liaison’s role was often portrayed as being a covert collaborator, one who, though fully engaged in the communication process, was also willing to frame the collaboration so that it shed a positive light on the early college program.

Bolman and Deal’s (2003) political frame includes two propositions that are worth noting in the context of early college liaison collaboration: (a) organizations are composed of diverse people, and (b) even in alliances, there are differences between partners in “values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality” (p. 186). Considering this, one of the jobs of the savvy liaison, as described by some participants, was to pull diverse stakeholders representing different viewpoints together in the interest of the high school. One liaison emphasized this in the context of the relationship-building that was explored earlier in this chapter:

I think there’s a focus on relationship building, valuing the people that you’re trying to lead and work with, and their ideas, and their needs, and trying to help one of two things: either help meet their need, or help convince them that,

perhaps, that isn't a need, and do it in such a way that maintains their dignity, and not belittle what they thought was a need.

Other liaisons spoke about this phenomenon in a similar fashion. One referred to the liaison position as being that of an "undercover leader," a second one referred to it as "softer, it's suggesting," and another one viewed it as "sneaky leadership, where I persuade people to do things without, really, telling them to do it." All of these statements were made with the utmost respect to early college stakeholders; however, they represented the idea that the early college liaison, a "leader without authority," is tasked with moving business forward without having the "legitimate power" associated with a high position on an organizational chart (French & Raven, 1968, p. 264).

Of course, collaboration did not always, and, in fact, did not usually take place in such a fashion. It was often described in the context of liaisons and college faculty members working together to ensure that students were successful, or in arranging schedules so that students could access classes at the right time of day, while still fulfilling the demands upon academic departments to serve traditional adult students. Interfaculty collaboration such as this was mentioned most often, but intrafaculty teamwork was also a subtheme. One liaison expounded on the collaborative style of leadership that, she said, worked best for her early college's high school faculty:

In this setting, in the early college setting, with 13 teachers, I certainly think that the idea of a leadership that engages all the players, brings everyone to the table, and doesn't demand that everyone have the same strengths, or contribute in the same ways, but, rather, focuses on what those individual strengths are, is an extremely positive work environment. There are certainly caveats within all

leadership styles that are somewhat less effective, or lead to outcomes that weren't necessarily where you wanted to go; for instance, sometimes in a setting like this, you are so small, and you do pull everyone to the table and sometimes the line between subordinate and insubordinate becomes a little blurry, and people might feel a little more ownership to take liberties that cross lines, you know, and then, the leader has to rein that in.

Ability to “lead from the middle.” Facilitating improvement; having vision; decision-making; creating or changing culture; confidence; communication; collaboration; discipline; and problem-solving were the leadership skills that were most frequently mentioned in participants' accounts of the “boundary-spanning” process. This list of traits shows that “leading from the middle” requires a complex blend of skills that involves a keen understanding of human relations; technical considerations; and dual educational philosophies and systems. Of course, it also necessitates the ability to access and influence people of all ages and ranks. From wooing rising ninth-grade students during the recruitment process to mulling facilities considerations with college presidents, the liaison position was represented as being one of significant breadth. Again, “the ability to talk to the person who has the power” (AIR & SRII, 2009a, p. 63) appears to be a key component in the liaison's skill set. But the ability to talk to leadership is not necessarily the same as being able to influence leadership, and study participants provided a number of examples related to how they effected positive change – from “the middle” – for their early colleges.

Although participants described a number of avenues for being an influential member of their respective campus communities, one prominent theme that surfaced was

the skill of being able to stand out among peers, and to understand, not just one's superiors, but the college work force as a whole. One liaison put it this way:

There are times, being a middle management leader, you have to make your voice known. It's crowded at the top, so, you really have to make sure you command the attention you need when you need it. It's not a bad place to be, but it's a place where you have to know what's going on above and beneath you.

Another participant, whose early college was located on a site away from her college's main campus, expressed a similar sentiment, saying that, "every now and then, I like to rattle the office a little bit and say, 'Hey, wait a minute, I'm out here hanging on my own.'" Both of these liaisons espoused two distinct traits of middle-management leadership – having access to and support from executives, and possessing the ability to get power players to talk to one another about important issues.

Communication with and between leaders was described as occurring in several formats. Impromptu discussions with executives who had open-door policies, informal meetings, and committee or advisory board work were all cited as avenues for such engagement. Some liaisons reported chairing committees that included college executives (presidents and vice presidents), and others, as they did with faculty, simply put leaders in touch with one another so that they could discuss things among themselves.

Sometimes, it was expressed that principals asked liaisons for decisions about issues that could only be provided by college executives. Still others spoke about working with leaders in separate one-on-one meetings – especially in the case of strong-willed leaders – to avoid possible clashes.

Certainly, the depth of some liaisons' professional backgrounds played a role in their ability to sway leadership. According to one liaison,

One of the things that we do, and that I'm real pleased with, and this came about in a weird way, in business, having been 20 years in the business field, when you bring people together and put them at the table, there's money at that table, in terms of time and resources, so you make decisions, you sit, you talk, you make decisions, you get up, and you go do them. Educators are the world's worst about meeting, sitting, talking, getting up with no resolution, no plan, no action, than to meet again.

The participant said that her expression of these sentiments to her supervisor resulted in the formation of monthly meetings among college and high school leadership, gatherings that have been instrumental in the early college reaching its goals.

As is indicated in the formation of this liaison's committee, the overwhelming theme related to "leading from the middle" was a reflection of participants' thoughts about relationship-building, which was described as being tantamount to the ability to connect with a variety of stakeholders, combined with a knack for knowing which constituents can be of service in certain situations. According to one participant, an understanding of institutional culture was very helpful when seeking lasting, meaningful solutions. She said:

You have to know who your major players are, and who are figureheads. You have to know who is actually doing the work, and who can do for you what you need done, so to speak, and who's going to just give you lip service, and you figure that out by trial and error, so to speak, but you are also very observant to

the people who can get things done, and people who just say, “yeah, okay,” and nothing ever happens.

“Leading from the middle,” as depicted in participants’ words, included the art of working with and understanding a plethora of stakeholders. Interview data indicated that the savvy liaison must lead, but also must have the capacity to massage the mission and goals of the high school into the community college culture, and, as many liaisons recounted, this is rarely an easy thing to do.

Social Skills Important in a Politically Oriented Partnership

Overview. The early college liaisons who took part in this study focused heavily, through interviews and written reflections, on the art and task of building positive relationships with a wide group of constituents. Through constant communication, close collaboration, and foresight related to the early college mission, among other things, they reflected on being able to lead “from the middle” and “without authority.” Although one liaison reported being the equivalent to a dean at her college, most of the other participants expressed sentiments that, although they were leaders, they did it without the “legitimate power” associated with a high position on an organizational chart (French & Raven, 1968, p. 264). In addition, none of the participants managed other employees, although they all had a heavy hand in guiding large groups of students through the early college experience.

The fourth research subquestion in this study was “What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?” and one of this study’s assumptions was that high schools and community colleges are political entities, especially in light of the fact that institutions of public

education have limited resources. According to Bolman and Deal (2003), conflict is a natural facet of politically charged organizations that operate with limited resources, and the authors' theory of the "political frame" is useful for examining the early college liaison's world. Furthermore, "bridging social capital" (Putnam, 2001), which is composed of the abilities and personal traits necessary to build relationships between organizations, has close parallels to the early college liaison, because, according to many participants' job descriptions, the position is tasked with being a conduit for "bridging the gap" between high school and college.

Table 9

Social Skills Cited as Important in a Politically Oriented Partnership

Types of Social Skills Identified	<i>n</i>
Negotiation	14
Diplomacy	10
Listening	9
Empathy	7
Ability to interact with different types of people	7

Table 9 shows a spread of the social skills that study participants cited as being most important to the "boundary-spanning" process that takes place in a politically oriented arena. Not surprisingly – especially in light of liaisons' thoughts about relationship-building – negotiation, diplomacy, and listening topped the list. Also not unexpectedly, participants talked at length with great directness about politics and political maneuvering. Their words about these topics will be featured in this section, which is designed to portray liaisons' perspectives about the social traits they considered to be most important for incorporating the early college high school into a community college setting. As can be seen in previous sections, participants expressed a keen sense

of understanding about the different needs and stations of early college stakeholders. This section will be an extension of those expressions, and will analyze the skills that early college liaisons, “champions of two worlds,” used during the promotion and maintenance of their respective programs.

Diplomacy. For the purposes of this report, the terms “diplomacy” and “negotiation” will be analyzed separately. This is because liaisons tended to speak in generalities about diplomacy and in specifics about negotiation. In other words, diplomacy was typically portrayed as an overarching work philosophy, while negotiation was described within the explicit back-and-forth actions that liaisons and other stakeholders engaged in when creating learning opportunities for early college students. Participants spoke at length about both concepts, and their words generated a plethora of rich data linked to the maneuverings of the early college liaison.

Balance. One subtheme that developed during conversations about diplomacy was balance. Several interviewees talked about working to make both sides “happy,” despite the fact that, according to participants, the high school and the college were not entities that naturally intertwined. One liaison expressed this idea through the concept of “wins”:

There’s a lot of times where, you know . . . we kind of give the high school one or two wins here, and you give the college a win here, you know what I’m saying? And, you’re just, kind of, you’re just trying to strike a balance there that everyone feels satisfied, you know, because I really believe that there’s not this – if one person is elated and the other person is really upset, that’s not a winning situation. That’s a losing situation.

The same participant expressed similar feelings in his written reflection, as this excerpt shows:

My leadership experiences here . . . have, in many ways, revolved around diplomacy. As I am sure you know, high schools and colleges don't naturally mesh very well, so, more often than not, I am trying to find common ground between the two entities in a way that each feels satisfied.

Thoughts about balance were often framed in the spirit of "keeping the peace" between the early college and its partnering postsecondary institution. Professed areas of friction included space and resources; student maturity; differing schedules; and curriculum. All of these issues, at times, were described as causing conflict. As has been discussed in the sections about relationships and leadership skills, liaisons sometimes dealt with these concerns in group settings, and other times through one-on-one interaction. "When one entity vents to me about the other," one liaison said, "I don't feel the need to share that with the other side. I try to understand where they're coming from . . . how the college feels about a situation, how the high school feels about a situation." This sentiment was repeated by a number of participants, who used face-to-face diplomacy to, as the same liaison wrote in her reflection, "defuse a situation."

The subtheme of balance among partners in times of conflict definitely included hints about, and, occasionally, direct references to, the challenge of advocating for two different entities simultaneously. In these situations, some liaisons described persevering by maintaining an inner-balance. One participant summed up the experience this way:

You're constantly making decisions all the time, and you're constantly, you're making controversial decisions a lot. You're in between groups of people that,

you're going to let somebody down, and you have to be careful on who. You have to be tactful, and you have to be humble, I mean, and gracious, I think. It's really a job where you have to watch what you say, and how you say it, not be quick-tempered, and, then, oftentimes, I spend a lot of my day just cooling people down.

The abilities and traits this liaison listed are among those that several scholars have included in their analyses on social capital and its importance to the effectiveness of middle-ranking leadership in educational partnerships (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Coleman, 1988; Eddy, 2010; Edens & Gilsinan, 2005; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Throughout data collection, participants routinely talked about working in situations that mirrored “adaptive work,” Heifetz’s (1994) theory about leading through conflict.

Furthermore, their social skills – and the capital that grew out of those skills – were portrayed as being essential to helping make the partnership work. According to Eddy (2010), social capital helps facilitate collaboration among diverse groups, and can aid in navigating the conflict that inevitably surfaces when two culturally different institutions come together. There is no question that the words and professed actions of early college liaisons were colored with a disposition to mediate and pacify during times of contention. A section of one participant’s written reflection was possibly the most engaging piece of data collected in relation to the phenomenon of “keeping the peace”:

Right from the outset, I had to become very adept at living simultaneously in two worlds. The college was territorial about resources and there was always an underlying supposition that the early college was greedy and grasping, wanting more classrooms and space usage than needed. Conversely, there was the thrum and throb by the high school about being marginalized or unwanted. At all times I

had to present a soothing presence to both parties. I began to gradually assume the role of a mediator in a divorce. Both “parents” loved the child, but they resented one another and, therefore, seemed ready to somehow take it out on what they jointly created – the early college high school.

Politics. Certainly, diplomacy is part of politics, but, in the case of this study, being political and using politics was typically mentioned when liaisons were discussing the art of mediating between the “two worlds” of a high school-college partnership; therefore, politics is considered here as a subtheme to diplomacy. The most powerful statements related to politics included references to appealing to stakeholders about the “higher issue” of learning. As one participant put it, “I think it’s getting out of the lower-level conversations, and focusing back on how do we make our students successful, that, kind of, appeals to people’s better nature.” The spirit of this quote was repeated by several liaisons, who, as with some of the suggestive leadership qualities addressed in a previous section, worked to cultivate community college buy-in for the early college. According to one liaison, being politically minded was part and parcel of this cultivation, especially when it came to appealing to college employees’ educational sensibilities:

You also want to, I think, recognize the expertise that your classroom teachers have, and there are times when I have student issues, that I want their input, so I have to make them feel like student success is also something that they buy into for the long term, not just when you have them in your class as a freshman, but as the kid grows, you know, you still try to keep those people in the loop, and you basically have to be on good terms with a lot of people.

The cultural differences between college faculty and staff and their high school counterparts were not always easy for liaisons to bridge. As previously mentioned, one of the political hurdles that participants reported having to overcome was an occasional aversion on the part of educators who were wary of having high school-age students in their classes. One liaison provided a lengthy discourse on her opinion that, to convince such instructors that the early college concept was legitimate, she had to, in her words, “try to advocate for change that maintains the integrity of the professor, doesn’t undermine their authority.” However, at the same time, she had to hold fast to the mission and vision of the early college concept, by truly believing that young students, in the right environment, can succeed in postsecondary coursework, and that the adult clientele of her community college was not too far removed from early college learners. This is how she put it:

I think that you have to be a politician, of sorts; you have to be politically minded, you have to understand, you know, that you’re dealing with a group of people who have one idea of what their job ought to be, and who their clientele should be, which is kind of tongue-in-cheek, in that we serve – if you look at the [college’s] traditional student, you know, it’s far from the academic feel of a university. You know, it’s rural. [This county is] full of rednecks – and there’s nothing wrong with that – I’m just saying, let’s recognize what we’re serving. This isn’t Chapel Hill. We are serving people who are here, because for some reason, be it economic, be it academic struggles, for some reason, they need a step between either high school or job, wherever they’re most recently from, and a university. So, let’s recognize, first of all, that it’s not such a far stretch to take a young person right out of eighth grade and put them in that environment, with the

right supports, and think that they couldn't be successful. But, now, I certainly cannot say to them exactly what I said to you, so the political piece comes in there, you know.

One repeatedly discussed facet of participants' political experiences, related to the cultivation of community college buy-in, was making sure that instructors and other stakeholders knew that one of the "supports" mentioned in the above quote was the early college liaison position. Referring mostly to academicians – instructors, department heads, and deans – participants spoke about "making their jobs easier," and the impact that stakeholders' realization of this had on an early college's successful integration into a postsecondary institution. Referencing the partnership as it existed before she took the position, one liaison said, "In the past, I think it had been a 'us against them,' you know, 'we want you to do all this for [the early college],' and I approached it as, 'how can we make this happen where both of us are happy?'" Political actions such as this, when liaisons massaged relationships and led "from the middle," were, according to most participants, some of the main reasons why their high schools were able to gain ground in becoming enmeshed with partnering institutions. Here's how one liaison described the progression as it related to politics:

It began with, "Why are these teenagers on campus"?, you know, the common thing was, "I'm at the community college because I didn't want to teach high school kids," and, so, trying to work with them and get them to understand the program, and, then, it's moved more now to a supporting sales, in my view.

They've got the kids, they know why the kids are there, they're pretty much okay with the kids, but now, it's more, "Okay, I'm here to help you. Tell me what I can

do. Tell me what the principal can do. What can we do staff-wise,” you know, “How can we make the program better? Work with us, if you’ll just work with us, we can help you in return.”

As can be seen in this quote, back-and-forth with early college stakeholders was important to the evolution of this liaison’s early college. Data saturation related to this facet of diplomatic relationships – interactions that included bargaining and negotiation – occurred within the first few interviews. It was evident that working closely with stakeholders, to make people on both sides of the partnership “happy,” was a prime duty of the early college liaison position.

Negotiation. Bolman and Deal’s (2003) theory of the political frame is very specific in that it lists “bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position” (p. 186) as the impetus for decisions within organizations that have diverse stakeholders. According to study participants, early colleges epitomize this viewpoint. Negotiation was constantly referenced during the interview process and in written reflections. Such bargaining was mentioned most often in relation to department heads, instructors, site coordinators, and students. Issues addressed were facilities usage; class offerings; funding; and students’ academic abilities and habits. A large chunk of data related to this phenomenon was relayed by one participant in particular, and, although the passage below is quite lengthy, it speaks volumes about the skill set that is required for a savvy liaison. From students to high school leadership to the college president, she touched on scheduling, facilities, motivation, and more when she said:

Well, one of my responsibilities is to put together the schedule, and, so, it starts out with our needs, you know, “Okay, I need so many electives, I’ve gotta have

Math 171/172,” you know, my basics. And then, the process is really a back-and-forth: “Okay, I really need this in the morning.” “Well, you can’t have my instructor in the morning,” there are all kinds of issues. “Well, okay, if I can’t have him in the morning, when’s the next best time I can have him,” or, “I can’t give you that this semester,” and occasionally, the negotiation turns into, I go to . . . the president, and say, “You told me I could have what I needed out there. I need this,” you know, that kind of thing, but, for the most part, I call it, like, a little dance. There’s the back-and-forth. I give, they give. I stand firm, at times, you know, I have been nose-to-nose with an instructor and said, “I need Sociology 210 this fall. I have to have it. You’ll either give it me, or I’ll make a trip across campus, to the president’s office,” you know, that’s rare – very, very rare, but, I’m not afraid to put a stake in the ground if I have to, but, most of it is back-and-forth: “Okay, alright, your Math 140 instructor is stretched real thin this semester, alright, I’ll postpone that 140 till the spring, but you’ve got to give me, you can’t back out on me, you’ve got to give me Math 140 in the spring.” It’s that, and even space, sometimes. You know, “Look, we need access to a lab. When can we have a lab? What are the conditions on having it?” I even negotiate with the high school sometimes on that, you know. “Can we swap? My Reading 090 instructor needs a lab one day this week. Can we do a room swap?,” you know, that kind of thing. It’s just constantly, it seems like bartering for space, for schedule, for enough faculty, and it’s negotiating with the kids. You know, a lot with them, you know, “Look, if we can get through this class, you’ll have it made, things will be fine. If you don’t, you’re not going to, you’re going to have to go to

summer school,” that kind of thing. It just seems like throughout the day, it’s a constant bargaining process on something.

Department heads and facilities coordinators. As is shown in the quote above, participants’ communication with stakeholders was portrayed as a constant back-and-forth related to class availability and space usage for early college students. According to liaisons, this bargaining seesaw usually built rapport with department heads and facilities coordinators, although, on occasion, an impasse was reached and negotiations ceased. Parts of the quote above were replicated by all liaisons who participated in this study. Heavy doses of reasoning with community college power players were found in every interview.

Sometimes, solutions were simple – room swaps, for example, appeared to be relatively painless. Other times, bargaining involved the somewhat tricky talent of framing an early college’s need as being a power player’s need, as well. This process was indicative of Heifetz’s (1994) stance that “a leader without authority will have to ‘take counsel’ from her adversaries, incorporating in her strategy whatever wisdom of theirs connects to her central thesis” (p. 186). One great example of this was when participants spoke about full-time equivalency funding, commonly referred to as “FTEs,” which is the money generated from state coffers for the participation of students in college classes (NCCCS, 2007). FTEs were commonly spoken about in relation to presentations to postsecondary leaders, as well as in communiqués at large to college faculty and staff. However, they were also referenced as a selling point for acquiring classes for early college students. In remembering a labor-intensive negotiation with a department head

related to acquiring conveniently scheduled Spanish classes that would help students earn the credits required for matriculating to major universities, one liaison said:

The problem was the time of day it was being taught that didn't work for us, so when I first broached the topic of switching, the high school teacher wanted it, the high school principal, rather, the leadership here wanted it to be accessible to our students. So, my job was to have that time, which involved a lot of shuffling, I mean, it involved some work on the college side, so I had to present that in such a way that, you know, I had to go to . . . the division chair, and say, you know, if you'll offer Spanish three and four at the same time you offered Spanish one and two last semester, then my kids, who took Spanish one and two in mini-mesters, can turn right around and take three and four, and I can get your FTEs up. And so, while, on the high school side it was a matter of we wanted these kids to get through three or four levels of Spanish that were going to Chapel Hill, and even now, UNC Wilmington requires three levels, and, you know, we wanted them to have what they needed, so it was an educational decision-making instrument on our side, but to get them to invest in making that kind of work-intensive commitment, because, it involved some work on their part to make those changes happen, I had to present it from something that would motivate them, which was certainly increased FTEs.

Facilities, as has already been mentioned, were a constant struggle, especially in an early college's first years, when student populations grew annually. Participants' negotiating skills vis-à-vis space and resources seemed to represent the larger issue of incorporation of the early college mindset (as opposed to simply being a physical

concern) that came with an expanding school. Facilities issues initially caused much consternation; however, as liaisons and college staff worked through these problems, collegiality and teamwork were two of the results, according to participants. Liaisons reported working actively with schedulers and site coordinators to manage space, and, in some cases, participants did a significant portion of the legwork in acquiring access to such facilities. One liaison recalled her early efforts at space negotiation this way:

I remember going to the campus coordinator's office, pulling out the binders, looking in the binders, and there was a page for every single classroom in the whole . . . campus, and saying, you know, "okay, here's a room that's open during," you know, "from 12-5, can we please have this room?," and I was begging all the time.

Not all facilities-related negotiations worked in favor of the early college, however. Participants occasionally recalled an impasse related to their quest for space, and, in one case, a liaison and her early college were shocked to find that the new building that housed the early college – a building they thought would be designed in their favor – was devoid of many desired features when it was completed. Another liaison talked about constant conflict with the coordinator of a satellite campus. However, such instances were rare, and, through the skill of negotiation, the early college liaisons who participated in this study were typically able to secure the things they needed from mid-level community college managers.

College instructors. On a day-to-day level, participants reported working more closely with instructors than with other college personnel. One-on-one interactions were described as being heavily shaped by conversations about individual student

performance, but, sometimes, negotiation related to an early college's entire student body occurred in group settings. Either way, back-and-forth with instructors involved sacrifice, sometimes on the high school side and sometime on the college side.

Oftentimes, issues related to bargaining with instructors were focused on the academic rigor of college classes, combined with maturity or motivational issues related to young students. These discussions pitted philosophy against philosophy, and, certainly in the early years, were a challenge for most interviewed liaisons. One participant, referencing her place in the "middle," between college and early college, remembered a particular academic-related negotiation this way:

We've had some issues with the English department. The English department thinks that sometimes these kids aren't ready for the rigor in their class, and, then, the high school thinks these kids can go up against any of your college kids, and they'll come out better, so, I found that the high school thought that the college went out of its way to make the class difficult, and, then the college said, "No, no, we're just showing you that these kids can't do college work – it's a college class," and there was some back-and-forth, and it's, I find myself having to say, "Hey, you know what, they understand. Nobody's trying to take the rigor away, we absolutely understand, and if they can't do it, they can't do it, but can we give them a chance?," or it's "No, they're not picking on your kids, they just want to make them college-ready," so, it's kind of like that.

Situations such as this were common. According to participants, working with faculty members often involved alleviating concerns that early college students, because of their age, were receiving special treatment. It would be hard to argue that students who

are provided with a tuition-free education are being held to the same exact standards as traditional students, and no participants took such a stance; however, liaisons did express ongoing challenges linked to advocating to faculty about their students' academic abilities. In such cases, a number of liaisons described very tactful negotiation. One recounted advocating for low-performing students, and the respect with which she approached the involved instructor:

I know that when I contact instructors, and I know my student is well outside of what they would do for a normal student, I know it's going to be uncomfortable, like, I know that they're going to think that I want them to make special circumstances for my student, so I immediately start with, "I don't want you to do anything that you wouldn't do for a normal student, but I want to share the circumstance, and then you tell me what you can do." And if it's nothing, then that's fine, like I, but I can just ask. So, I feel like my job is to ask.

As indicated here, liaisons often approached these situations by reinforcing the fact that part of their job was to support instructors. This support came in the form of discipline, tips on how to work with young students, and monitoring student progress in college classes. One liaison spoke about negotiations with all faculty members at her college who taught early college students. When she accepted the position, there was a mechanism in place for faculty to report students who were not making sufficient progress in coursework. However, according to the liaison, the system had been virtually ignored by her predecessor, and, therefore, she was receiving feedback from faculty that it was ineffective. "Are you sick of this?," she said she asked faculty, "because, if you feel this isn't worth your time, I will negotiate to try to make some of this go away." However,

faculty members told her that, if the system was used, it would be worth keeping. The liaison said she revamped the reporting mechanism, and, through regular use, has successfully communicated with instructors about academic positives and negatives related to her students' performance in college coursework. She said:

I made an agreement that, "If you'll do this, I will organize it in a way where the data will be much more accessible, and we'll look at the data every week, and, if you do this, then, I promise you you will see results," and, once we started looking at attendance every Friday, and then, what happens is, I look at this, and then turn around and give all the data to the high school teachers, so, then, if Little Timmy doesn't go to class on Tuesday, everyone knows, and Little Timmy will get suspended, or he will get written up, so, attendance just, they started going, which was good, and, then, with the comments coming in, they may not turn a paper in on Wednesday, and I know on Friday, and the principal knows on Friday, so, the reward was, the faculty were gracious enough to give me one more shot, and I promised that, if we could do it the right way, it would be worth it.

Other social skills used in the "boundary-spanning" process. The arts of diplomacy and negotiation topped respondents' lists of social skills associated with "bridging the gap" between high schools and colleges engaged in an early college partnership. However, some other skills also figured prominently in interviews and written reflections. Many skills did not surface enough to form themes, but a handful of traits made significant repeat appearances during data collection. The skills that were mentioned most were listening, empathy, and an ability to interact with different types of people.

Listening. Listening was a huge part of the back-and-forth described by liaisons. Nine participants spoke about this aspect of the communication and socialization process, and everyone who mentioned it said it was an integral part of their effort to incorporate the early college program. Being flexible and open to others' ideas; forming trust; and building "face time" and "history" were all linked to the art of listening. Although most participants tied listening to their relationships with fellow professionals, a number of liaisons connected it to student advisement. In addition to listening, follow-through was described as being of paramount importance in the process. In other words, listening was essential, but what the liaison did after listening – how he or she handled student issues or other areas of conflict – was crucial in determining the value of face time with instructors and other college personnel.

Part of the listening process, according to participants, was knowledge on the part of the liaison that many college instructors were not used to serving high school-age people. Regarding professors, one participant spoke about "working with them closely to ensure that they feel that they've been heard, and that their needs as an instructor of nontraditional students are met." This support of instructors – one type of follow-through – was definitely portrayed as being the fundamental reason that listening was so essential to liaisons' relationship-building skills. Other stakeholders were mentioned, as well.

According to one liaison:

I think listening goes a long way. I think people feel better if they just know someone listened, even if you can't change it. The fact that someone actually heard what they said. I think, also, reflecting what they're saying, so they understand that I do know, and, people like to talk about themselves, I just think

it's really powerful when you get to know a faculty member, or a student, or parent, or a teacher, and you do get to know them on a personal level, I think that's a huge piece of it.

Listening was chronicled as taking place occasionally in group settings, but, overwhelmingly, was referenced as being a part of the one-on-one relationships that liaisons described in a previous section. Building rapport and making sincere connections through listening were listed as very powerful avenues for greasing the wheels of progress. Several liaisons talked about the power of face-to-face listening. One said:

I try to make a very concerted effort to get in touch with instructors here. A lot of times, that means instead of calling, I'll walk to their office, talk with them. . . . I really think that has played a large part in, just the overall, not necessarily the perception of the program, but the willingness to work with the program.

Throughout participants' verbal and written words about listening and its link to relationship-building, a subtheme of investment surfaced. Instructors and students, though spoken about the most, were only two types of constituents that liaisons spoke about in this area. Viewpoints related to networking among all stakeholders – office workers, security guards, maintenance staff, etc. – were tempered by the art of listening, and this action was seen as a way to bolster the future of the early college. One interviewee put it well when she referenced listening and “visibility” in conjunction with building a network that could benefit her high school in the long run:

I've always been able to get to know people easily and, you know, lay things out on the table, and, you know, “I want to hear your feedback,” or whatever. That's definitely, that skill has helped me here. I think not allowing myself to get tied to

my office has made a big difference. I try to walk around the campus, talk to the dean of student development, talk to people in the learning lab, talk to people in the library, just, you know, just shoot the breeze, just, kind of the, you know, acquaintances that you know you're going to need to ask a favor from someday, or, whatever, and I don't do it with the intent of knowing I'm going to have to ask a favor from them, but, you know, it always comes in handy that you've taken time to stand there and have a conversation with the bookstore director, or whatever, you know, and those people have become my network here, certainly.

Empathy. It is important to take note of the various intentions that are weaved into the quote above. Although this liaison was holding dialog and listening to various stakeholders partly for the purpose of investing in their ability to help the early college, she also appeared to be genuinely interested in getting to know them as people, and not just as professionals. This sincerity, and the act of truly listening to the concerns of as many stakeholders as possible, was portrayed by several liaisons as being one the keys to their success. Empathy and making a concerted effort to understand the feelings of others was represented as being a prime component in making the early college partnership “work.” The words of one liaison mirrored, in some ways, the quote from another liaison that ended the “Listening” section above. Her words were filled with sincerity when she said:

For me, the biggest piece of the puzzle has been building a relationship with that person, and I really do care about people. I think that's, I really believe in, when I call someone to ask them for a favor, or to ask them about, you know, how they do something, I want to know that person, I want to know who I'm talking to, and, so, it's not all manipulation, it's, like, I really care about the faculty here, and

the staff. When I stop and see them I do care – “How are your kids?,” you know?
So, I personally believe rapport is the way to go.

Not surprisingly, though, participants’ empathy was linked more often to students and parents than it was to fellow professionals. These feelings – the desire to help first-generation college-goers and their families – were described as being an essential facet of the liaison’s work life. Although only half of the study’s participants spoke about empathy, it was linked, time and again, to caring about the plight of first-generation families, many of which came from impoverished backgrounds. Participants’ descriptions about their feelings of empathy for students and their parents are explored more fully in the student advocacy section of this chapter, and these descriptions are not only indicative of liaisons’ close relationships with parents and students, but are also a reflection of the diverse groups of people with which they worked.

Ability to interact with different types of people. Both Bolman and Deal (2003) and Putnam (2001) theorized that social skills are essential for providing cohesion among diverse stakeholders. As can be seen in almost every section of this study’s findings so far, working with varied people – separately and in groups – was an integral part of participants’ leadership experiences. But, going beyond the basic fact that early college partnerships are composed of diverse constituents, the savvy liaison also had to be able to adapt to the different personalities, ranks, educational levels, and attitudes of a wide swath of the local community. One liaison described her abilities this way:

I’m adept at working with a wide variety of people and trying to ferret out what their agenda is and their needs, because, I think, the liaison has to be able to feel the needs of the various stakeholders, and give them credence, so that, in fact, you

can try to find solutions. I think, if you take entrenched positions, it's a bad practice for a liaison, so, I think that flexibility, negotiation, the ability to try to see the perspectives of the other stakeholders has probably been the best thing that my background prepared me for my needs in this particular job.

As with this participant, interviewees repeatedly referenced their capacity to relate to diverse groups as being a key determinant of their effectiveness in the liaison role.

Remarks about catering to multiple stakeholders were indicative of Putnam's (2001) theory of "bridging social capital," which is composed of the traits and abilities that are effective in bringing diverse groups together, as well as Bolman and Deal's (2003) political frame, which theorizes that organizations are composed of diverse people who have differences in "values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality" (p. 186).

For some, this talent was described as being simply part of their nature. "It doesn't matter to me if somebody's the dean or vice president or someone who comes in and, you know, waxes the floor, or whatever," one participant said, "I treat everybody equally." For others, it was a calculated effort to adapt to the different personalities of an early college's various stakeholders. According to one liaison,

Everybody's so different, like, I have a couple of good instructors that think they're God's gift to the world of teaching, and, so, I know how to interact with them. A lot of people get very offended about things people say, but I don't, because everybody is different, so I can't approach everybody the same way, and I can't help how you respond to what I say, or the situation that's going on, so, I think, just learning people, and figuring out what they need so that, when we do

have a conversation, it can be beneficial. It's not like you just saying something and we're not getting anything solved.

Regardless of the group involved, though – instructors, parents, students, executives, or others – the social adeptness needed for appealing to a wide variety of constituents was typically described as a learned phenomenon, but not necessarily one that was found in books. In talking about the talent of working with a diverse population that has a plethora of needs, one person put it this way:

That's not stuff they teach you in school, that's stuff that, you have to know people, you have to know what works, you have to have a different set of tricks in your bag – if this doesn't work, I'll pull this one out. That's all stuff that you develop, being on that front line of, you know, working with people in their situations.

Maintaining Student Advocacy in an Educational Partnership

Overview. The social capital and leadership skills that liaisons possessed were described by participants as being pillars of early colleges' successful integration into a community college setting. They were also listed as tools for keeping the “big picture” of student advocacy in the forefront of constituents' minds when stakeholders considered the worth and desirability of a high school being melded with an institution of higher learning. Study participants made no secret of the fact that cultivating college and community buy-in was not an easy task on multiple levels. They struggled with the conflict and change that the early college represented, and they had to have a diverse skill set to handle the myriad issues that arose in the wake of having two different educational entities under one roof. Culturally, academically, and physically, high schools and

community colleges have traditionally been distinctly different. Merging them together in the form of an early college was bound to be hard, but doing it quickly – in some cases, the high schools reached student body capacity within four years – must have been an incredible challenge.

This study's fifth subquestion, "How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?" will be addressed in this section. Like all other sections in this report, it is a story of trial-and-error coupled with a strong belief in students and their abilities. Thick, rich data were culled in relation to liaisons' advocacy, and several significant themes surfaced in interviews and written reflections, as well as in submitted documents. Study participants discussed the many ways that they advocated for their program and its students, through the cultivation of buy-in, exhibition of a strong belief in the program, loyalty to students, and maintenance of the academic integrity of the college, all the while struggling with the fact that, at times, each "side" of the partnership questioned their loyalty. Early college liaison advocacy, as described by participants, was a worthy cause, but it was one that came with all of the trappings of innovation and change when they occur in a traditional atmosphere such as a community college.

Ultimately, it was participants' words about creating an environment where young students can succeed in college (and, as previously mentioned, one liaison phrased it, "getting out of the lower-level conversations" related to space, curriculum, and adult relations) that defined this study. Although early college liaisons are "champions of two worlds," they are also champions of students. Participants' descriptions of how they navigated success for their programs, arguably, provided the most compelling data

related to this study's overarching research question. Without question, the leadership experiences of the North Carolina early college liaisons who took part in this research were rooted in participants' ability to convince instructors, executives, front-line employees, community members, parents, and even students that the early college concept is one that has merit. This section tells the story of how they worked to accomplish this.

Cultivating buy-in for the early college. According to their job descriptions, early college liaisons are tasked with cultivating buy-in from a wide array of educational stakeholders. The vast majority of participants said this process was very hard during the early part of their tenure as liaisons, but became easier as time passed. The position was described as becoming less complicated as constituents gained knowledge about the early college program and witnessed the academic success of its students. Participants were generally reserved when it came to claiming credit for an early college's success, but a quick scan of liaisons' job descriptions showed that, if the person in the position was following the directive, he or she had a heavy hand in "bridging the gap" between high school and college.

Certainly, economic benefits, whether local or regional, are always a good selling point for a nonprofit program, and participants talked time and again about how they spoke to many people about such advantages as they pertained to their early colleges. Explaining nuances, whether they were related to the type of student served, the long-range goals of the program, or the academic supports that are part of the early college model, was definitely part of the liaison's role. On the other hand, though, participants described having to be stalwart proponents of their community college and its policies,

procedures, professors, and academic integrity. As “champions of two worlds,” they had to have their feet in “both camps,” and to defend, promote, and understand those entities simultaneously.

Student success. For a large percentage of participants, a powerful element of their advocacy was early college students’ academic performance. Not surprisingly, high rates of academic success were touted by liaisons as being a major selling point in their interactions with college faculty and executive leadership. Through hard data as well as anecdotes, participants said they were adept at providing evidence that their students were succeeding, and it was this knowledge, at least in part, that helped them cultivate buy-in for their schools. Some participants provided data that compared early college students’ collective performances on end-of-course testing with that of other schools in the county or state, and others talked about the performance of high school students in college classes.

All participants who reflected on these things told stories that had similar endings: College instructor buy-in increased as early college students’ success rates rose. One of the great ironies of this study’s findings is that, repeatedly, liaisons mentioned the fact that some, though not all, of their college’s instructors had begun to prefer teaching early college students to traditional-age students. The phenomenon of faculty buy-in and acceptance related to early college students was one of the more fascinating themes that emerged from participants’ interviews and written reflections. One liaison relayed a story about a faculty member who, though initially surly, had done an about-face in her attitude toward early college students. Recounting a college faculty meeting that took place when the early college was new, the liaison remembered:

She was sitting in the back of the room and, you know, she's, she's very, sort of, brazen, anyway, I mean, she'll say pretty much what's on her mind, and she said in the back of the room, and was, you know, just cussing, "I don't want to teach these damn kids," you know, that kind of thing.

A few years later, after teaching a large number of successful early college students, the faculty member had changed her stance, according to the participant. When asked if the instructor is now a supporter of the early college, the liaison said,

Oh, yeah, a strong advocate, any time I asked her to come address a group, she's willing, welcoming to support us. She'll tell me all the time, "I'd rather teach your kids than traditional kids, any time," a complete switch.

The participant's passion for her job shined through when she was asked how this "complete switch" made her feel. "Wonderful," she said, "I mean, it's a very fulfilling thing, and I, you know, it's the – my job was so hard in the beginning, and I did things to create that bridge between us and the college."

Similar stories of evolutionary buy-in passed through a number of participants' lips. Oftentimes, these stories were attached to the fact that the liaison was the college's number one proponent and salesperson for the early college, but this advocacy was definitely portrayed as a two-way street. One liaison put it this way:

I think an important part of my job in treating everybody equally, and trying to make sure people treat our students and the . . . early college faculty and staff equally, is just to make the college side aware of what our students are doing, their successes, but also making sure that the high school side is aware of what's going on with the college, making them aware of things.

Sometimes, these “successes” were as important to early college staff confidence as they were to postsecondary “proof” that a high school student could succeed in a college setting. Buy-in for the program, and its link to student achievement, was listed by some participants as being cultivated on the high school side, as well as the college side. One liaison said:

Well, you know, once the kids started taking more college classes, and they started doing well, and had a really good success rate as well, you know, some of them around 75-80%, you know, where the kids are doing well, that, I think, a lot of those fears were alleviated, about, you know, are we going to trust this kid to get off the bus and go to class, you know, and we have students now we don't even see.

However, by and large, student success was associated with community college buy-in for the early college program. Participants talked about instructors who cited young students' enthusiasm for learning, as well as their high level of achievement, which sometimes surpassed that of adult students. In addition, these successes were represented not only as being for individual students, but for entire academic departments. Such growth was recalled by one liaison when she said:

Because of the early college, we now have two sections of biology 111 . . . and, [the instructor] will tell you, that his early college students, he will tell anybody, you know . . . he said that without a doubt, the early college students were his best students, and [an instructor] who teaches in the physics and math, she'll tell you, without the early college, she wouldn't have a physics class, or she wouldn't have a calc II or calc III class, and some people look at me and say, “they actually take those classes?”

Generation of state funding. Of course, having a pool of students to teach is the aim of every academic department, because, without students, there would be no work for an instructional staff. In the North Carolina Community College System, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students largely determines the amount of state funding that an institution receives (NCCCS, 2007). Probably not surprisingly, FTEs figured largely in participants' words about maintaining advocacy for their programs (as they did when negotiation skills were described earlier in this chapter). Liaisons mentioned bringing the possibility of higher funding levels to the attention of rank-and-file faculty members, department heads, and college presidents.

One participant, who was a former K-12 teacher, said that, initially, she struggled with her community college's focus on funding generation. "I quickly learned that the college is very much a business and dollar signs matter," she wrote in her reflection. "I now understand that as a necessary mindset – but the public school educator in me struggled with that change in philosophy." The same liaison continued with this theme when she referenced college funding during her interview, and said that "you always feel like you have to get in the belly of the beast and be careful not to become the beast"; however, she was also quick to mention, that, despite this sense of uneasiness, she had often referenced her early college's generation of funding when advocating to college faculty for the program.

The referencing of FTEs to create buy-in for an early college program, though, was usually mentioned by liaisons as being part of their communications to executive leadership. A number of participants mentioned that they reported this regularly to their college's top officer, sometimes in reports, sometimes in publications, and sometimes

vocally. One liaison, in particular, who admitted she had a hard time “selling” the early college to her CEO, said funding was one of the ways that she could be sure to get the president’s attention. She said, rather than complaining, she would cater to the president’s way of thinking, by mentioning FTE generation and a list of other early college benefits:

For example, the president has certain agendas and certain goals that may not always be stated, but, you can surmise what those are, and, so, to think that she’s going to consider what you’re doing is as important as you consider it, is rather naïve, so, rather than supposing that or wishing for that, it would be better – and this what I’ve tried to do – to point out that more than 50% of the student success, more than 50% is all due to [the college], staff, faculty, and facilities, use that as a PR piece, sing it from the rooftops about how wonderful what you’ve done and what you’ve provided, so I try to see what is the upside for her, and try to be positive about that part, the fact that the board of directors love the early college, and it’s extremely popular in the community, point out to her the things that are a benefit to her, because she’s got to be a politician, and she’s got to function in the county, I mean, you know, so, anything that brings her praise and good press, is a bonus, so, rather than quibbling over little things, point out the things that are distinct benefits to her. She wants completion rates to be high, our completion rates are awesome, which also enhances her numbers. Try to bring up the positives, like, the generation of FTEs, and, you know, things that could be useful to her, rather than saying, “Well, we want this and we want that,” you know.

Benefits to the local economy. Likewise, participants also reported facilitating buy-in by educating the public about the benefits that the program could potentially have

for a surrounding area. Liaisons spoke about addressing local business and civic organizations, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and Civitan; having articles published in local media outlets about early college student achievements; and, of course, distributing the fliers and brochures that many participants created themselves. This was portrayed by a few liaisons as being very effective for grass-roots promotion. One liaison said:

I think that, while we serve an economically disadvantaged population and more minorities than other schools in our county, I think that we also serve a very, there are a population of students here whose parents are very vocal in the community, and are some of our biggest advocates, and they put words in people's ears all the time about what a positive experience this is been for their children.

But, again, liaisons struggled mostly with advocating to college instructors about the program. Although all participants said that this "tough sell" had mellowed over time, some were still adamant that, especially when it came to the "nonbelievers" on staff, touting the benefits that the school could have for the local area was priceless. One liaison recalled reasoning with faculty members about the immediate economic impact that the early college could have, as well as the long-term benefits it could spearhead in an impoverished county:

With the instructors, it was pretty easy, because, for most of them, I said, "You know, we have to think of the long-term benefits to our county." We don't have a very wealthy county, and, I would just say to them, "You know, this is going to end up being such a boon to our county," and I would talk to them about the fact that, over the course of a lifetime, a person that doesn't get educated can cost around \$300,000 to the system in services, in lost taxes, incarceration, any

number of things that happen when people don't get an education and don't have access to career paths of any kind, and, I said, "Look at this initiative, I mean, look at what it could do for our county," and, "Yeah, I understand that it's a little inconvenient for you, but, anything that comes up in your classroom, if there's behavior problems with the students, believe me, I'll jump in and help you. If you need to know anything about how to address this population, I'll help you," so, it, most of the resistance didn't last long. I would make very personal connections with instructors that I felt had issues.

Treating students like adults and supporting instructors. As has already been reported, the maturity of early college students, according to participants, was one of the concerns that postsecondary personnel had with young students on campus. Several liaisons spoke about this at length, and two subthemes developed: (a) high school students tend to act more mature in a classroom setting when they are mixed with adult students, and (b) treating early college students like adults, in the long run, is beneficial to young students' progression toward credential completion and, eventually, matriculation.

A few participants said one of their goals was for early college students to be treated identically to adult students. While this was not an overwhelming theme – due, in part, to the fact that, many times, the students who were being discussed were quite young (freshmen or sophomores in high school) – it was definitely voiced in relation to the early college's older students. One liaison said one of her objectives was to integrate her early college's students "to the point where they're treated the same as any other student, and they walk across that stage, just like everybody else." Other liaisons were more specific about their desires, and spoke about training students to advocate for

themselves to instructors, register themselves for classes, and conform to the environment of an adult-oriented institution. Liaisons also described recommending to faculty that early college students be held to the same discipline, and, without fail, the same academic standards as traditional students. For some, treating high school students as if they were adults was one of the program's beauties, despite an occasional struggle with a secondary partner's point of view. According to one liaison,

I think, to me, what was so innovative about this program, when it first started, and the thing that everybody had a hard time with, and still, some folks do, is that these kids need to be treated like college students when they're getting their associate's degree. To me, that's the benefit of being on our campus, that's the whole reason they're taking college classes, is to get that college experience, and that, ultimately, prepares them to go to the four-year school and succeed, so my vision is that, you know, we are not treating these students like high school students, and I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with the principal, and everybody, "But they're high school students," you know, "But, they're getting an associate's degree, we're giving them the same credit as – they should be treated like everybody else who's getting that credit."

The same liaison intimated that, to him, treating students as if they were adults and supporting college instruction was, in the end, to the young students' advantage. By mixing early college pupils and traditional students in instructional situations, he said, "they are learning more, the expectation, the level of maturity, everything is elevated." Furthermore, he said: "I do, honestly, feel like everything that I'm doing, by maintaining the integrity of the college classes . . . I think that benefits the students, ultimately."

Maintaining the college's integrity. The liaison quoted above was not alone in the stance that, to make a high school-community college partnership successful, postsecondary policies, procedures, and academic standards needed to be upheld. Although some liaisons expressed concern that college instruction tended to be much more lecture-based than its innovative high school counterpart, and that this could be confusing to students, all participants agreed that a significant part of their job was to ensure that the college's half of the partnership remained intact, both physically and philosophically. Again, being a "champion of two worlds," early college liaisons were tasked with maintaining the college's integrity, while, at the same time, being an advocate for high school students taking postsecondary courses.

Participants indicated that playing this dual role – simultaneous advocate for the college and high school – was one of the more difficult aspects of their jobs. However, a number of them also said that being a champion for the college was a crucial factor in their being able to propagate buy-in from postsecondary faculty and staff. As such, it was an element in their ability to help create an environment where early college students would be accepted, and, hopefully, academically successful. Three subthemes related to maintaining a college's integrity developed during data collection: (a) defending college instruction, (b) making it clear to stakeholders that the liaison is a college employee, and (c) recognizing that the position can be viewed as advocating for one "side" of the partnership over the other, despite the fact that it is supposed to be neutral.

Defending instruction. As the conduit between high school students and the college, liaisons reported having to occasionally defend college instruction or instructors to both early college students and staff. According to participants, the dichotomy between

high school and community college instruction was a very real challenge for many of their students. As with many other things related to the postsecondary side of the equation, explaining these instructional differences often fell upon the shoulders of the liaison. Here is how one participant phrased her challenge with this issue:

I tell the kids this – I set the stage from the side of the student as well, that professors profess, you know, that’s what they view their world as. Your psychology teacher might stand up there and talk for 90 minutes about psychology-related subject matter, but it may not be right out of chapter 1. You know, he’s professing his knowledge to you, and then it’s your job to get in that book and dig, and get those minute details, and be ready for that test.

This challenge was echoed by another liaison, who indicated that, for her students, learning how to navigate the world of lecture-based instruction was a challenge that she tried to help alleviate through providing support and a bit of firm advice:

Our students will say, “Well, look, I took notes, and that exam was not based on anything that was in my notes.” I was like, “Did you read your text?,” and they’re like, “Well, it’s six chapters,” and I’m, like, “Did you read your text?,” you know, “How much effort did you put into studying when you did your research paper? How much time did you spend doing research, or did you, just, you know, the night before, just, kind of, vomit something out, to give to, you know, him the next day, and fool him into thinking you actually, I mean, he’s a college instructor, he knows what you’re doing,” so, that definitely, that has been a struggle, because they consider it very boring in comparison to when they’re able to do group work together.

Explaining the differences between lecture-based instruction and its problem-based counterpart were not the only challenges participants linked to the management of instructional integrity. They also spoke about occasionally having to draw the line with a student who refused to complete assignments or participate in class. One liaison spoke at length about a student who said she couldn't get any coursework done because she claimed sickness. But the lack of the illness's severity, coupled with the student's failure to produce any work related to a particular college class, figured into the liaison's decision to back away from the situation and let the student suffer the consequences. According to the liaison, this caused friction between her and the principal:

When she [the student] came back to school she had nothing, and so I knew what the result was going to be, and so, our principal contacted the instructor, and the instructor told him exactly what I said, that this is what she had done for the student, and the student hadn't done her part, and so she was going to withdraw the student. But, I know he [the principal] thought I didn't do, or he wanted me to do more, and I knew what the result was going to be, because I feel like you can go so far, but the student has to do something. I feel like if she had turned in one thing, then the instructor might have been like, "Oh, you know, I'll give her a little bit more time," but, for her to do nothing, makes me feel like asking again would be like, you bending over backwards, and I don't see why you should do that.

In a similar vein, other liaisons spoke about direct clashes between college instructors and their early college's principal, and, in these cases, liaisons reported siding with the college side of the partnership. Speaking about high school principals in both general and

specific terms, one liaison said, in reference to an argument between his school's leader and an early college instructor, "Principals have a lot of autonomy . . . but, that's a difference in her relationship with her instructors and her relationship with my instructors. Whereas my instructors don't report to her in any way, shape, or form."

Making it clear that the liaison is a college employee. Another employee that doesn't report to the high school principal is the early college liaison. Of the study's 14 participants, only one said she reported, on a daily basis, to the high school principal, although her official supervisor was a community college vice president. Even that participant, though, made it clear that she was a community college employee, and said that the principal had recently made some high school personnel changes which clarified that the liaison represented the postsecondary institution. Eight participants stated that, although they were college employees, they were often perceived as working on the high school's staff. This perception was represented as happening through the eyes of students, college faculty, and high school faculty, but was most prominently portrayed as being a point of frustration between the participant and the early college principal.

The confusion that participants described related to principals' perception that they worked for the high school, and not the college, may have, on occasion, stemmed from the aforementioned salary issue. All interviewed liaisons worked with local education agencies that, as fiscal agents, distributed funding to the community college for at least a portion of the participants' salaries. However, because only four liaisons mentioned that this funding scenario caused friction, it was obvious that money was not the sole cause for liaisons being perceived as high school employees. One liaison, who stated that the funding structure was not an issue, said his principal appeared to

sometimes get “jealous” about the time he spent working on nonearly-college issues, but also said that the fact that he was a college employee, and that she accepted that fact, “really helps our relationship.”

Some liaisons, though, were downright acerbic when they talked about principals and the perception that the liaison was a high school employee. “There was actually a time when I had to remind her that I don’t work for her,” one liaison said about a former principal, “and I’m not going to take the crap that she was trying to give me.” The subtheme of acrimony related to principal relations continued with another participant, who mentioned the salary funding issue as he recalled a clash with a principal via email about a student discipline situation:

It was just one of those moments where the principal was mad at me – I saved the email for a long time, because it was, like, this really scathing email about how, you know, I worked for the early college, not for [the community college], you know, and it was at that point that it was kind of defined that I work for [the community college] ... it’s my job to, you know, to be a [college] employee, and to support our code of conduct, so that was an interesting moment, and, a lot of that stuff, to me, is complicated by the fact that our funding is given to the school system, which is then, you know, [the college] bills for, so there’s some, there’s some, uh, I think, resentment, or, feeling that, you know, because that money, even though it’s coming from New Schools Project, is being routed first through the school system, that I’m somehow, beholden to them, you know.

It must be noted, though, that most of the issues related to perception of the liaison being a high school employee were described as taking place during the liaison's first years on the job.

Perceptions about liaisons' loyalty. Others' perceptions were also linked to the theme of loyalty. Seven of the liaisons – employees who work in “two worlds” that span K-12 and community college cultures – reported that their loyalty had been questioned by one of the “sides,” and, for the most part, it was community college affiliates who provided the skepticism. Doubts about participants' loyalty were portrayed as being anything from gentle reminders to scathing attacks. Typically, such questioning was linked to liaisons' treatment of early college students. A number of liaisons said that college faculty accused them of treating high school students differently than traditional students, but, at the same time, those participants did admit that they felt a great deal of loyalty to early college pupils. Participants did not equate this loyalty, though, with special treatment for early college students. Referencing her college's faculty, one liaison said, “They think that I'm, that I am swayed, or, because they say that I put high school students, I put them first. And I try to tell them, it's not that, but, I feel like I am their voice.”

Concerns about participants' loyalty sometimes created opportunities for liaisons to express the fact that, although they were community college employees, they still had to have a great degree of belief in the early college concept, and had to advocate for the high school's students. One liaison recalled being accused by a dean that she was partial to the high school:

She said that I cared more for the early college, and I just said, flat out, in the meeting, “My job is liaison. I’ve got to be Switzerland. I must be neutral. I’ve got to see both sides, and I’ve got to, at all times, think about the success of the program, for the success of the students,” and, so, I said, “I don’t feel that that is, in any way, that this is something that you do take sides on.” You don’t take sides. You promote the school for the success of the students.

As with most aspects of the liaison’s job, fellow employees’ doubts about loyalty seemed to wane over time, and this could partially be attributed to the social capital that participants built vis-à-vis their respective faculties. One liaison said her loyalty was constantly questioned by college employees during the early years, “and, I can see where it looked like that,” she said, “because I was trying to build a bridge between the two.” Another liaison said that, she, too, had experienced fewer questions about her loyalty in recent years, and attributed it to a better understanding of how the two different entities, high school and college, operated, particularly in the area of student discipline. Whether they realized it or not, these participants seemed to be reflecting on “bridging social capital” (Putman, 2001) – abilities and personal traits used in bringing together diverse groups – that they had developed during their time as liaisons.

At the same time, though, recollections about accusations of loyalty to one “side” over the other paled in comparison to participants’ words about loyalty to students and their families. The overwhelming theme of devotion to students, parents, and the early college mission stirred passion in a number of participants, and these emotions were described as being linked to the fact that, ultimately, the liaison position is one of student advocacy, rather than institutional advocacy. Although some liaisons admitted that they

leaned toward the high school side and others said that they preferred the college side, all 14 participants expressed that, first and foremost, they served early college students.

Loyalty to students. Treating students like adults – particularly in academic and disciplinary situations – helped liaisons cement buy-in from certain college factions; however, there was always, according to participants, a fine line between service to their employer (the community college) and service to students. In all cases, participants were adamant that supporting student success was their number one goal. Through mentoring students, as well as by advocating for the program on faculty and executive levels, they expressed this loyalty in many different ways. Integration of a high school into a community college setting is difficult work, according to the documented experiences of the liaisons who participated in this study. But even in tough times, student advocacy was able to thrive as liaisons acclimated to their jobs and students proved to be successful in the classroom.

Three subthemes linked to participants' loyalty to students formed during data collection, and all were closely linked through the strong emotions with which liaisons typically described them. First, the majority of participants stated that the academic and social success of early college students was their guiding force for making decisions and “bridging the gap” between secondary and postsecondary education. Essentially, they reported using student success as their compass in determining how to go about their daily professional activities. Secondly, participants displayed a strong belief in students and their abilities, regardless of parents' educational attainment level or other indicators of “at-risk” status. This was coupled with loyalty to the early college mission. Finally, liaisons displayed empathy and understanding for (a) early college students' life

circumstances (such as first-generation college-goer status, etc.) and (b) their young age. These three subthemes seemed to be integral to participants' ability to maintain a strong sense of student advocacy, even among the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that characterized the educational partnerships that they spanned.

Using student success as a compass. During all interviews and in all written reflections, participants referenced advocacy for students and their successful integration into the community college. This success was referenced from a social aspect, indicating that liaisons were concerned about students' comfort level with being on a college campus, as well as academic. A number of participants stated that, ultimately, it was this success, and the creation of an atmosphere that could breed such success, that served as their main criteria for making decisions. One liaison referenced the separation between high school and college when he said:

Sometimes there are some challenges, because they are two different entities, so there are two different policies and guidelines, so that may present some challenges, but they aren't challenges that we can't, you know, overcome. I think, at the end of the day, everyone pretty much takes a step back and says, you know, "what's best for the students?"

This sentiment was echoed by several other liaisons, who said that basing decisions on students' well-being was typically something that both sides – college and high school – could agree upon, although one side or the other might disagree about what, exactly, would best benefit the student. In cases of not seeing eye-to-eye, though, liaisons tended to, again, lean toward the student. One expressed advocacy despite the college's organizational structure, in the event that that advocacy was in the student's best interest:

I know who I work for and who gives me my paycheck, but, I guess I'm naïve enough, even after 25 years of working, where I'm, like, why would we do it any differently? The end result here is for the student, you know, and, if we're doing something that's helping the student, then why do we have to, you know, why can't I be more supportive of the way they're doing something, or, you know, that's helping that kid?

Consideration of what's best for a student is a subjective thing, however, and, as has already been stated, some liaisons leaned more toward treating early college students similarly to their adult counterparts, while others expressed more sympathy related to giving young students some special considerations in their day-to-day comings and goings on the college campus. Either way, participants talked about building trust with their young charges, and making decisions that were tailored toward smoothing students' journeys toward a college degree or high school diploma. Inspirational messages were sprinkled throughout liaison interviews, as they discussed the ways in which they tried to nudge students toward the ultimate goal – college completion. Leadership of students was a core concept related to providing students with the motivation to succeed. One liaison put it this way:

I think, as far as leadership goes, I don't see myself as much of a leader among the peers that I have here, as I'm a leader to those students. I think the students see me as someone they can come to for anything, they can ask me any question, some of them say they prefer to come to me than to go over there, you know, I mean, to go to the early college staff, because they're so caught up in so many things, in the runnings of the school, and I have time to actually listen to them. I

just think that's one way in which I've been able to be a leader, is just to be able to be a model for those students.

Descriptions of being a "model for those students" included strong elements of coaching them to stay in the program, to accept the rigor of college coursework, and to aim for credential completion. Sometimes this meant giving them "tough love" (one participant, when told by a college instructor that "you don't have a heart," rebutted by saying "I do have a heart, you can't let them [the students] see that you have a heart"), but, at all times, it meant being available and interested in the lives and successes of early college students. One of the more vibrant descriptions of this subtheme was explored in one liaison's written reflection, when she wrote:

I love being able to be an example to every student who enters our program. They see me loving what I do on a daily basis. They recognize and appreciate my passion to help them succeed and watch them realize their true potential to achieve their academic and personal goals. They know that I am the one who is going to laugh with them, cry with them and push them to seek out their dreams. Everyone on this campus knows that my heart is intertwined in every aspect of our program. I want to help each person understand the life-changing power of education. I am honored to be able to be the bridge that connects us all together and encourages us to be a family.

Belief in students and the early college concept. Championing students would not be possible if advocates' confidence in pupils' abilities was nonexistent. Fortunately, all participants expressed trust in their students' potential. This does not mean that every student who enrolled in their early colleges had all of the tools that were necessary for

earning a degree. Motivation, for example, was cited as an essential element that was lacking in some students, and certainly, students, regardless of age, who lack motivation are always in danger of not reaching their goals. However, liaisons – to a person – said that, with the will to succeed and the right academic supports, their students could, by and large, meet the demands of college coursework. “We believe all kids can learn,” one said, “just maybe not on the same day in and in the same way.”

Academic supports and the advocacy of the liaison were listed as essential to making the early college partnership a healthy one. In addition, two of the early college design principles, though not referenced specifically by name, were mentioned by most participants. They were (a) Personalization: To have a staff that develops relationships with students, and (b) Purposeful Design: Schools are designed so that “the organization of time, space, and the allocation of resources” (NCNSP, 2012, p.1) lend themselves to student success. Certainly, these two principles are most closely aligned with the work of the early college liaison, who is tasked with organizing time, space, and resources for the program, as well as being the go-to person (through the building of one-on-one relationships) for all things related to the community college.

These relationships with students did not necessarily come easily, especially in early colleges that had a large student body. Intensive mentoring and advising, as well as a willingness to participate in the every-day activities of the students, were all mentioned as being important to retaining connectivity with the early college, which, in turn, led to the strong personalization that was required to maintain student advocacy within and between two institutions that do not mesh naturally.

Relationships with parents. According to participants, personalization and advocacy for students – particularly first-generation college-goers – did not end with the students themselves. Relationships with parents came to life through the patient and understanding, yet firm, words of multiple liaisons, and, according to participants, relationships with parents and guardians were very important to keeping students on track, academically and socially. Although parents were cited less frequently than most other stakeholders, the relationships that liaisons did speak about having with parents had many similarities to their reported exchanges with students. This, no doubt, is linked to the fact that so many early college students are the first people in their families to attend college.

Some liaisons reported having life experiences that were similar to those of some early college parents. Pursuing work, rather than higher education, after high school and having teenage children were highlighted by multiple participants. These experiences lent themselves, at least in part, to those participants' ability to relate to a significant portion of the demographic that they served. Extensive experience in a manufacturing setting, a job that had ended when the facility closed, was cited by one liaison as being valuable in her ability to understand the plight of first-generation college-goers and their parents. Another participant said that being perceived as someone who understands the lives of the early college client base – both students and parents – was particularly helpful to her, and she referenced her work experience and nontraditional route to completing a college degree when she said:

Dealing with this demographic, when they know that I have been in the work place, too, and I've punched a clock, and those kinds of things, then that gives a

commonality, so that they know that I know what they're going through, and, then, the students say, you know, "well, if you can do that, maybe I could do that. Maybe if I can't go off to school, I can go part-time somewhere, do online classes, because that's what . . . she did." So, it does bring a commonality to both the parents and the students, because I'm not someone who did the traditional route.

The ability to relate to early college constituents was seen as essential by all liaisons, regardless of whether or not the participant had entered work and education through a nontraditional route. Lack of transportation, parental guidance, and knowledge about how to navigate the college experience were listed as some of the major barriers that participants witnessed in relation to their young charges' ability to access, understand, and complete postsecondary education.

Participants often spoke about clarifying early college policies and procedures for parents. Although, on the surface, this would seem to be a common practice, a couple of participants went into detail about the depth with which they explained the rigors of the early college program to the mothers and fathers of first-generation college-goers. Topics included basic college information, study skills for students, and homework. Referencing the rigor of homework in college classes, one liaison said:

I think the struggle is most of our parents didn't do this. They didn't do well in high school, they definitely didn't go to college, so, the first thing they'll say is, "well, it was hard for me, too, it was hard for me, too," It is hard, but we know what they need to do, so, if the parent is on board with us, even if they don't know what the student is doing, they need to know some basics like, "I should see them doing work, I should see them with their college textbooks," even if they can just

watch and see if they see those things, ask them what they did in school today, it's still helpful.

Another liaison said almost exactly the same thing when talking about the subject:

We found that when a high school child tells their parent, "well, I don't have any homework," I tell them, "you have to see them doing homework, if they're in college classes" So, the biggest thing that I think the adjustment of the parents is actually making them sit in the den, or at the table, with them, so they could actually see that, because I told them, "I mean, you play a part in it, too." A lot of them did not understand; they thought that classes, every class could be taught between nine and three, knowing that there are some times you have to take a night class, you know, you just, you know, it just doesn't work.

Several liaisons described taking a proactive approach to helping parents understand the nuances of postsecondary education. The college catalog, financial aid, attendance policies, completing matriculating students' college applications, course syllabi, schedules, and study tips were all mentioned by liaisons as being subject matter for parent meetings and presentations.

Although an increase in families' knowledge about the early college concept was cited as being the most prominent direct result of parent information sessions, a touching subtheme developed as liaisons described these interactions: trust. As can be seen above, the information that liaisons provided to parents was largely focused on the skills needed to properly navigate postsecondary education. Consequently, some parents knew very little about what to expect, curriculum-wise, for their children. Therefore, according to some participants, part of the liaison's job was to build a bridge with parents, so that

parents had confidence that the right academic decisions were being made by the early college. One liaison said, “When they come in, they say ... ‘we have no idea. We are going to trust that you know and put them in the classes that they do,’ you know, so, it is, I think it makes a big impact.”

Understanding students’ young age. Of course, the subtheme of trust was particularly acute in relation to early college students, and part of the mentoring process, and, therefore, a strong element within liaisons’ advocacy, was participants’ ability to relate to their students. Clashes with college employees who were not used to having high school-age pupils on campus (particularly freshmen and sophomores) were common, especially in the first years of an early college. Issues related to discipline, academic performance, maturity level, use of profane language, loudness, and the fact that young students, according to one liaison, “move in herds” were all addressed as being part of the liaison’s “fight” to maintain student advocacy amid conflict. Liaisons did not always defend the actions of early college students. Most participants expressed a belief that students must maintain a high level of personal responsibility regardless of age; however, nine interviewees directly spoke about their opinion that, in some cases, special considerations should be given to younger students.

Discipline was one of the areas that were mentioned as being problematic for young students. Participants’ recollections ranged from simple noise complaints to more serious offenses such as bullying and recreational drug use. While grave offenses were never defended by liaisons, there was a sense that, in certain circumstances, a student’s age should be factored into decisions about disciplinary action. One liaison remembered:

We had a kind of heated issue with the vice president for student services, feeling like we weren't reporting some discipline things to him, that were really high-school related, but his argument was, "It happened on the college campus, so I need to know about it." At some point, you have to, yes, you want them treated the same and held accountable, but, at some point, you have to recognize that they're 14- and 15-year-old high school kids; you can't crucify them all, there's gotta be some approach there that is both meaningful, in that they learn from what they've done, and maintains their ability to come to school here and get an education.

On occasion, the same held true for breaches of academic etiquette. No liaison who participated in this study recommended that young students be provided with less-rigorous coursework or be subject to more-lenient classroom expectations; however, there were times when participants talked about going to extra lengths when advocating for students' success in postsecondary classes. Several liaisons referenced negotiating with faculty about working with students to get them through particularly challenging coursework, especially when it came to classes that, if failed, could prevent graduation from high school. This dividing line between early college students and their traditional counterparts – the fact that, unlike adult students, dual-enrolled pupils sometimes rely on college classes to fulfill high school graduation requirements – was represented as being a specifically tough facet of student advocacy. One liaison was particularly passionate about this point when describing a "constant back-and-forth" between herself, a student, and an instructor, that was related to the liaison advocating that the student be given one more chance. For the record, according to the participant, the student was given the chance, and he did pass the class. She recalled the end result this way:

I needed the kid to graduate, that point – this is his life – at that point, I don't care. This is a child's life we're talking about. I feel like, if there's something in our power we can do to make him successful, we should be able to. As long as you're not doing anything you feel is ethically wrong, or making you feel like you are compromising some principle, something you can do, I don't see why we wouldn't do it. Just because you think he's high school, and he's being lazy – well, he may be, but let's grow him, let's cultivate him, and figure out how he can be productive and graduate.

No matter what the specific circumstance, though, several liaisons were adamant that maintaining student advocacy included an element of imparting to college faculty, as one said, “the needs and characteristics of the adolescent student.” Again, the dichotomy between high school culture and its postsecondary counterpart surfaced as liaisons spoke about college professors' familiarity, or the lack thereof, with instruction and classroom management as they relate to young students. Liaisons routinely defended their college colleagues in this respect, but they also stated that, as liaisons, it was part of their job to help college faculty understand that teaching adolescents can be a far cry from teaching adults, no matter what the subject matter. One liaison provided very vivid detail about the divide between college instruction and young students' maturity levels:

[The] high school wants the kids to be successful, wants them to pass the classes, to get C's and above to transfer. College doesn't want to dumb-down their classes. That's not what we're asking. We're asking to remember that they're in high school, that they're 14 when they come here. We're not telling you to change the curriculum, we're not telling you to change the rigor of your class. Be aware

that 14-year-old kids are probably going to talk. Be aware that 14-year-old kids are probably going to laugh if you say the word “penis.” Be aware that 14-year-old kids, if you cuss in class, they’re going to go home and tell mama, because, “Oh my god, my teacher cussed.” You’re a college instructor, and you’re in a college environment, you feel free rein and to be yourself, and be an adult, but these are children, and I think it’s hard to understand.

Compassion for students’ life circumstances. The subtheme of students’ maturity level was one that every liaison in this study had to wrestle with at one time or another, and it was sometimes coupled with another profound subtheme – an understanding of and appreciation for the daily struggle faced by many first-generation college-goers. Despite this study’s bent toward professional, adult relationships, most participants viewed themselves – first and foremost – as leaders of children. This was revealed through multiple subthemes focused on fostering academic improvement, motivation, preparing students for adulthood, and discussing personal issues. Several liaisons veered toward student relationships throughout their interviews, and a sense of service to students who were growing up in less-than-desirable circumstances seemed to be a motivating factor for the majority of participants. One liaison put it this way:

They’ll come to my office and say . . . “I want to go to college, I want to do the very best I can. I come from a background where, it’s not stable, no one has any educational aspirations, and I understand that’s not the type of life I want to lead. What can you do? Can you help me?” So, that’s what keeps me going.

Personalization, one of the North Carolina New Schools Project’s nonnegotiable design principles, reads that “knowing students well is an essential condition of helping them

achieve academically” (2012, p.1), and most liaisons who talked extensively about student relationships linked their words to fostering academic success. Sometimes, this was connected to a motivational speech. One liaison recalled a recent student interaction:

I had one in here today, bless his heart, by all of intelligence and Accuplacer [an academic placement test] scores, he shouldn't have completed a single college class, but he's going to get his A.A. [associate in arts degree] in business administration, and I told him today, I said, . . . “I tell every instructor you have, don't give up on you. You'll scratch, you'll claw, you'll climb, you'll do what you need to do, but don't give up on you,” and that's motivation.

Participants sometimes equated relationships with students to a “family” atmosphere, one where no topic was too sacred or taboo. Recreational drug use; boyfriends and girlfriends; and, in one case, a long-past incident of sexual molestation, were all cited as topics of conversation with early college students. Although one liaison expressed uneasiness with conversations of this sort, the majority who mentioned them indicated that they saw such talks as healthy to the overall well-being of the students in question.

The most prominent themes tied to student relationships, though, were steeped in a duty that, though very real, was not explicitly stated on any participant's job description – the duty of helping students improve themselves, academically and motivationally, in order to excel in the program, and, beyond that, to succeed in adult life. One liaison spoke at length about the “constant consultations” he held with students, to prepare them, initially, for how to navigate the community college as well as, eventually, to be prepared for entry into a four-year university. “I have a saying,” he said, ““You're starting to dictate what

kind of lifestyle you're going to lead' . . . what you do now is part of who you're going to be 10, 15, 20 years from now.”

Dual-enrollment has long served students who are considered “at-risk” or “first-generation” (Bailey et al., 2002; Dutkowsky et al., 2006), and a few liaisons explicitly, and sometimes emotionally, described the trials that their institution’s young students faced. The following example illustrates the kind of living situation that, on occasion, participants had to become a part of, as well as a strong belief on behalf of the interviewee that the early college mission and the work of the liaison were creating positive change and opportunity in students’ lives:

It’s what brings me to work every day. I mean, I’ve been in education for well over 30 years, and I’ve done just about a little of everything, and seen every program come around a couple of times, and, in my opinion, this is the best thing we have ever done for the kids, because I see, I see these kids, I mean, I had one come in one day, and go, “I lost my college book, I can’t find it” . . . and, I said, “Okay. Why did you lose your book?” “Well, my stepdaddy kicked my mama and I out last night, threw all our clothes out on the curb, and I couldn’t find my textbook in there anywhere, and I can’t go back and ask him for it,” and I’m going – and this is not one case – we’ve got dozens of cases like this, and this school, this program, gives them a safe place to be, we give them everything we can possibly give them. Now, they may choose not to take advantage of it, but we give them everything we can possibly give them, and if they were over in that 1,200-student high school, it would never happen for them.

Conclusion

This chapter is a synopsis of data that were collected in relation to the study's overarching research question and subquestions. The study's participants were 14 early college liaisons who worked with North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early colleges. As community college employees, liaisons "bridge the gap" between K-12 institutions and their higher-education partners. Research questions and subquestions; the written reflection prompt (Appendix C); the document collection prompt (Appendix D); and the interview protocol (Appendix E) were designed to mine participants' leadership experiences through a qualitative, phenomenological research design.

Findings indicated that early college liaisons draw from a very deep, as one participant phrased it, "bag of tricks" that allows them to "lead without authority" (Heifetz, 1994) in times of change and conflict. Collected data focused on participants' job experiences and training; professional relationships; leadership skills; social traits; and approaches to maintaining student advocacy. Participants provided a wealth of data showing that the early college liaison leadership experience is varied; however, saturation related to all research inquiries was reached during the collection phase. Overall, findings revealed that early college liaisons are at the hub of intensive high school-college partnerships, and are tasked with interacting with and influencing a diverse array of stakeholders.

The next chapter will synthesize these findings, and will provide a discussion of how these findings might have implications for future practice and research. In addition, it will synthesize the study's strengths and weaknesses, and will include recommendations for next steps related to empirical study of the early college model.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the North Carolina early college liaison's leadership role in the melding of K-12 and community college cultures and curricula as it is embodied in the early college high school. The liaison is the nexus of the early college, and it is a requirement that the position be connected to students, parents, administrators, instructors, and a diverse array of other stakeholders on both the high school and community college sides of the partnership. This study investigated the experiences of 14 early college liaisons, community college employees that, essentially, serve two masters, the public high school and two-year postsecondary institution. In addition, it described, from the viewpoint of participants, the challenges of melding two distinct institutions in pursuit of an overriding goal – accelerated education for first-generation college-goers and other “at risk” populations. Finally, it probed the role that social capital (Putnam, 2001) and “leading without authority” (Heifetz, 1994) play in the “adaptive work” (Heifetz) that takes place within Bolman and Deal's (2003) “political frame” as it pertains to early colleges in North Carolina.

In this chapter, I will discuss the study's findings from Chapter Four and provide a synthesis of these results. The discussion of the findings will be centered on the study's overarching research question, “What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?,” as well as the subquestions:

1. What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?
2. What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the “boundary-spanning” process?

3. How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in “boundary-spanning” between K-12 schools and community colleges?
4. What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?
5. How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?

Also included in this chapter will be an analysis of the study’s implications for both research and practice, as well as recommendations for further research. Finally, it will revisit the study’s strengths and limitations.

Synthesis of the Findings

This study’s findings were determined through an analysis of data that were collected in relation to the study’s overarching research question and subquestions. For the purpose of trustworthiness, it was important that all participants had similar characteristics, so that interviews, written reflections, and submitted documents would accurately represent the leadership experiences of seasoned early college liaisons. It was a requirement that each participant:

1. Worked for a North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early college that was partnered with a North Carolina community college.
2. Had been employed as an early college liaison for at least two years prior to data collection.
3. Worked for an early college that had been in operation for no less than four years at the time of data collection.

4. Had a majority of job duties (more than 50%) that were dedicated to the early college, and a minority of duties (less than 50%) that were dedicated to other community college-related areas.

The main justifications for setting these parameters were so that collected data would reflect liaisons that had (a) experienced leadership, (b) accumulated social capital, (c) participated in the academic growth of a significant number of students, (d) worked for an established institution, and (e) been exposed to the New School Project's nonnegotiable design principles (North Carolina New Schools Project [NCNSP], 2012). Part of the rationale was that such participants would likely have a grasp of whether or not their role was one of leadership and influence, and, if so, how they managed these constructs without possessing, in the words of French and Raven (1968), the "legitimate power" (p. 264) associated with a high position on an organizational chart.

During this investigation of participants' leadership experiences, data revealed that liaisons most often personified the NCNSP principles of Personalization and Purposeful Design, and this is due to the fact that interviewed "boundary-spanners" exhibited a strong sense of student advocacy coupled with an ability to make significant contributions to "the organization of time, space, and the allocation of resources" (NCNSP, 2012, p.1) that is required in an intensive high school-college partnership. However, these principles were taken even further by each participant, because data analysis showed that, not only do liaisons help students, manage calendars, perform registration, and arrange facilities, they also have great influence on an early college's assimilation by (a) forming professional relationships and communicating with a wide variety of on-campus and off-campus stakeholders; (b) collaborating closely with faculty

and executive leadership on both “sides” of the partnership; (c) engaging in diplomacy in a highly political environment; (d) possessing knowledge of K-12 and community college cultures and academic requirements; and (e) advocating for students, even in times of conflict.

As such, data analysis showed that early college liaisons – “champions of two worlds” – are not only tasked with the duties that appear on their job descriptions, but are also responsible for developing the ability to be community college employees who “lead without authority.” Furthermore, they are influential participants in the early college model’s attempt to provide low-cost, easily accessible higher education to first-generation college-goers and their families. I will synthesize the major themes that collected data revealed in relation to the “boundary-spanning” and leadership activities of participants, and will discuss the ways in which early college liaisons advocate for students by bridging K-12 and community college cultures.

“Living in two different worlds.” According to Heifetz (1994), conflict is bound to occur when complex organizational change takes place. In these situations, “adaptive work,” he wrote, is “required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the realities that they face” (p. 22). Certainly, this description is applicable to the placement of a high school on a college campus, and, in North Carolina, “the realities” have included the implementation of 74 early colleges in less than a decade (T. Habit, personal communication, March 29, 2012). Collected data showed that early college liaisons grappled with the many differences that are part and parcel of intensive dual-enrollment partnerships.

Some of the differences that liaisons experienced were infrastructural – scheduling, calendars, policies, and procedures did not mesh easily, if at all. Others were foundational. Instruction, for example, varied between institutions, and the ways in which faculty engaged students was given by several liaisons as a concern – lecture was reported as being typical on the college side, and project-based learning was said to be preferred by high school teachers. A few liaisons expressed a stance that this juxtaposition – the mix of “traditional” and “innovative” pedagogies – was self-defeating to the purpose of an early college high school. Discipline, too, was a point of uneasiness for some participants, as they struggled with college regulations – rules that were intended for adults – in situations that involved minors.

Such differences, according to participants, were underscored by the fact that, at least in the early years of their tenures, a number of faculty members at almost every college indicated that they had little or no desire to teach high school-age students. Although the intensity of these feelings waned over time, interactions with faculty members who “didn’t sign up” to teach high school students was a large theme for the vast majority of participants. Run-ins with disinterested or resistant faculty probably played a role in that most liaisons said they felt uncertain about the specifics of their role during their first months (and, in some cases, years) on the job. This uncertainty, according to some, was linked to a sense of isolation that was a byproduct of being a community college employee that was not part of a specific “department” or “team” on campus.

That participants, at least in their opinions, personified a worthy cause was likely a factor in their ability to persevere through the uncertainties and trials associated with

the liaison position. A person who “leads without authority,” according to Heifetz (1994), “may need people across boundaries to believe that she represents something significant, that she embodies a perspective that merits attention” (p. 186). Because none of the participants in this study were managers in the traditional sense (i.e., employees who supervise personnel), their ability to navigate change and conflict was not based on the “legitimate power” (French & Raven, 1968, p. 264) that is associated with many educational administrators.

Training and backgrounds. Despite a lack of “legitimate power,” all participants indicated that they had “the ability to talk to the person who has the power” (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2009a, p. 63). This was evident in their reflections on conversations with executive leaders, as well as in their reporting structures. Twelve of the 14 liaisons reported directly to a vice president, dean, or associate dean, and, depending on their community college, worked in either the curriculum and instruction or student services divisions. The close placement of liaisons in relation to upper-level management is indicative of the fact that, to maneuver an intensive educational partnership, easy access to decision-makers is a must. Such placement should probably be considered for future “boundary-spanners,” which have been recommended by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities as educational partnerships and dual enrollment programs increase (Eddy, 2010; Thomas et al., 2013).

Participants’ ability to influence persons of authority, however, was more important to this study than their ability to talk to them. This study’s first research subquestion was “What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college

liaisons?,” and the corresponding analysis showed that participants had extensive experience in secondary and postsecondary education; educational technology; business; and other fields that require sharply honed communication and persuasion skills. The fact that most participants had extensive experience in education, specifically, was telling, because a person with vested interest in an organization is more likely to possess the “bridging social capital” (Putnam, 2001) needed to bring diverse stakeholders together for a cause.

Relationships and “boundary-spanning.” Relationships and relationship-building are crucial to the success of politically-oriented organizations, in which diverse stakeholders must put aside differences for a mutually beneficial cause (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Putnam, 2001). Early college liaisons in this study interacted with a plethora of stakeholders in carrying out their missions. This study’s second subquestion was “What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the boundary-spanning process?,” and participants cited interactions with diverse colleagues as highly important to early colleges’ success.

Although most relationships were described, overall, as collegial, interactions between liaisons and college instructors were not always harmonious – the “I didn’t sign up for this” phenomenon is a case in point. However, instructor resistance was described as having a bit of a reverse correspondence to student success. In other words, as early college students earned passing grades in college courses, most instructors became more comfortable with high school students, and, therefore, with early college liaisons. Participants reported that their ease in working with faculty increased when the liaison (a) appealed to faculty members’ appreciation for student learning; (b) was able to be seen as

“one of them” (i.e., a community college staff member); (c) possessed the ability to work with employees of all types and ranks; and (d) aided in the difficulties associated with space and resources.

Relationships with community college leadership, by and large, were described as healthy, and, although this might have reflected hints of self-preservation (most participants reported to high-level administrators), it seemed, more so, to indicate executive buy-in for the early college concept. Open-door policies and easy-going interactions with college leadership provided a much larger theme than anything to the contrary, and this, for the most part, was similar to reported synergy between liaisons and early college principals. Although most relationships with principals were described, overall, as collegial, there were instances of friction. The latter were portrayed as occurring most often (a) in relation to the funding structure of the liaison position, in which money from the New School Project flows through the public school district, or (b) as a point of principal frustration related to the fact that the liaison is a community college employee, and does not, in the traditional sense, report to high school hierarchy.

Leadership skills used in “boundary-spanning.” This study’s third research subquestion was “How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in ‘boundary-spanning’ between K-12 schools and community colleges?,” and, although a couple of participants said they did not consider the liaison to be a leadership position, all participants spoke about leadership traits when describing their interactions with fellow employees. As revealed in data linked to liaison-college faculty interactions, participants had to deftly position their cause – the early college model – so that colleagues would buy into the concept. Regarding the “adaptive work” in which someone who “leads

without authority” must engage, Heifetz (1994) wrote that “as she seeks informal authority from those across organizational or factional boundaries, she has to place her cause in the context of the values of her opposition” (p. 186). Although it would be unfair and inaccurate to call college instructors the “opposition,” Heifetz’s words are applicable, because early college liaisons reported that their belief in the program – and the collaboration that was a byproduct of such advocacy – was an essential element for an early college’s successful integration.

Communication was highlighted as a fundamental leadership skill, and participants were adamant that published materials and data showing academic progress and student demographics played a significant role in their leadership tactics. Certainly, liaisons described many of the traits that have been associated with leaders and leadership theory – vision, decision-making, confidence, and being mission-focused (Northouse, 2010). These elements were portrayed as serving liaisons well as they navigated the cultures and curricula of their partnering K-12 and community college institutions.

Again, though, participants did not possess a high position within the organizational structure of their community colleges, and their ability to “lead from the middle” was a prominent theme in this study. This talent was described as including an ability to influence people of all ages and ranks, and liaisons described having a keen understanding of rank-and-file college employees, as well as top brass. In addition, convening leaders – on committees, at meetings, or in impromptu situations – was cited as a facet in influencing positive change “from the middle.”

Social skills in a political partnership. Bolman and Deal (2003) wrote that conflict naturally occurs when a politically-oriented organization operates with limited

resources, and that “bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position” (p. 186) are precursors for decision-making within organizations that have diverse stakeholders. Data showed that, in the form of the early college liaison, this theory reaches a crossroads with Putnam’s (2001) idea of “bridging social capital,” in which a person has the ability to bring together varying constituents for a mutual cause. This study’s fourth subquestion was “What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?,” and related data showed that social skills played a prominent role in liaisons’ ability to “jockey for position” and rally stakeholders.

Saturation was reached quickly as participants talked about the role that negotiation, diplomacy, and politics played in their advocacy for the early college. Liaisons were inclined toward keeping both sides “happy,” but talked about struggling with this, especially in times of conflict and change. Because the early college, for many reasons, represents change and reform in American education, it is understandable that participants had to work hard in negotiating for their programs. However, liaisons’ strong belief in the early college concept, and the idea that young students can succeed in a college classroom, seemed to propel them in their negotiations with various people, including department heads, facilities coordinators, and instructors. These negotiations were particularly acute in relation to space and resources, the acquisition of which, according to several participants, was an ongoing struggle for their early colleges.

In addition to some of the more politically-oriented social skills, liaisons cited listening, empathy, and the ability to interact with different types of people as being hallmarks of success. These traits should not be underplayed, because they bolstered evidence that liaisons tended to personify the NCNSP principles of Personalization and

Purposeful Design – they built relationships, not only with professionals, but also with students and parents, as they carried out the “the organization of time, space, and the allocation of resources” (NCNSP, 2012, p.1) required for an early college’s successful assimilation.

Student advocacy. This study was not intended to focus on early college liaisons’ relationships with students. However, the purpose of a phenomenological research design is to obtain “description of ‘the things in their appearing’ through a focus on experience ‘as lived’” (Langdrige, 2008, p. 1132). In other words, it was important that the concept of leadership in this study be viewed through the lens of the participant. Because of this, it was determined that relationships with students – which were addressed frequently – should be included in findings related to the study’s fifth research subquestion, which was “How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?”

In answering this question, participants talked about the many ways that they worked to seamlessly integrate their students and the early college concept into the community college milieu. Cultivating buy-in; personifying a belief in the early college mission; developing meaningful relationships with students and their parents; and maintaining the academic integrity of the college were the themes that surfaced the most. In addition, though, several liaisons talked about others’ suspicions related to participants’ institutional loyalty, and this appeared to be yet another wrinkle in the change and conflict that the early college often represented.

Data showed that participants, to a person, viewed the early college as a “win-win-win” situation: the students generated state funding for the college; the community’s

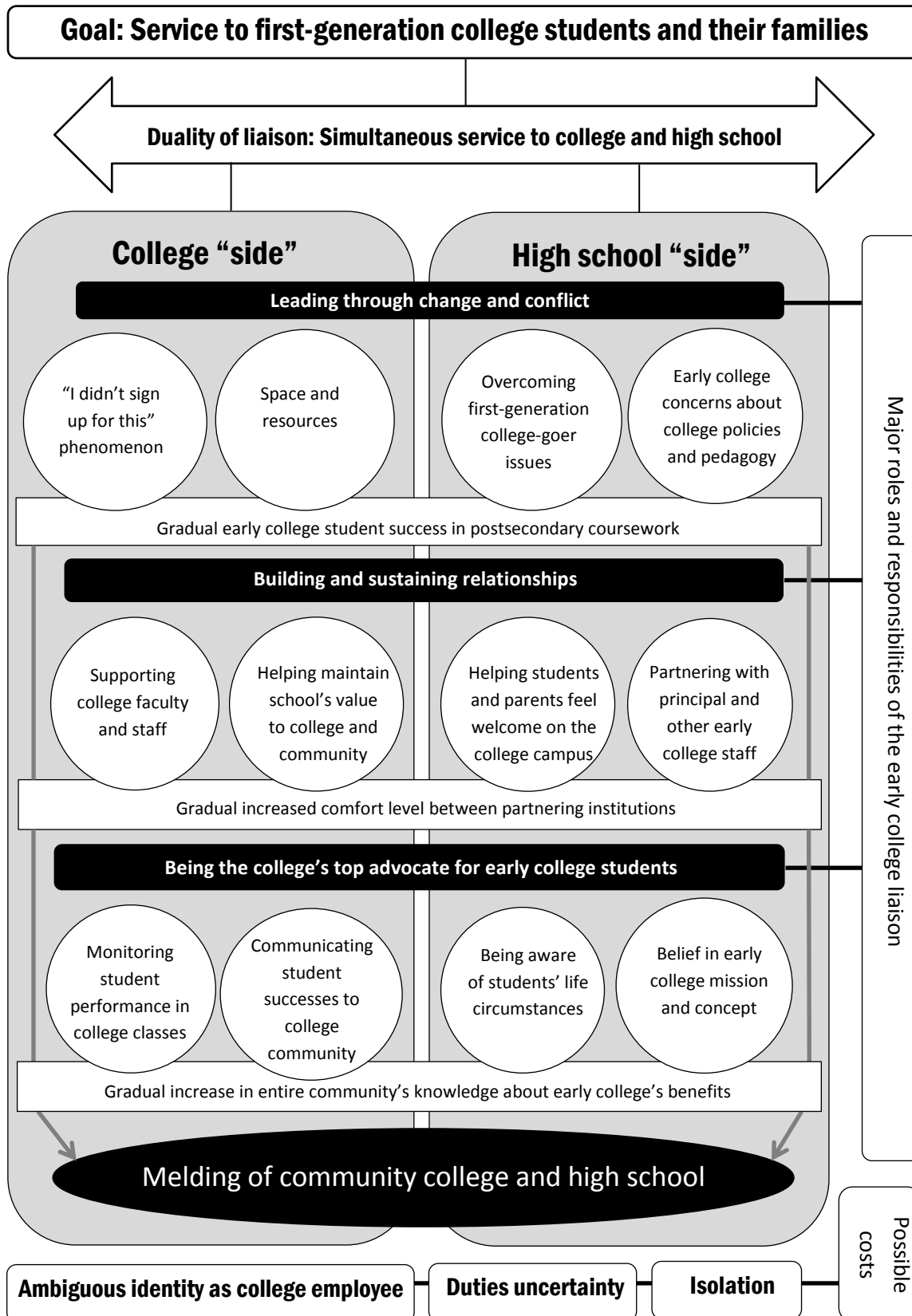
collective educational attainment level rose; and the students, many of whom came from economically deprived backgrounds, benefited from a free college education. In addition, participants viewed themselves as community college employees, but also as staunch advocates for high school students. Indeed, the liaisons in this study represented themselves as “champions” for both the community college and its partnering high school.

The Essence of the Early College Liaison’s “Lived Experience”

Phenomenological research is rooted in describing the “essence” of a phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009), and the purpose of this study was to uncover the essence of early college leadership as it, in the words of Finlay (2009), is “concretely lived.” During the data collection and analysis phases of the study, in which 14 early college liaisons were interviewed in their places of employment, data saturation relating to the essence of early college leadership was reached quickly, and was reinforced repeatedly. Early college liaisons are employees who must have an understanding of both K-12 and college cultures and curricula, and, because of this, a keen and varied sense of duality is the essence of their leadership role. “Janus-faced,” “boundary-spanners,” and “champions of two worlds” are all fitting descriptions for the liaison, and this section will describe how this duality of purpose is at the core of the liaison’s mission to serve first-generation college students in an early college setting.

Figure 2 depicts the ways in which the dual nature of the early college liaison’s leadership role serves the melding of a high school and community college. Certainly, the main reason that the liaison position exists is to serve first-generation college-goers and other “at risk” students during their journey toward the simultaneous earning of a high

Figure 2: The Essence of the North Carolina Early College Liaison

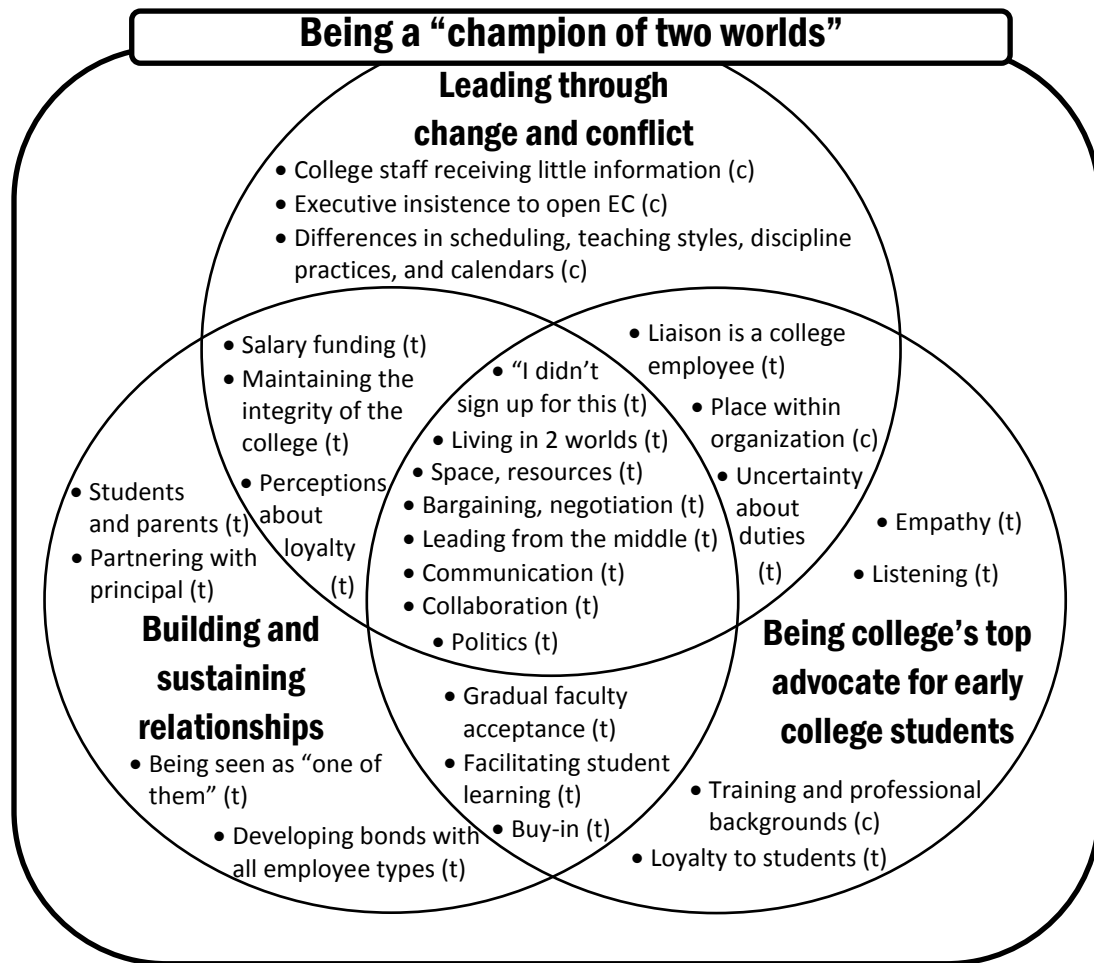


school diploma and college associate degree. To achieve a high level of service – one in which students’ social and academic success is realized – the early college liaison must cater to both “sides” of the partnership at once, and work to understand and accomplish the goals of two innately different educational institutions. This is no easy task, but the participants in this study have proved it is possible, and this was indicated through three overarching themes that reflected the most prominent roles and responsibilities of early college liaisons. These overarching themes are:

1. Leading through change and conflict.
2. Building and sustaining relationships.
3. Being the college’s top advocate for early college students.

I expound upon these overriding themes in this section, to provide an overview of early college liaisons’ working essence. In addition, Figure 3 shows the relationship that these overarching themes – the three main components of a liaison’s essence of duality – have with the smaller themes and categories that were uncovered during data collection. In the graphic, themes are labeled with (t) and categories are labeled with (c). Themes are abstract in nature, and categories are the more concrete findings associated with early college liaison leadership experiences. The themes and categories can be part of multiple overarching themes, and this is seen in the overlapping portions of the figure. For example, the “I didn’t sign up for this” theme, in which college instructors resisted the inclusion of high school students in college classes, is a factor within all three overarching themes, although it played most prominently in the super-theme of “leading through conflict and change.” Salary funding, on the other hand, is a theme that is linked

Figure 3: Themes and Categories Linked to the Essence of the Early College Liaison



to two of the overarching themes, and structural differences between high schools and colleges is an example of a category that is linked to only one overarching theme.

Leading through change and conflict. Liaisons must lead through change and conflict on both sides of the high school-college partnership. Navigating college faculty resistance to the inclusion of high school students in college courses was a prominent theme throughout this study. The “I didn’t sign up for this” phenomenon was referenced repeatedly by all participants except one. According to participants, this mindset was a major challenge, especially in the first years of an early college’s existence. In addition, space and resources were cited as hurdles in the formation and continued management of

an early college. Although space-related issues waned over time, they continued to be troublesome until the early college reached maximum capacity. On the flip side, college instructor attitudes related to dual enrollment quickly became more positive after early college students began to excel academically in postsecondary coursework.

Change was also a prominent theme on the high school “side” of the partnership. One of the purposes of the early college model is to introduce first-generation students to postsecondary education. Participants said that, although this was a worthy cause, it was also very labor intensive. Constant communication with parents was referenced repeatedly, as was the academic support and enculturation that was required for helping first-generation students navigate the college experience. On an institutional level, the major adjustment that liaisons cited was navigating the differences between college and high school policies and pedagogy. Principals, in particular, often struggled with these issues, and one of the liaison’s duties is to act as an intermediary between the two institutions’ faculties and administrations.

Despite these challenges, though, all participants stated that issues of change and conflict subsided over time, and this was largely a result of the proven ability of early college students to succeed in college coursework. As students became acclimated to the requirements of college – both academically and socially – college faculty became more accepting of them, and, on several occasions, participants stated that certain faculty members had grown to prefer teaching early college students to traditional students.

Building and sustaining relationships. The duality of the liaison was also evidenced in participants’ thoughts about building and sustaining relationships on both sides of the partnership “fence.” Certainly, college faculty acceptance of early college

students was bolstered by the fact that liaisons were required to support postsecondary faculty and staff. This was sometimes reflected in disciplinary actions, but, most frequently, was referenced in relation to academic support, with participants acting as go-betweens for college instructors and high school teachers or the early college principal. Social capital (Putnam, 2001), as well as bargaining and negotiation (Bolman & Deal, 2003), played a huge role liaisons' successful indoctrination of the early college model onto a community college campus. Relationships, though, were not limited to faculty members. Participants cited constant communication with administrators, rank-and-file staff members, and community members when helping maintain the early college's value to the college and its service-area community.

On the other side of the partnership, relationships with parents and students were cited as most important. Students held a special place in the words of all participants, and several stated that interactions with dual enrollees were their favorite aspect of the job. Of course, these relationships with students were also of paramount importance to the academic and social health of the children, because the liaison position is the primary college representative in the early college milieu. Liaisons' duties related to representing the college, though, were not limited to students. Participants also interfaced daily with early college faculty, staff, and administration, and occasionally, with a public school system's central office. This duality of purpose – in which liaisons personified a community college and high school vis-à-vis an entire range of constituents – was cited as crucial to the communication between public-school personnel and the postsecondary partner. When successful, this state of “boundary-spanning” between institutions, in

which relationships were formed and cultivated, gradually increased the comfort level between the high school and community college.

Being the college's top advocate for early college students. The overarching reason that the early college liaison position was created was so early college students would have a designated advocate on a community college's staff. Throughout data collection, it was obvious that this facet was of primary importance to participants. The monitoring of student performance was often couched in words that described participants' relationships with faculty; however, this practice was also seen as crucial to making sure that young students stayed motivated and focused while attending college classes. Participants often expressed a somewhat circular sentiment that, by investigating student performance, they were able to ensure faculty acceptance of students, and, therefore, help students, because faculty reacted positively when students increased their academic performance. One major byproduct of such academic support was scholastic success, and, when successes occurred, liaisons were primary spokespeople in communicating this progression. Participants' advocacy materialized in presentations; publications; interactions with the community; and meetings with college faculty and staff. Therefore, their advocacy ranged from one-on-one communications with students to public displays intended for a mass audience.

Advocacy can be rather hollow, though, if the spokesperson does not have an intimate relationship with or belief in the subject. Across interviews, participants expressed the fact that one of the more profound parts of their jobs was to have an understanding of students' home lives and backgrounds. Again, helping first-generation students and their parents navigate the college experience was a prominent theme.

Liaisons cited poverty, abuse, lack of familial support, and other barriers for early college students. This advocacy for young students, despite such hurdles, was rooted in a strong belief in the early college mission and concept. Participants often cited the New Schools Project's design principles, and the principles of "Personalization" and "Purposeful Design" were most often reflected in liaisons' words. These principles, which represent the relationships that liaisons developed with students and the role that participants played in making their colleges inviting places for those students, were key in the growth of each college and community's knowledge about the benefits of early college.

Melding of the community college and high school. Although it is unlikely that colleges and high schools will ever be entirely seamless institutions, the actions of the early college liaison certainly represent an attempt to meld a community college and its partnering high school. The professional duties of the early college liaison – which are founded in the duality of serving both academic institutions at once – are primary examples of the steps that can be taken in the spirit of making a two-tiered educational partnership gel.

There are pitfalls, however: Participants cited three major themes related to the possible costs of being a college-high school go-between: (a) ambiguity related to their status as a college employee, especially in relation to the New Schools Project's salary funding scenario, (b) a certain level of uncertainty related to the liaison's duties, particularly in the first years of an early college, and (c) a sense of isolation linked to the fact that the liaison, typically, is not part of a college "department" in the traditional sense of the word. However, these negative aspects paled in comparison to the more positive themes of leadership, relationships, and advocacy.

Implications for Practice

A growing need for boundary-spanners. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities has recommended an increase in the amount of personnel who have an understanding of the K-12/college continuum (Eddy, 2010). At the same time, dual enrollment has shown no signs of slowing down. With the most recent available data revealing that dual enrollments topped 2 million in 2010-2011, an almost 67% increase in registrations since equivalent data were collected in 2002-2003 (CCRC, 2012; Collins, 2012; Thomas et al., 2013), it is obvious that such partnerships are growing. Furthermore, in North Carolina, the General Assembly has ratified rules for the expansion of cooperative-innovative high school programs, so there is reason to believe that more schools resembling the academic parameters of an early college will be developed within the state (North Carolina General Assembly, 2012). Added to this is the fact that data indicate early colleges, in North Carolina and nationwide, are resulting in positive results for students of all socio-economic statuses (Edmunds, 2010; Hoffman & Webb, 2010; NCNSP, 2010; Public Schools of North Carolina et al., 2011). Considering all of these things, a firm understanding of the skill set that is needed to manage intensive dual-enrollment partnerships is not only warranted, it may be crucial to the future of America's educational landscape.

This study was focused, through a qualitative, phenomenological research design, to mine the leadership experiences of early college liaisons, unique community college employees who must understand intensive dual-enrollment collaborations. In addition to providing much-needed information about leadership in such a setting, this study could help policymakers determine (a) if the liaison position is worth funding after North

Carolina News Schools Project grant money expires at the end of the five-year funding period, and (b) if similar positions should be funded in the event of expanded dual-enrollment partnerships.

It is worth restating a quote from Huber and Williams (2009) to emphasize the importance of having a “champion” to implement and cultivate an educational partnership:

Many partnerships are doomed to be underwhelming based on the sheer scale of intercultural and interpersonal differences. The worlds of public school, higher education, nonprofits, and businesses are so profoundly disparate that one can almost hear an audible sigh of relief when grants run their course or programs are terminated. (p. 32)

It is imperative to the future of American education – as public money dwindles and institutional accountability rises – that educators are capable of overcoming the differences cited by Huber and Williams.

The person who leads the charge. The findings of this study showed that early college liaisons, in the traditional sense of the term, have little “power.” Typically, they do not supervise other employees or manage budgets. However, collected data indicated that liaisons have influence within both of the organizations that they serve. Such influence, along with access to information and leadership, are recommended by Eddy (2010) for “boundary-spanners.” In other words, the “champion” does not have to be an organization’s official leader. However, he or she must possess certain skills, and this study’s findings have implications for who organizations should select when searching for an effective person to “bridge the gap” between the worlds of K-12 and higher education. The study’s findings related to leadership skills; knowledge levels and areas;

social traits; and relationships could be very important, in this respect, to policymakers and educational leaders.

The evaluation of early colleges by the American Institutes for Research and SRI International (2009b) indicated that the liaison is crucial in melding secondary and postsecondary academic cultures. In addition, early college principals have expressed concern that the position could be at risk when an early college's grant cycle ends (Vargas & Quiara, 2010). This study's examination of the early college liaison's world – in which advocacy for student learning is balanced with the inherent benefits that early colleges can provide for institutions of higher education and their surrounding communities – will be useful for advocates of high school reform.

Suggestions from the liaisons. A final implication that this study could have on practice is reflected in the recommendations that were made or indicated by participants. These include, but are not limited to:

- Closer alignment of high school and college teaching methodologies: Participants indicated that it is difficult for students in a cooperative-innovative setting to go from project-based learning classes to lecture-based classes. In light of this, colleges should consider project-based learning professional development activities for their faculties.
- Learning more about the adolescent learner: With dual enrollment growing nationwide, and early colleges showing healthy returns, it might be beneficial for colleges to train faculty members in how to best communicate with students who are high school-age.

- Implications of dual-credit affecting high school graduation: Because some dual-enrolled students, particularly early college students, take college courses that are applied toward high school graduation, it might be best for high schools to provide testing or other means of assessment that would indicate a high school student's chance of succeeding in college coursework, even if that coursework does not have math or English prerequisites. This could reduce the number of students who are forced to delay graduation in the wake of failing a dual-enrollment course.

Of course, all of these items would likely require further empirical study before being considered seriously or implemented. It is advised that participants' recommendations be treated as suggestions for further study, in addition to being considered implications of this study.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Strengths. A major strength of this study is that it filled two gaps in educational literature: The seeming nonexistence of research related to the early college liaison, and the paucity of research related to educational liaisons in general. Furthermore, according to Miller and Hafner (2008), there is a dearth of experiential studies focused on how educational partnerships are planned, initiated, and developed. Because it is one of the very few studies focused on participants' lived experiences within educational partnerships, this study could be a foundational brick for similar research.

Another strength of the study was its research design. Phenomenology is an excellent genre for examining the experiences of people as they relate to certain phenomena. The rigorous preparation that went into the bracketing process, to minimize

the influence of subjectivity, combined with taking every effort to produce an accurate reflection of participants' words and intentions, lent itself to a thick, rich study that portrays the essence of early college liaison leadership. Multiple readings of collected data; realignment of codes and themes; and several trustworthiness measures were all applied in this study. Therefore, the end result is an adequate analysis of participants' experiences.

Limiting participants to the criteria described near the beginning of this chapter was another strength of this study. These guidelines narrowed participants to those who had experienced leadership at an established institution, and who had been in the position long enough to have developed social capital, worked with a large number of students, and absorbed the non-negotiable design principles of the New Schools Project (NCNSP, 2012). It was required that participants possess these traits, while, at the same time, not having a high position on their college's organizational chart.

A final strength of the study was its conceptual framework. By analyzing early college liaison leadership through the lens of Heifetz's (1994) theory of "adaptive work," in which people "lead without authority" in times of conflict, I was able to frame the ability of the early college liaison to spearhead a cause – free access to higher education for first-generation college-goers and other "at-risk" students – that represents change in a traditional setting. Through the use of Bolman and Deal's (2003) "political frame," I was able to provide a more clear understanding of the "bargaining, negotiating, and jockeying for position" (p. 186) that the authors insisted are essential for decision-making as it relates to a politically-oriented organization that operates with limited resources. Lastly, Putnam's (2001) views on "bridging social capital," the social traits that are

effective in bringing diverse stakeholders together, shed light on the many ways in which liaisons cultivate buy-in from an early college's many constituents.

Limitations. Among the study's limitations was the fact that it represents liaisons who worked for only 14 North Carolina early colleges. Although this was completely appropriate for a phenomenological design, it would be optimal to gather information on the leadership experiences of all seasoned North Carolina early college liaisons. To a certain extent, this could be done through survey methods, and this will be recommended for further study. A phenomenological study that accessed all such liaisons would be unwieldy, and truthfully, would not serve the purposes of a phenomenological design.

Another limitation was that the study focused solely on the early college liaison, and did not examine the relationships that other early college employees have with the spanning of K-12 and community college cultures. Certainly, a phenomenological or other experientially based study focused on early college principals or teachers would have also uncovered pertinent data related to early college leadership. However, such a study would not have the depth of focus on "boundary-spanning" between K-12 and community college that this study contained, because no other early college/community college employee is so intensively tasked with "bridging the gap."

A final limitation of this study was that it did not take into account early colleges that have partnered with four-year colleges or universities. Early colleges in North Carolina are not always affiliated with community colleges, and four-year college partnerships were not examined or described in this study. Although such partnerships include variables that do not exist among early college partnerships with two-year

institutions, including them in this study would have resulted in the collection of some very interesting data.

It must be noted that, as with most qualitative research, the findings of this study are not generalizable, in a statistical sense, to all educational partnerships or academic settings. Although the study's findings are an accurate reflection of early college liaison leadership experiences, further study is warranted for researchers who decide to analyze the leadership experiences of other types of employees who engage in work similar to that of the North Carolina early college liaison. Furthermore, any related analysis of North Carolina early colleges or early colleges outside of the state should be tempered with the caveat that the findings contained in this study are limited to the liaisons who participated in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

As dual-enrollment and the early college model continue to expand, it is imperative that further study be implemented in a number of areas pertaining to the phenomena. This study serves as a reminder that empirical research related to early colleges is still in its infancy, and, certainly, qualitative research focused on early college stakeholders – students and employees alike – is severely lacking. Qualitative research attempts “to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), and the experiences that early college students and faculty members have had and continue to have are goldmines of information related to educational opportunities for first-generation college-goers and other “at-risk” populations. To this end, a few suggestions for further research are provided here:

1. The phenomenon of “boundary-spanning” in educational partnerships needs to be explored further, as it relates to early college liaisons, as well as to other positions within the K-12 and college ranks. To this end, the following studies are recommended:
 - (a) Qualitative inquiry related to the “boundary-spanning” that occurs within educational organizations, as reflected in administrative and instructional hybrid positions, such as deans and department heads. These positions tend to provide a link between rank-and-file faculty and executive leadership, and it would be interesting to explore an understanding of how these two cultures are navigated by people in similar “boundary-spanning” positions. Furthermore, it could be valuable to compare the skills and traits of these internal positions to those of the early college liaison.
 - (b) Comparisons, both qualitative and quantitative, between student “success” (e.g., retention rates, overall grade point averages, graduation rates, etc.) at early colleges that have liaisons and other dual-enrollment partnerships that do not have a similar position. This could help determine the value of having someone on staff, such as a liaison, who is knowledgeable about K-12 and college curricula and culture.
 - (c) The creation of an “effectiveness scale” to determine the impact that individual liaisons are having or have had on individual early colleges. Factors such as employment status upon being hired (whether a person

was hired from within or outside of an organization), educational attainment, leadership style, technical skills, and other factors could be included on the scale. This could help organizations pinpoint the minimum and preferred requirements for job applicants when searching for an educational “boundary-spanner.”

2. As Miller and Hafner (2008) have noted, there is a dearth of experiential research related to how educational partnerships are planned, initiated, and developed. It would be beneficial for future phenomenological studies to focus on the experiences of other early college stakeholders, such as students, faculty, and principals. It would also be advantageous for researchers to investigate the “lived experiences” of college faculty who teach high-school students, so that the pedagogical techniques they have used to aid young learners could be published, and, possibly, used for best practices in the instruction of dual-enrolled students.
3. The experiences of graduates are also untapped. Now that thousands of early college students have matriculated to four-year colleges and universities, it is time to find out how their early college experiences helped or hindered their transition to the next level of education. It would be particularly beneficial to examine the socialization process of former early college students who have matriculated, considering the fact that their postsecondary experience was accelerated.
4. A qualitative case study – either single or collective – would be appropriate for analyzing professional relationships or faculty-student interaction within

or across early colleges. A single case study could closely investigate any number of highly renowned early colleges, in North Carolina or elsewhere. Furthermore, a collective case study – in which multiple schools would be examined – could be used to compare high-achieving and low-achieving early colleges.

5. Further analysis is warranted for examining the challenges that arise when two distinctly different cultures are mixed for an educational partnership. As such partnerships increase, information about the experiences of the leaders who provide oversight could be very valuable. Although the early college liaison is a case in point, the viewpoints of upper-level management would provide insight related to how buy-in is cultivated and resources are shared. Again, a qualitative approach would be appropriate.

In addition to these ideas, it should be noted that it is time for further experimental study similar to the one conducted by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's SERVE Center (Edmunds, 2010), (a) to find out if early colleges in other parts of the country are making progress in the areas of increased academic achievement and reduced achievement gap, and (b) to compare how early college students that have matriculated to four-year colleges and universities are faring academically in comparison to their classmates who did not attend an early college. In addition, there are myriad other quantitative angles that could be pursued, including survey-based inquiries related to early college leadership and teaching methods, as well as randomized designs that could shed light on the student characteristics that might be used to predict academic success in an early college setting.

Conclusion

Early college liaisons play a unique role, and their experiences related to how educational partnerships are formed and sustained are invaluable. Although many community college employees are engaged in forming partnerships with businesses and other institutions of learning, no job description is more tailored toward melding two distinct entities than that of the liaison. Possibly because the position is not typically one of great authority, liaisons' leadership experiences are particularly important for rank-and-file employees who don't possess – and in many cases, don't want to possess – a high position on an organizational chart. Certainly, organizational rank and the desire to be influential in one's job are not synonymous. Therefore, the words and actions of early college liaisons in “leading without authority” have great merit because they provide a lens through which being influential – despite rank – can be accomplished.

This study investigated the Janus-faced nature of the early college liaison. The “champion of two worlds” must understand and be persuasive within both K-12 and community college cultures. To be competent at this, the incumbent must possess leadership skills that are suited for maintaining staunch advocacy, even in times of conflict, change, and limited resources. Bringing diverse groups of people together – particularly for a controversial cause – is never easy. However, the savvy early college liaison is someone who has the mettle to be a diplomatic “boundary spanner” that, through communication, relationship-building, and negotiation, puts student advocacy above all other issues. Future study related to the early college is welcomed, and it is hoped that this study will be useful for researchers who are interested in discovering more about the expansion of dual enrollment in the United States.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: INITIAL RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings. My name is Michael Dempsey and I am a graduate student at Western Carolina University, pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership. I am currently working on my dissertation, which is titled “Champion of Two Worlds: A Phenomenological Investigation of North Carolina Early College Liaisons’ Leadership Experiences.” The reason that I am pursuing this topic is that I want to better understand the ways in which early college liaisons help manage educational partnerships that include elements of both K-12 and college education.

To research this topic, I will be collecting data from a number of North Carolina early college liaisons. To maintain consistency in the study, all liaisons involved in the research must meet the following criteria:

1. Work for a North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early college that has partnered with a North Carolina community college.
2. Have been employed as an early college liaison for at least two years prior to data collection.
3. Work for an early college that has been in operation for no less than four years at the time of data collection.
4. Have a majority of job duties (more than 50%) that are dedicated to the early college, and a minority of duties (less than 50%) that are dedicated to other community college-related areas.

If you meet the criteria listed above, I would be very interested in pursuing your participation in the study. Data for the study will be collected using interviews, written reflections, documents, and notes that are taken by me. These data will be the only

information collected in this study. If you participate, your name would not be associated with the research findings in any way, and the information collected by the researcher would be completely confidential. Interviews would take place at a location of your choosing, and you would be given detailed information about the data collection process prior to participating in the study. You would be required to sign a letter of informed consent, which would clearly state your role in the study, and which would indicate that you could withdraw from the study at any time.

The published dissertation will not include any individual identifying information, and your participation would be entirely confidential. In the event that your words were used to support the study's conclusions, a pseudonym would be used, so that your name would not be revealed. In addition, a pseudonym would be used for any individual institutions that are referenced in the study, so that no institution's real name is revealed. However, I must be honest with you – during data collection, you might describe your working relationships with both K-12 and community college personnel; because of this, there is a minor likelihood that some angst or feelings of tension could surface. The expected benefit associated with your participation, though, is that the information gained about your experiences would help researchers better understand the facilitation of educational partnerships, as well as the role and experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons.

In coming days, I will contact you via phone to speak with you about your qualifications for participating in the study. If you meet the criteria listed above, I will ask you if you would be interested in participating in the study, and, if you are interested, I will arrange to meet with you as soon as is convenient to you. If you are interested in

participating in the study, you will need to complete a Letter of Informed Consent, which is attached to this email, before I can interview you, collect a written reflection from you, or ask you to provide me with any documents. After signing this form, you may scan it and email it to mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu, or fax it to me at (828) 281-9760. I will ask you about this letter when I call you in a few days.

I hope that you will consider participation in this study. As an early college liaison, you are in a very interesting and important position. If you are included in the study, please rest assured that the information you provide would be used to help administrators and policymakers better understand the trials and tribulations of the early college liaison.

I appreciate your reading this email, and I look forward to talking with you soon. In the meantime, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me. My phone number is (828) 242-5293 and my email is mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu.

Thanks, and I hope to speak with you soon.

Sincerely,

Michael Dempsey

APPENDIX B: INITIAL RECRUITMENT TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Hello, this is Michael Dempsey, and I'm calling for

You may recall that I sent you an email a few days ago indicating that I am a doctoral student at Western Carolina University and that I am writing a dissertation about the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. Did you receive my email?

If the answer is “no,” then the following information will be provided:

My proposed dissertation is titled “Champion of Two Worlds: A Phenomenological Investigation of North Carolina Early College Liaisons’ Leadership Experiences.” The reason that I am pursuing this topic is that I want to better understand the ways in which early college liaisons help manage educational partnerships that include elements of both K-12 and college education. The expected benefit associated with your participation is that the information gained about your experiences would help researchers and policymakers better understand the facilitation of educational partnerships, as well as the role and experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons.

If the answer is “yes,” then I will ask the following question:

Does this sound like a study in which you would be interested in participating?

If the answer is “no,” then I will thank the person for their time and hang up the phone.

If the answer is “yes,” then I will say the following:

Excellent. As I indicated in the email, to maintain consistency in the study, all liaisons involved in the research must meet the same criteria. Therefore, I'm going to ask you a few quick questions to see if you qualify:

1. Do you work for a North Carolina New Schools Project-affiliated early college that has partnered with a North Carolina community college?
2. Have you been employed as an early college liaison for at least two years?
3. Do you work for an early college that has been in operation for at least four years?
4. Do you have a majority of job duties (more than 50%) that are dedicated to the early college, and a minority of duties (less than 50%) that are dedicated to other community college-related areas?

If the answer to any of the four questions is “no,” then I will thank the person for their time and hang up the phone.

If the answer to all four questions is “yes,” then I will reiterate the following information that was in the initial recruitment email:

Excellent. You qualify for the study. Before we go any further, I must ask if you had a chance to read over the Letter of Informed Consent that was attached to the email, and, if you did not receive my email, I will forward you the letter immediately. Before any data can be collected for this study, you will have to sign the form. After signing the form, you may scan it and email it to mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu, or fax it to me at (828) 281-9760. Per Western Carolina's Institutional Review Board, the letter must be signed by both of us before interviews, written reflections, and document submission can begin. I will also sign the form, and make sure that you have a complete copy, which I

will email or fax to you prior to the beginning of data collection. After the form is complete, I will email you prompts for a written reflection and data collection.

Also, before I speak further with you about setting an interview appointment, I want to remind you that the published dissertation will not include any individual identifying information, and your participation would be entirely confidential. In the event that your words are used to support the study's conclusions, a pseudonym would be used, so that your name is not revealed. In addition, a pseudonym would be used for any individual institutions that are referenced in the study, so that no institution's real name is revealed. Also, when we meet, you will be required to sign a letter of informed consent, which will clearly state your role in the study, and which will indicate that you could withdraw from the study at any time.

My only caveat to you is that, during data collection, you might describe your working relationships with both K-12 and community college personnel, and, because of this, there is a minor likelihood that some angst or feelings of tension could surface. Please rest assured, though, that confidentiality is my top priority when it comes to your possible participation in the study.

Are you still interested in participating in this study?

If the answer is “no,” then I will thank the person for their time and hang up the phone.

If the answer is “yes,” then I will say the following:

Great. Let's set up a time to meet. In the meantime, I'll send you information about a written reflection that I'd like you to write, as well as the documents that I would like to look over prior to the interview. You are under no obligation to write any pre-

determined length or amount of information in the written reflection. Its intention is simply to get you thinking about your leadership experiences as an early college liaison. Furthermore, you are not required to submit documents that you are uncomfortable submitting. My desire for having the documents is simply to understand your job duties and your early college as much as possible before interviewing you, as well as to compare these things with documents collected from other participants in the study. Again, all data collected in the study will be confidential, and, if the data is used to reach published conclusions, it will not be tied to you or to your place of employment.

Thanks for your time – I look forward to meeting with you and discussing this topic. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at any time. My phone number is (828) 242-5293 and my email is mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu.

APPENDIX C: PROMPT FOR WRITTEN REFLECTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research project. I'm really looking forward to getting to know you, and to pick your brain about your experiences as a North Carolina early college liaison. To refresh your memory, the title of my dissertation is "Champion of Two Worlds: A Phenomenological Investigation of North Carolina Early College Liaisons' Leadership Experiences." As I told you over the phone, part of the data collection process will be my examination of written reflections about leadership that will be submitted by participants in the study. Included here is the prompt for the written reflection that I am requesting from you prior to our interview session. Because I will be interviewing you on (date), I would appreciate it greatly if you could return this reflection to me three days before the interview takes place. I might refer to this reflection during the interview, so it would be very helpful to me if I have it prior to the interview. You can call me at (828) 242-5293 or email me at mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu if you have any questions.

The prompt for the written reflection is "open-ended." In other words, there are very few topics, outside of leadership and the early college partnership with which you are affiliated, that need to be addressed. However, you may include any information that you think would be beneficial to the study. Furthermore, you may write as much or as little as you think is necessary. I am grateful that you are interested in participating in this study, and want you to feel comfortable with what you decide to submit for this reflection. Finally, I want to remind you that the published dissertation will not include any individual identifying information, and your participation would be entirely confidential. In the event that your words are used to support the study's conclusions, a

pseudonym would be used, so that your name is not revealed. In addition, a pseudonym would be used for any individual institutions that are referenced in the study, so that no institution's real name is revealed.

Here is the writing prompt:

Please describe the leadership experiences you have had as a North Carolina early college liaison. Include the leadership skills that you have developed while working to bridge K-12 and community college cultures, resources, and environments. Feel free to include information about the relationships that you have developed with K-12 and community college administration, faculty, and staff in your pursuit of helping high school students adapt to a community college setting. Also, please describe how you have developed as a leader, if at all, during your time as an early college liaison.

Thanks for taking the time to do this. Please submit your response to me at mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu. I'm really looking forward to meeting with you on (date), and I will call you the day before the interview to make sure that the agreed-upon time and place will still work for you.

APPENDIX D: PROMPT FOR DOCUMENT COLLECTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research project. I'm really looking forward to getting to know you, and to pick your brain about the experience of being a North Carolina early college liaison. To refresh your memory, the title of my dissertation is "Champion of Two Worlds: A Phenomenological Investigation of North Carolina Early College Liaisons' Leadership Experiences." As I told you over the phone, part of the data collection process will be my examination of documents related to your job and the early college and community college with which you are affiliated.

To fulfill this part of the data collection, it would be great if you could submit the following documents to me, if they are available:

- Your job description.
- An organizational chart of your community college.
- An organizational chart of your early college.
- Any brochures, fliers, or other materials that are used to market your early college.
- Any documents that describe the demographic and/or academic makeup of your early college's student body.

Regarding the final bullet point, no confidential information should be submitted. I am interested in the early college as a whole, not individual student achievements. For example, if you submit a report that indicates test scores, please submit overall averages

for the entire student body or an entire student body demographic (e.g., African-American males), rather than individual student performance records.

Because I will be interviewing you on (date), I would appreciate it greatly if you could submit these documents to me three days before the interview takes place. I might refer to these documents during the interview, so it would be very helpful to me if I have them prior to the interview. You can call me at (828) 242-5293 or email me at mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu if you have any questions.

Thanks very much, and I look forward to seeing you on (date).

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

The purpose of this doctoral dissertation study is to describe the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons who work for early college/community college partnerships that are sponsored by the North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP). Data collection for this study will consist of the following:

- A face-to-face interview, which will take approximately one hour to complete (this time frame was verified through the participation of a pilot interviewee).
- A written reflection, which will be submitted by each participant prior to the face-to-face interview.
- Documents, which, if accessible to participants, will be collected by the researcher. These documents will include job descriptions, organizational charts, marketing materials, and demographic/academic synopses of early college student bodies.
- Notes that will be taken by me during the research process.

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in this study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the interviewer. In addition, your decision to participate in this study, or to not participate in this study, will have no bearing on your job or your relationship with your college, early college, or the NCNSP.

As stated above, data will be collected using interviews, written reflections, documents, and notes that are taken by the researcher. In addition to initial interviews, written reflections, and document collection, follow-up interviews, written reflections, and documents could be requested by the researcher. Follow-up data may not be necessary for this study; however, if follow-up data are requested, an IRB amendment and follow-up protocols will be submitted to the IRB review board of Western Carolina University, prior to any follow-up data being collected. Furthermore, if follow-up data is requested, new protocols will be submitted to participants, explaining exactly what type(s) of data the researcher is requesting.

The data types listed above will be the only information collected in this study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and the information collected by the researcher will be completely confidential.

If you have any questions about the interview questions, writing prompts, document types, or how the data will be used, you may contact me at mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu or Dr. Mary Jean Herzog (mherzog@wcu.edu), who is the faculty supervisor of the project. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in the study, you should contact the chair of WCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (828) 227-7212.

I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. If you would like to view these findings, please contact me at mmdempsey1@catamount.wcu.edu, and a copy will be sent to you upon request. Prior to publication of the findings, you will be asked to read a transcript of your interview, so that you can confirm or make changes as needed. It is my goal to ensure that your words are represented accurately, and I will appreciate any feedback you can provide about the accuracy of your interview transcript.

There are very few risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. However, it is possible that data collection could partially focus on your working relationships with K-12 and community college personnel, and there is a minor likelihood that some angst or feelings of tension could surface during interviews and/or written reflections. However, the expected benefit associated with your participation is that the information gained about your experiences will help researchers better understand the facilitation of educational partnerships, as well as the role and experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. The published dissertation will not include any individual identifying information, and your participation will be entirely confidential. In the event that your words will be used to support the study's conclusions, a pseudonym will be used, so that your name is not revealed. In addition, a pseudonym will be used for any individual institutions that are referenced in the study, so that no institution's real name is revealed.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study. Your participation in an interview, submission of a written reflection, submission of any related documents, and examination of an interview transcript will signify that you consent to participating in this study. In addition, your signature below will signify consent.

Signatures

The study has been discussed with me and my questions have been answered. I understand additional questions regarding the study should be directed to the investigator or the faculty advisor listed above. I understand that the data collected will not be used for any purpose not approved by the IRB. I understand that I may direct questions about my rights as a participant in this study to the WCU IRB Chair at (828) 227-7212. I am at least eighteen years of age. I agree with the terms above and acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of volunteer: _____ Date: _____

Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Preparation

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons. The methods of data collection for the phenomenological design were interviews with early college liaisons, written reflections, documents, and researcher notes. Interviews of North Carolina early college liaisons followed Turner's (2010) interview preparation approach as much as possible. Turner suggested that the interviewer "1) choose a setting with little distraction; 2) explain the purpose of the interview; 3) address terms of confidentiality; 4) explain the format of the interview; (5) indicate how long the interview usually takes" (p. 757).

Purpose of Interviews

Interviews probed for the study's overarching research question, as well as subquestions related to the overarching question. The study's overarching research question was "What are the leadership experiences of North Carolina early college liaisons?" The subquestions were:

- 1) What are the training and professional backgrounds of early college liaisons?
- 2) What professional relationships do early college liaisons develop during the "boundary-spanning" process?
- 3) How do early college liaisons describe the leadership skills used in "boundary-spanning" between K-12 schools and community colleges?
- 4) What social skills do early college liaisons identify as being important in navigating a politically oriented partnership?

- 5) How do liaisons maintain student advocacy amid the power struggles, limited resources, and competing interests that can affect an educational partnership?

Protocol Overview

I took what Patton (2003) and Turner (2010) refer to as an “interview guide approach.” With this method, the interviewer does not have a set of fully developed questions but does identify topics, so that the interview, though flexible, remains focused. In addition, I attempted a number of things suggested by Spradley (1979): a) build a rapport with the participant, b) keep the interviewer talking through follow-up questions, c) make repeated statements (e.g., remind the subject multiple times what the “theme” of the interview is), and d) ask questions that are descriptive, seek examples, and mine interviewees’ experiences.

Interview Questions

Professional background.

- 1) What training or work experiences do you have?
 - Topics explored included: Length of time in position; length of time in education; prior positions, both at the college and elsewhere.
- 2) Tell me about the leadership experiences that you had prior to becoming an early college liaison.
 - a. Topics explored included: Personal definition of leadership; level of comfort in assuming leadership role in previous positions.

Current position.

- 1) Tell me about your job duties.

- a. Topics explored included: description of duties that are related to early college; description of duties that are not related to the early college; space and resources that are available to participant for achieving the goals of the job; types of partnership activities that liaison is involved with or has initiated.
- 2) Tell me about your early college.
 - a. Topics explored included: How participant helps early college students navigate the community college, both academically and socially; types of learners who attend early college; demographics of early college's students; a description of early college's high school staff; a description of how community college employees are involved in the partnership.

Leadership and the liaison experience.

- 1) Describe the experience of being an early college liaison.
 - a. Topics explored included: Relationships with community college faculty/staff, high school faculty/staff, and students; conflict management; change management; management of resources.
- 2) Describe the relationships that are important to you as an early college liaison.
 - a. Topics explored included: Support received from community college boss; support received from early college principal; liaison's advocacy for community college vs. advocacy for K-12 students.
- 3) Tell me about how you interact with the administration, faculty, and staff of both the early college and the community college when managing a K-12/community college partnership.

- a. Topics explored included: Understanding of community college mission and culture (especially if participant comes from a K-12 background); understanding of K-12 mission and culture (especially if participant comes from community college background); motivation to perform professionally at a high level; negotiation and bargaining skills.