

EXCEPTIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE:  
A CASE STUDY OF THREE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES'  
STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO ACCOUNTABILITY FACTORS, 2007–2009

by

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## ABSTRACT

JOHN BRUCE LATTIMORE. Exceptional institutional performance: A case study of three North Carolina community colleges' strategic responses to accountability factors, 2007–2009. (Under the direction of DR. DAWSON R. HANCOCK)

Accountability demands on North Carolina community colleges are examined in a qualitative case study of three institutions that met Exceptional Institutional Performance standards set by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2007–2008 or 2008–2009 after not having met them in previous years. The study uses a theoretical foundation of Joseph Burke's accountability triangle to view the accountability pressures and the resulting strategic planning to successfully confront the pressures of market, political, and academic perspectives. Each college is explored using a within-case model, and a cross-case comparison is made to determine convergent themes of strategic planning. A set of best practices emerges from the common themes of the three colleges for meeting the needs of community constituents, students, and campus constituents through effective plan implementation.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| ABC     | activity-based cost accounting                                      |
| ABE     | adult basic education   |
| AQIP    | Academic Quality Improvement Project                                |
| BSC     | balanced scorecard  |
| CAO     | chief academic officer  |
| CASAS   | Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems                      |
| CCS     | North Carolina Community College System                             |
| CCSSE   | Community College Survey of Student Engagement                      |
| CQI     | continuous quality improvement                                      |
| CSF     | Critical Success Factor   |
| EIP     | Exceptional Institutional Performance status                        |
| FTE     | full-time equivalent  |
| GED     | General Education Development Test                                  |
| IPEDS   | Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System                      |
| IRB     | Institutional Review Board, UNCC                                    |
| JBDC    | joint big decision committee  |
| KPI     | key performance indicator   |
| MBNQA   | Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award                             |
| NCCCS   | North Carolina Community College System                             |
| QEP     | Quality Enhancement Plan, SACSCOC                                   |
| SACSCOC | Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges |
| SAFRA   | Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act                           |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| SAT    | Scholastic Aptitude Test                               |
| SAW    | Strategic Activity Worksheet                           |
| SCM    | supply chain management                                |
| SPOL   | Strategic Planning Online™                             |
| SWOT   | strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats      |
| TABE   | Test of Basic Adult Education                          |
| TCC    | Tallahassee Community College                          |
| UCCTOP | Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program |
| UNC    | University of North Carolina                           |
| WE     | Workunit Effectiveness (Tracker Form)                  |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although the term *shared vision* is a leadership-inspired, organizationally accepted picture of the organization's future (Senge, 1990), the organization seldom achieves greatness without deeply shared goals, values, and sense of mission. According to Senge, a shared vision fosters genuine commitment, as opposed to mere compliance. The community college, at this point in its history, is at the center of social and economic growth, where shared vision coupled with proper planning make it a critical element of the United States education system. The community college has a unique role, positioned at the nexus between public K-12 education and university education, responding to a need for an educated citizenry to compete in an expansive world economy (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Smart, 2003).

The community college, the newest institution in American higher education, continues to modify its organizational structure in a manner consistent with its educational role. As a developing institution, the organizational structure must have the ability to meet business, political, societal, and internal demands in a changing environment (Smart, 2003). The community college often responds to change, as in the case of training business and industry employees to meet globalization challenges, providing open access to all students, regardless of previous academic success, and by serving as a transfer institution to 4-year colleges and universities (Abelman &



Dalessandro, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Nemetz & Cameron, 2006; Shaw & Rab, 2003).

### 1.1 The Community College's Mission

In the post–World War II era the United States Congress passed legislation designed to inform and enhance the higher education opportunities of the American adult population. These education initiatives include the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (better known as the GI Bill), the Presidential Commission on Higher Education (1947), the Higher Education Act of 1965 (and subsequent reauthorizations), the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002 (TAA Reform Act). Similar legislated programs were designed to educate and train adults for a competitive and more technologically challenging global economy (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzi, 2006; Lucas, 2006; Shaw & Rab, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011a, 2011b). In addition to corresponding societal and business expectations, such legislation places significant pressure on community colleges to be accountable to the needs of multiple constituencies (Burke, 2005; Burke & Minassians, 2004; Lucas, 2006).

The mission of the community college requires the institution to act with a multifaceted approach in response to its constituencies (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges are uniquely positioned to design programs that meet the stated and unstated requirements of (a) an increasing influx of students seeking higher education, many of whom are underprepared for the rigors of college work; (b) the political entities that fund programs and facilities; (c) business and industry seeking the next generation of skilled, educated employees; and (d) faculty seeking support for a mix of traditional and

new delivery educational methods (Burke, 2005; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; “Developments,” 2009; Dowd, 2003). To be responsive to all of these constituencies and to be accountable for the resources that community colleges use, intentional efforts through formal strategic planning processes are required (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2004; Shaw & Rab, 2003; Smart, 2003).

#### 1.1.1 Mission and Multiple Accountability Measures in the Community College

One example of a North Carolina community college’s mission and vision is taken from Gaston College in Dallas. As a member of the 58 institutions of the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), Gaston College’s mission is similar to others in the system. Its mission statement reads: “Gaston College is an open-door public community college, located in Gaston and Lincoln counties, that promotes student success and lifelong learning through high caliber, affordable, and comprehensive educational programs and services responding to economic and workforce development needs” (Gaston College, 2010, ¶ 1). References in Gaston College’s mission include being accountable, having an open door, being public, being a part of community, achieving student success, being affordable, providing services and education that are comprehensive, and being an instrument of economic and workforce development needs. The emphasis that Gaston Colleges places on these elements can be found in most of the other 57 North Carolina community college mission statements.

To meet its mission, an organization develops a vision (Senge, 1990). Gaston College’s (2010) vision statement is as follows: “Gaston College will be viewed as the premier post-secondary educational resource in the region, consistently recognized as an exceptional community college and known in the state and nation for successful and

innovative programs” (¶ 2). The success of Gaston College, as with most of the other North Carolina community colleges, results from setting goals supported by both values and the sense of mission throughout the organization (Collins, 2001; Senge, 1990).

Accountability leads community colleges to develop a mission to fulfill the responsibilities inherent in the accountability standards (Burke, 2005). Burke described “360-degree accountability” as consisting of “mission-centered, market smart and politically savvy leaders...[managing] conflicting requirements for preserving autonomy while producing accountability” (pp. 20–21). As with the example of Gaston College, leading administrators, along with faculty and staff, envision the future as they think it should be and craft plans to make that future a reality. Planning is not a new subject or process for organizations. As Keller (1983) stated, “Everyone is a strategic planner, scanning the environment , possessing internal values and goals, weighing the costs and benefits of numerous alternatives, making choices among various options and deciding through investments and purchases on a course of action” (p. 101).

This research explores the issue of accountability for community colleges through the lens of Burke’s accountability triangle. Through the context of introducing institutional accountability (see chapter 1), the community college is examined through the literature on community college accountability and strategic planning (see chapter 2). This study continues with chapter 3 providing the design of a multi-case qualitative study of planning processes at three community colleges that improved performance to meet accountability standards. Chapter 4 provides the findings from the study of the three community colleges and chapter 5 is a discussion of those findings with implications of how the findings could be used by other community college leaders.

### 1.1.2 Accountability When Access Collides With Success

The foundational philosophy of the community college is that it is available for any adult, based upon “the drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 1). This “open door approach” has provided access to higher education for millions of citizens who could not have afforded postsecondary tuition and/or room and board at a university (Dowd, 2003). Since community college transfer education programs have become transferrable to universities, and since licensure preparation for professional exams is widely used in the community college arena, accountability for student success becomes a vital function of the college (Haygood, 2009; North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2010a, 2010b). Using student outcome data for setting goals and measuring outcomes to create institutional plans is a process colleges use to create a culture of evidence that supports the mission and vision of the community college (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009). Community colleges offer opportunities for both access and success in a period of unprecedented enrollment growth (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009).

The explosive growth of community college enrollment creates pressure on the institution to ensure adequate financial and physical capabilities to meet student needs. Unlike universities and colleges, which can restrict admission, the open-door philosophy of the community college does not restrict entry, even though the student may not have completed college or may be a lower functioning high school graduate (Cross, 1976). The issue of growth contributes markedly to the challenge of open access while ensuring higher levels of student success (Dowd, 2003; Haygood, 2009). Additionally, community

colleges provide adult basic education (ABE) programs, General Education Development Test (GED) preparation and testing, and adult high school diploma programs for both young and older non-high school graduates to prepare them for life skills through gaining a secondary school diploma (NCCCS, 2009b).

### 1.1.3 Underprepared Students

The older dislocated worker often may only require a refresher course to regain his or her skills (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The underprepared student is different from the older student who has been out of high school for an extended time. After 2 decades of reform on public schools, less than half of the students who graduate from high school are ready for college-level work (McClenney, 2004). In response to underprepared students, community colleges across the United States offer developmental or remedial classes in reading, writing, and mathematics as prerequisites to academic program requirements (Roska, Jenkins, Jaggars, Zeidenberg, & Cho, 2009). As many as 42 percent of all incoming community college students require developmental programs, compared to 20 percent at selective public 4-year colleges and 12 percent at private 4-year schools in the year 2000 (Zeidenberg, 2008). Cohen and Brawer substantiated these figures of students in developmental or remedial courses in community colleges: Half of all students entering community colleges in New Jersey require remedial courses; 39 percent of Georgia community college students require remediation; and 49 percent of California students require remediation. Cohen and Brawer found that, nationwide, an average of 40 percent of entering students require at least one remedial course.

Barr and Schuetz (2008) questioned whether the community college is prepared to handle underprepared students, citing the recommendations of Cross (1976) that led to

developmental education reform for new students. They further asserted that learning to accommodate the needs of underprepared students must be a part of community college strategy if the institution is going to successfully shift to positive learning outcomes. This segment of strategic planning encompasses basic skills and English as a second language (ESL) as well as the developmental courses in reading, writing, and mathematics. The new student's failure to achieve academic success impacts community colleges through (a) their higher dropout rates, and (b) their inability to meet university transfer rates and obtain other outcomes that the community college is expected to meet (Mattis & Sinn, 2009; NCCCS, 2009b).

While the community college is faced with the challenge of providing increased access while helping more students gain subsequent academic success as enrollments rise (Haygood, 2009), the diverse roles of the institution need to be examined according to accountability measures. The comprehensive community college balances programs in vocational-technical training, academic-university transfer, continuing education, adult literacy, developmental education, and community-cultural service (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). With an ambitious agenda, accountability becomes an issue when colleges are not only forced to deal with fiscal constraints but also are required to make choices to which the community colleges are held responsible (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Rowley et al., 1997). There is no shortage of entities that demand accountability for community college performance.

## 1.2 Calls for Accountability in Higher Education

In 1996 the Western Governors' Association conference report criticized a perceived lack of responsiveness on behalf of higher education to a changing environment.

All western governors are feeling the press of increased demand on their state systems of postsecondary education. All recognize that the strength and well-being of both their states and the nation depend heavily on a postsecondary system that is visibly aligned with the needs of a transforming economy and society. At the same time the states' capacity to respond to these challenges is severely constrained by limited resources and the inflexibility and high costs of traditional educational practices and by outdated institutional and public policies. (Rowley et al., 1997, p. 4)

The United States' reputation for quality higher education is often based upon the large graduate research universities and the small, selective liberal arts colleges; the current need is for "multiple models of academic excellence based on performance not prestige, on results not reputations, on mission centeredness not mission creep" (Burke, 2005, p. 21). While accountability is not synonymous with strategic planning, accountability requires effective planning to enable institutions to be accountable to market, political, and internal academic constituents (Burke, 2005; Keller, 1983; Rowley et al., 1997).

The need for better planning to meet higher levels of academic performance becomes evident as sectors of society state dissatisfaction with the traditional academic model. The traditional model served as the dominant provider of postsecondary education from the postwar period, which started in 1945, to the globalization period in the early 1990s (Burke, 2005). Keller (1983) identified the precarious position that higher education occupies and called it a

“special, hazardous zone” in society between the business/market-driven sector and the state:

[Colleges and universities] are dependent and yet free; market-oriented yet outside cultural and intellectual fashions. The faculty are inventors, entrepreneurs, and retailers of knowledge, aesthetics, and sensibility yet professionals like the clergy or physicians. The institutions pay no taxes but are crucial to economic development... They constitute one of the largest industries in the nation, but are among the least businesslike and well-managed of all organizations. Whatever, like large animals in a bleak landscape, they are perpetually in search of vital financial nourishment. (p. 5)

The pre-globalization academic model worked well for many years. Community colleges in the post–World War II period initially were similar to advanced high schools but took on the appearance of small colleges under the junior college model (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Lucas, 2006). However, the early years of the 21st century indicate that there is an increasing need for a robust model for measuring accountability and implementing effective strategic planning. There is also a need for increasingly sophisticated planning for the complex, modern community college, with limited resources to meet the accountability standards of society and the internal quality standards of the institution (Farmer & Paris, 2000). The external forces of (a) the political environment, (b) the market environment, and (c) the traditional role of professional faculty represent the three forces dominating the coordination of higher education systems, which demand measures of accountability (Burke, 2005).

### 1.2.1 Burke’s Accountability Triangle

Joseph Burke has conducted extensive research in higher education accountability and the requirements imposed upon colleges and universities by constituents (Burke, 2005; Burke & Minassians, 2004). Burke provided a theoretical-conceptual foundation to view the accountability pressures placed on colleges and the resultant strategies that



institutions (in this case, community colleges) use to meet accountability factors. Burke (2005) noted that accountability requires both a willingness and an obligation to accept responsibility for resulting actions.

From an institutional perspective, Burke (2005) listed six demands that are imposed on colleges and universities by governmental or other societal entities. They must

- demonstrate that they have used their powers properly,
- show that they are working to achieve the mission or priorities set for their office or organization,
- report on their performance in a transparent manner,
- recognize that public stewardship requires efficiency and effectiveness in the resources used and the outcomes created,
- ensure the quality of the programs and services provided, and
- show that they (the institutions) meet public needs.

By using taxpayer dollars for facilities and faculty, utilizing foundations' funding of student tuition and academic endeavors, and employing the intellectual capital of its faculty, colleges and universities have an obligation to be answerable for their activities. Because of its unique purposes, higher education's challenge is to respond to the stringent demands by external constituents and governmental entities while both maintaining collegial accountability to the academic perspective in operations and serving diverse constituencies (Birnbaum, 1988; Burke, 2005).

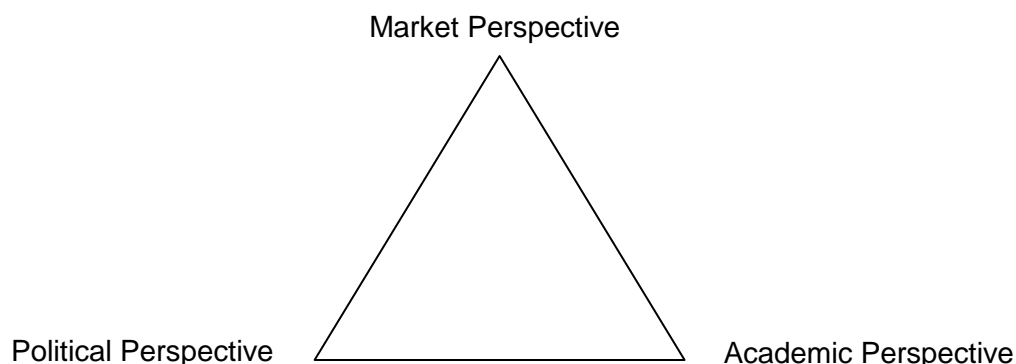
The legal accountability issue involves the question "*Who* is accountable to *whom*, for what purpose, for *whose* benefit, by *which* means and with *what*

consequences?” (Burke, 2005, p. 2). With a long trail of delegation of authority—from the public through state legislatures, to governing boards, to individual colleges, to divisions, to departments, to faculty, and ultimately back to the public (students and employers)—there is plenty of room for ambiguity and lack of clarity regarding who is responsible to whom and for what. The approach presented by Burke is that the constituents of the community college’s efforts is the general public on one hand, which includes students, businesses, societal organizations, and governments, and constituencies on the other hand, which include the employees (i.e., faculty and staff) of the college.

Burke (2005) used a triangular model that shows the forces dominating the coordination of higher education systems demands. Burke’s accountability triangle provides a lens to view the competing external and internal forces that exert pressure on community colleges and universities (see Figure 1). On one point of the triangle, the market perspective demands accountability on behalf of the constituents from outside of the college. State priorities, representing the political perspective, on another point of the triangle, indicate the desire for higher quality programs that provide access to higher education and responsible use of resources. These needs are expressed by elected and civic officials from state, federal, and local governments. The third point of the triangle, the academic perspective, involves the issues considered important by academicians for the purpose of teaching and learning, collegial relationships, and scholarly inquiry.

Burke (2005) maintained that the center of the triangle is the ideal location for an effective accountability system. At the center, all of the competing factions demand some level of accountability and none dominate; tilting toward the *political perspective* ignores the market and the academic factions; tilting toward the *market perspective* may create an

environment of the college being driven by student or business interests, ultimately failing the academic or political mission; and tilting toward the *academic perspective* may insulate the college from the real world, thus making what it is doing irrelevant. Higher education is too important to society to either (a) be off limits to external review, or (b) become a passive object of the control of state mandates or market forces (Burke, 2005; Gumport, 2003). Burke found that the challenge for community colleges is to find the appropriate blend of accountability to measures meet market, political, and academic concerns. The institution must establish planning methods that will enable it to meet selected accountability standards from all three points of the accountability triangle (Burke, 2005; Rowley & Sherman, 2002).



*Figure 1.* The many faces of accountability. Adapted from J. Burke, 2005, *Achieving Accountability in Higher Education*, p. 23.

### 1.2.2 Societal Implications of Accountability

As an institution of higher education, the community college has a broad societal mission in addition to its educational one. Cohen and Brawer (2003) listed the functions of the community college as providing the first 2 years of a baccalaureate degree, or the

transfer function; the vocational-technical education and training function for skill and knowledge development; and the community service function through non-curricular education and training for individual interests, adult education, business, and industry. Such functions constitute the comprehensive community college and overlap since educational functions are rarely discrete.

Critics of the community college assert that, with its highly diverse roles, the community college's efforts may be diluted by spreading its resources across too wide an area (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Gumport, 2003). The result could be that the community college is viewed as having little impact on the improvement of society and should therefore be resigned to maintaining its status quo. Societal goals of a highly educated populace are not met, according to the critics who relate the comprehensive community college functions to a less ambitious social agenda: "Corporations get the kind of workers they need; four-year colleges do not waste resources on students who will drop out; students get decent jobs; and the political dangers of an excess of college graduates are avoided" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 377). A more pragmatic view is to balance the points of the accountability triangle so that market, political, and academic perspectives are balanced so that more access to education is provided, people are better prepared for higher skilled employment, resources are efficiently provided and utilized, and student learning outcomes are defined and met through an intentional, planned process (Burke, 2005; Dowd, 2003; Gumport, 2003; Rowley et al., 1997). This study seeks to summarize the literature on accountability and strategic planning and to explore how selected community colleges in North Carolina respond to accountability demands with strategic planning methods that balance each point of the accountability triangle.

In chapter 2, research concerning the political, market, and academic-professional perspectives is discussed in the context of constituency accountability issues. The review of literature illustrates the need for the community college to reexamine its planning function to ensure it responds positively and appropriately to the factors influencing the college in the areas of student access, community needs, and workforce development (the market perspective); the effective use of resources (the political perspective); and the assessment of student outcomes, accreditation, and faculty and staff's input into planning (the academic perspective).

Chapter 3 describes the multi-site qualitative case study methodology design of this study. The study is designed to search for common themes of how community colleges established discrete systems of strategic planning, implementation, assessment, and improvement to meet the requirements of all three perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle (2005). The methodology employed in this study supports the qualitative, exploratory design of this type of inductive research (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Chapter 4 provides the findings from research conducted at the three North Carolina Community Colleges. The colleges were selected because they met the NCCCS Critical Success Factors (CSFs) standards and were awarded Exceptional Institutional Performance (EIP) status in either the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years. The three colleges are in different regions of North Carolina and have been assigned the pseudonyms of Oak, Maple, and Pine Community Colleges to provide anonymity to study participants. Chapter 4 provides within-case analysis and cross-case analysis of the practices examined through interviews and internal and archival documents.

Chapter 5 presents the final discussion of the implications that emerged from the study. As the three colleges independently responded to the demands of the three perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle, their methods of planning, implementation, evaluation and improvement converged into a set of recommended practices for leaders. These recommended practices may be useful to presidents and senior staff seeking to improve the performance of their colleges in the face of student enrollment growth, reduced funding, and increased demands for higher levels of academic and fiscal performance.

### 1.3 The Research Problem

The research problem explores how three community colleges in North Carolina met all standards of accountability mandated by the North Carolina General Assembly. These CSFs, enacted by the NC General Assembly, touch on all three points of Burke's accountability triangle. The CSFs (also known as the core indicators of student success) consist of the following:

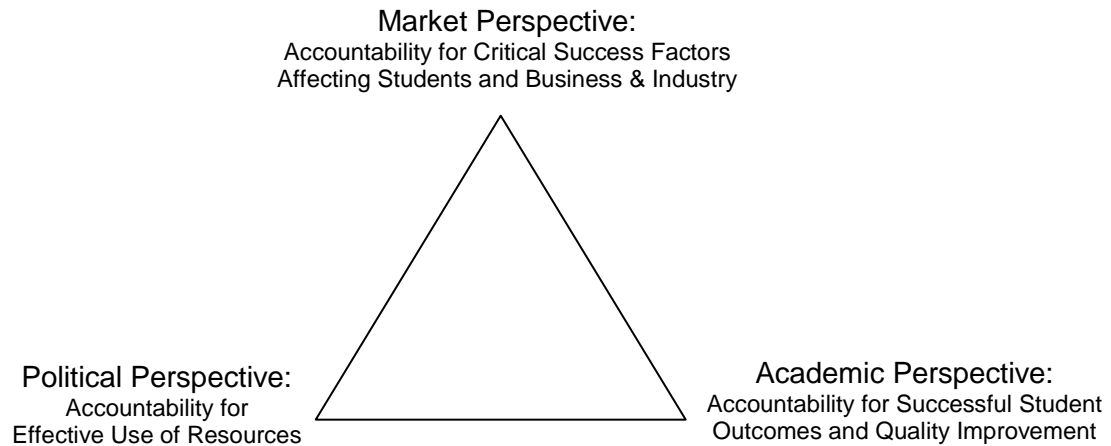
- A. Progress of Basic Skills Students
- B. Passing Rates on Licensure and Certificate Examinations
- C. Performance of College Transfer Students
- D. Passing Rates of Students in Developmental Courses
- E. Success Rates of Developmental Students in Subsequent College-Level Courses
- F. Satisfaction of Program Completers and Non-Completers
- G. Curriculum Student Retention, Graduation, and Transfer
- H. Client Satisfaction with Customized Training

(NCCCS, 2009a, p. 5; 2010a, p. 5)

In the academic year 2008–09, 24 of 58 community colleges met all 8 performance standards, but only 11 of those 24 met the EIP standard. The exceptional rating indicated that the college met or exceeded

- all eight system standards,

- the transfer student performance rates of students who began in the University of North Carolina (UNC) system, and
- at least 70 percent passing rate for students who sit for selected licensure or certification exams for the first time (NCCCS, 2001c).



*Figure 2. Accountability triangle applied to the research problem. Adapted from J. Burke, 2005, *Achieving Accountability in Higher Education*, p. 23.*

From the standpoint of this research problem, the CSFs could be found in the accountability demands of all three points of Burke's accountability triangle. To simplify the research process, Burke's accountability triangle provides a theoretical foundation, or lens, to review the literature on accountability and strategic planning with the eight CSFs constituting the market perspective; the accountability for the effective use of resources constituting the political perspective; and the accountability for student outcomes and quality improvement (including regional accreditation), as well as the relations between administration and faculty, constituting the academic perspective (see Figure 2).

### 1.3.1 Context of the Research Problem

The accomplishment of fewer than 20 percent of North Carolina community colleges to meet state-mandated standards of student outcomes in both the 2007–08 and 2008–09 academic years (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a) raises the question “What was different in terms of planning at these exemplary institutions from the other community colleges?” Given the pressures of *access* for all students, regardless of level of preparation for college work (Barr & Schuetz, 2008; Dowd, 2003; Zeidenberg, 2008), and *success* (Haygood, 2009; Commission on Colleges, 2008), it is obvious that there must be intentional efforts made by the successful community colleges to enable them to meet the accountability standards—not only those raised by the state of North Carolina but also those related to accreditation, reputational ratings, student engagement, and student satisfaction.

The research problem will be studied on the basis of the following: (a) the market perspective of accountability demands; (b) the political perspective, concerning the demands for fiscal accountability in the use of physical and human resources; and (c) the academic perspective, in the faculty’s relationship to how the institutions respond to the demands of both the market and political perspectives while remaining accountable for student learning outcomes and program quality improvement. Burke’s accountability triangle will be the conceptual/theoretical framework for organizing the review of literature, for designing the methodology of this study, for analyzing and reporting research, and finally for the discussion of how convergent themes of the three exemplary institutions should be considered recommended actions for community colleges to respond to accountability demands.



### 1.3.2 Significance of the Research Problem

Although public financial support for community colleges has failed to keep up with the demand for instructional services (Haygood, 2009; Mullin & Phillippe, 2009), there continue to be political and market demands for community colleges to better account for the use of scarce financial resources (Boggs, 2009; Haygood, 2009; Jenkins, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). There are indications that the calls for accountability for student outcomes will continue, not only at the state level but also in greater amounts from the federal government through accrediting agencies (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). In addition to political influences, efforts are made by business and industry, as well as by charitable foundations, to influence the direction of the community college—faculty members attempt to hold onto their traditional role of setting curricula, and the external demands for higher levels of performance require effective strategic planning, a necessary part of college operations (Burke, 2005; Keller, 1993; Rowley et al., 1997).

### 1.3.3 The Purpose of This Study

The issue of strategic planning emerges as an important factor in determining how eleven colleges were successful in meeting all state standards in the 2007–08 period and how eleven colleges (not all the same ones) met the standards in the 2007–08 period (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a). The data is especially interesting in that it shows only four community colleges consistently meeting the state requirements over a period of several years (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a). The purpose of this study of community college planning will be to explore accountability demands from the market, political, and academic perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle, as well as to examine the types of

strategic planning used by a selection of three community colleges that met the requirements of EIP according to the state-mandated CSFs in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years after having failed to meet them in previous years (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a).

#### 1.3.4 Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions about planning in three North Carolina community colleges that achieved EIP in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 periods.

1. What pressures did the college face from an accountability standpoint in the years 2003 to 2007 (prior to meeting EIP in 2007–08 or 2008–09)
  - a. from students? (*market perspective*)
  - b. from business and industry? (*market perspective*)
  - c. from foundations? (*market perspective*)
  - d. from state and federal governments? (*political perspective*)
  - e. from accrediting agencies? (*academic perspective*)
  - f. from other avenues of demand?
2. What was the role of strategic planning in the prior years, from 2003 to 2007, that led to the college's meeting EIP standards in 2007–08 or 2008–09?
  - a. Which description of strategic planning best describes the method used by the colleges in the study?
  - b. How is planning structured?
3. What have the colleges learned about planning through the implementation of the planning process and the execution of the plan?

## 1.4 Overview of Extant Research

Through the lens of Burke's accountability triangle, the literature review consists of both the research that impacts various constituents and the application of planning methods from each of the three points of the accountability triangle. The market perspective, the political perspective, and the academic perspective are explored for key considerations that a community college must consider in developing and implementing a strategic planning process (Burke, 2005). Extant research and related literature can be approached from the three points of Burke's accountability triangle.

### 1.4.1 Market Perspective Research

The market perspective literature provides insight into the market "pull" toward a demand-response scenario for community college presidents, leading to planning methods to satisfy constituents (Al-Turki, Fuffuaa, Ayar, & Demirel, 2008; Gumport, 2003; Taylor, Delourdes, Machado, & Peterson, 2008). Other studies show the use of business-planning mechanisms such as the balanced scorecard and formal strategic planning at universities (Asan & Tanyas, 2007; Beard, 2009; Cummings, Phillips, Tilbrook, & Lowe, 2005; Farmer & Paris, 2000; Goho & Webb, 2003; Rowley & Sherman, 2002). There are studies concerning strategic planning or the lack of planning from a foundation's perspective (primarily, the Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream program in coordination with Columbia University) regarding underprepared students (Jenkins, 2007; Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Roska et al., 2009). The use of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provides a student perspective into strategic needs (McClenney, 2004). The application of the community college mission from a market perspective is explored by Dowd (2003) and Shaw and

Rab (2003). Desired student outcomes as an input into planning is discussed by Bailey et al. (2006).

Due to the scarcity of journal case studies on community college planning, issues with the failure of planning processes will be reviewed in the cases of universities. Morphew's article, "The Realities of Strategic Planning," provides a timely look at university strategic planning (2000). A second journal article, "Planning Failures: Decision Cultural Clashes," provides a look at a university case in which questionable methods associated with strategic planning led to unexpected results (Swenk, 1999).

#### 1.4.2 Political Perspective Research

The research related to the political perspective of Burke's accountability triangle includes the colleges' assertions that they have adequate planning and capacity to assure the effective and efficient use of public monies. Burke and Minassians (2004) and Harbour and Nagy (2005) related studies on performance indicators for community colleges. Burke and Modarresi (1999, 2001), and Redlinger and Valcik (2008) assessed the concept of performance funding. Carducci, Kisker, Chang, and Schirmer (2007) provided a case study in which resource allocations are linked to mission critical performance in a California community college.

#### 1.4.3 Academic Perspective Research

Several empirical studies provide information on the topic of the academic concerns with formal planning processes. Smart (2003) discussed the impact of cultural complexity on the organizational effectiveness of a set of community colleges. Nemetz and Cameron (2006) explored the organizational control of a college of business in the larger context of a university. Welsh, Nunez, and Petrosko (2005) showed levels of

faculty and administrative support for strategic planning at 2- and 4-year schools in Kentucky. The shortcomings of formal strategic planning, based upon academic politics, is the focus of Marcus' (1999) study of a regional university. The alignment of regional accreditation and strategic planning is the subject of an article by Barker and Smith (1998).

While both the research and the anecdotal articles present the case for various levels of strategic planning, there appears to be a shortage of literature concerning how community colleges apply strategic planning to meet the goals of the three elements of Burke's accountability triangle. As such, an opportunity arises to explore the effects of the market, political, and academic forces of the community college on individual community college planning processes.

#### 1.4.4 Gaps in Extant Research

Smart (2003) noted that as a "young" institution that is still going through organizational maturation, there is a need for further research in the community college. The calls for accountability from the market and political perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle appear to be increasing. There is a significant amount of literature available to address the elements of planning and criticism of both traditional methods and formal strategic planning methods for universities. There appears to be a deficiency on all three points of the triangle—political, market, and academic concerns—for scholarly research into the role and perception of community college administration and faculty in strategic planning. This study should provide greater insight into what actually happens on the operational and strategic levels of the community college's planning process as the participating colleges respond to accountability demands. The success of

colleges in meeting standards imposed by the political, market, and academic perspectives may inform other colleges about best practices that may be helpful in their planning.

### 1.5 Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations, and Definitions

A study of an entire state's community colleges and the factors that define success could be so broad and time-consuming as to be unpractical. Therefore, it is necessary to limit the exploration to strategic plans in specific areas. Likewise, the study has limitations based on the level of cooperation and mutual availability of key individuals and the researcher. Assumptions are made to guide the research in a logical manner. Finally, operational definitions are provided to describe elements of research.

#### 1.5.1 Assumptions

This research is based upon the following assumptions:

- All North Carolina community colleges wish to be recognized for meeting external standards, whether is it the NCCCS EIP factors; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) reaffirmation of accreditation; or reputational ratings of completion, graduation, transfer, student engagement, and student satisfaction.
- Administrators in North Carolina community colleges are willing to share their planning experiences in meeting external accountability factors such as the CSFs or other recognition.
- Some aspect of planning is a part of the successful colleges' reasons for meeting accountability factors.

### 1.5.2 Limitations

This study is based upon the following limitations:

- The present study is limited in that the participants were administrators or nonteaching staff. Finding mutual times for individuals in a focus group to meet or for individual interviews to be scheduled with faculty proved to be a difficult task.
- The selection of participants from a pool of community colleges in North Carolina and the accreditation region served by the SACSOC serves as a limitation. A broader selection of community colleges from differing states may have provided greater comparison, especially from the political perspective.
- The time element produced a limitation concerning what was done in past years leading up to the year(s) in which the colleges achieved exemplary status. Time limitations meant key informants who are no longer employed by the college were not contacted due to job changes or retirement. At each of the colleges, the president and senior staff had arrived relatively close to the college's attainment of EIP. The overall turnover of the top levels of executive administration, while normally low, may have contributed to the successful change in the culture at all three colleges.
- The need for exploring previous methods was reduced, as the changes that were put in place negated or intentionally replaced the way that planning was done in the past. A single college case study would have had room for interviewing retired or past presidents and senior staff. The design of this

research called for triangulation of data, so the aggregation of thematic data from multiple sources still permitted trustworthy results (Creswell, 2009; Ezzy, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Despite the limitations mentioned, the overall cooperation and sharing of documents and participants' time minimized the limitations of this study. The ability to have an hour of a president or senior administrator's time made the interview process flow smoothly. The access to archival planning documents provided a wealth of information that contributed to the ability to triangulate data and find emerging and convergent themes through the research.

### 1.5.3 Delimitations

The *bounded system* (Merriam, 2009) of fencing in the practices of strategic planning in multi-site case studies limited the scope of this study to three North Carolina Community Colleges that have met all state-mandated CSFs to earn EIP recognition in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years. The three colleges in this study were absent from the exemplary status recognition from 2003 to 2007. Other colleges are compared in one chart only due to their regional location and size, but no other community colleges in North Carolina or other states are included. Nonacademic functions, such business office, foundation development, and student affairs are mentioned only in the context in which these functions support academic program strategic planning and Burke's accountability triangle.

Additionally, the study is delimited to planning for response to market and political perspective demands. Additional areas that could have been assessed were bounded off. Those areas include faculty evaluations, student course evaluations, faculty



credentials, and other areas outside the areas of strategic planning and assessment of academic program-level performance.

#### 1.5.4 Definitions

Key definitions used in this study of accountability and strategic planning are listed as follows:

- *Accountability*: In terms of community colleges, responsibility for results based upon factors such as completion rates, student retention, resource management, and successful student outcomes upon the college's acceptance of responsibility of its actions (Burke, 2005; NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a).
- *Assessment*: A program of locally designed and operated evaluation research intended to determine the effects of a college or university on its students, centered on learning outcomes, and principally engaged in for the purpose of improving teaching and learning (Ewell, as cited in Burke, 2005, p. 40)
- *Case study*: A detailed analysis of an organization as a bounded system, allowing rich description in a narrow scope (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009).
- *Collegial system*: A model in which organizational decisions are made on the basis of consensus, shared power, and collective responsibilities between administration and faculty (Birnbaum, 1988).
- *Constant comparative method*: A method of qualitative research that involves comparing data points between several participants to develop a category of evidence concerning specific phenomena (Merriam, 2009).

- *Critical success factor (CSF)*: An objective measurement of the degree that a metric reaches a stated criterion of accountability under the NCCCS (2009b, 2010a).
- *Curriculum student*: A student enrolled in a for-credit academic program (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *Cybernetic institutional controls*: Self-correcting mechanisms that monitor an organization's functions and provide negative feedback to participants when things are not going well (e.g., such as high failure rates in programs, excessive costs, high faculty complain rates, etc.) so that spontaneous corrective actions are taken by various elements of the institution to resolve the noted problems (Birnbaum, 1988).
- *Developmental/remedial course*: A noncredit academic preparatory course taken to improve skills as a prerequisite to more difficult course (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *EIP*: Recognition by the NCCCS that (a) an individual college had met all eight CSFs, (b) no program for professional licensure had less than a 70 percent passing rate, and (c) university transfer students performed equal to native university students (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a).
- *Loose/tight coupled academic system*: Pertains to the degree of administrative control over faculty in terms of strategic planning, alignment of curricula, and teaching methods (Birnbaum, 1988).

- *Native university student*: A student who began his or her postsecondary career at the university of which transfer students are compared for academic achievement (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *Open-door admissions*: The governing admissions policy of community colleges, which allows any high school graduate to enroll in the college, regardless of level of preparation (Dowd, 2003).
- *Satisfaction*: Degree of meeting internal or external objectives or requirements with either a course of study or employers with graduates from a course of study (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *Strategic planning*: A formal process designed (a) to help an organization identify important internal and external elements in its environment, and (b) to develop plans to help the organization meet the demands of the environmental elements (Rowley et al., 1997).
- *Strategic thinking*: The process of setting up alternatives that allow the organization to identify the best fit between the institution, its resources, and the environment (Rowley et al., 1997).
- *Student completion rate*: The percentage of students who complete a course of study within a given time frame (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *Student retention rate*: The percentage of students enrolled in a given term that return for the next term or transfer to another institution (NCCCS, 2009b).
- *Triangulation*: A method of confirming case studies by convergence of information to a single point from multiple sources or methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

- *Underprepared student*: The factors that together indicate a student is not yet socially, emotionally, or academically prepared for college-level work (Barr & Schuetz, 2008).

## 1.6 Summary

Community colleges are being held more accountable to meet predetermined outcomes by federal, state, and foundational funding sources while facing pressure from faculty to engage in more internally based improvement. A model to show the increased accountability is found in Burke's accountability triangle. Three entities pressure colleges to be more accountable: (a) the market perspective, composed of business, industry, parental, student, and underwriting foundations; (b) the political perspective, consisting of federal and state government pressures for greater efficiency and effectiveness in return for taxpayer support; and (c) the academic perspective, composed of faculty and administration efforts to obtain desirable student outcomes and improve the quality of education and the institution.

In chapter 2's literature review, a detailed analysis of literature will address how the three points of Burke's accountability triangle—the market, political, and academic perspectives—influence strategic planning. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology undertaken to conduct the study, and chapter 4 will be a report of the results of the study. In chapter 5, the results of the study will be discussed and interpreted, conclusions will be drawn, and implications of the study for both further research and recommended practices for meeting accountability demands in the community college will be identified.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In Senge's (1990) concept of developing a shared vision, one must look at the stakeholder, that is, the constituents of whom the shared vision will impact. The community college can find a useful model in Burke's accountability triangle (2005) to sort out the various constituencies that wish to influence strategies for how they operate. The points of the accountability triangle, represented by the market, political, and academic perspectives, provide a theoretical framework for organizing the literature on the effects of accountability demands on planning.

The numerous constituencies within these three primary perspectives are explored in relationship to their influence on strategic planning. In addition, strategic planning as a process will be reviewed in the literature on postsecondary education. The lack of research on planning processes specifically at the community college shows as a gap in the extant literature and presents an opportunity for the type of in-depth exploratory research method (see chapter 3) for which the qualitative case study method is well suited (Merriam, 2009).

### 2.1 The Market Perspective

The market perspective of Burke's accountability triangle consists of (a) students who enter the community college underprepared for the rigors of college work; (b) foundations that provide specially directed funding, such as those who support underrepresented students in higher education; and (c) business and industry with a need for a competitive workforce. Each entity places demands on the community college to

provide for its perceived needs. As Gumport (2003) pointed out, there is a danger of the community college failing to meet its mission if it chooses to simply follow market demands. Burke (2005) stressed that while there is a need to be responsive to the market, there is a danger to the institution's credibility if it becomes subservient to the market or to either of the other perspectives, academic or political.

### 2.1.1 The Impact of Access and Growth on Community College Planning

The expectation of high school students to attain to a college education increased between the years 2000 and 2009. Community colleges across the United States experienced rapid and often record-setting growth from a variety of sources (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009; NCCCS, 2009d). A steep decline in manufacturing—caused in part by the movement of factories to cheaper sources of labor, the near collapse of the American financial industry, and the erosion of home and commercial real estate values—led many adults who had established careers in these sectors to enroll in community colleges to learn new skills for employment (Haygood, 2009; Mullin & Phillippe, 2009). Nationally, student enrollment in academic classes increased by 11.4 percent from fall 2008 to fall 2009, and increased 16.9 percent from fall 2007 to fall 2009. Full-time enrollment in U.S. community colleges expanded by 24.1 percent between fall 2007 and fall 2009 (Mullin & Phillippe, 2009).

As more individuals recognize the benefits of higher education, the community college has an important role if society is to achieve the post-World War II goal of a free higher education for students who had not considered it necessary or financially feasible (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). To identify the democratization of higher education one generation later, Cross (1976) coined the phrase “new students” to describe those

students whose best opportunity for higher education is through the open-door admissions policies of community colleges. Cross did not necessarily characterize these students by socioeconomic status, but she did include all students who do not do well in public schools and who later seek postsecondary education or training as “new students.”

Thirty-two years later, Zeidenberg (2008) identified the emergence of “nontraditional” students, describing them as first-generation college students with little background to be prepared for the collegiate experience. According to Zeidenberg, many of these students are immigrants or minorities and often lack adequate preparation for the rigors of college work. Zeidenberg described the convergence of the community college’s mission of “enabling low income students, and those with relatively weak academic achievement to continue their education and acquire useful skills” with societal expectations of a higher educated citizenry (p. 1). Community colleges face challenges in dealing with an influx of underprepared, previously unsuccessful, and underrepresented students seeking higher education (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Dowd, 2003; Shaw & Rab, 2003; Zeidenberg, 2008).

A discussion of community colleges should include discussion of the open-door accessibility to all high school graduates versus the accountability requirements in preparing the students for either (a) transfer to a 4-year college, or (b) preparation for work (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dowd, 2003; Nemetz & Cameron, 2006; Shaw & Rab, 2003; Smart, 2003). The review of literature on this subject encompasses Cross’ (1976) new student through the underprepared student (Zeidenberg, 2008).

Cross (1976) criticized the 1950s and '60s movement toward open access to all students, as it failed to produce individual results. If a student only attains a minimal education via remedial courses and low expectations, Cross questioned, how can he or she be expected to maximize his or her potential? A similar question was posed three decades later at a conference of community college administrators: "How can the community college continue to meet standards of 'success' while maintaining completely open access?" (Haygood, 2009).

Dowd (2003) noted the role of community colleges as "democratizing" the postsecondary education system because it becomes the primary point of entry for low income students, a group that includes African-Americans, Latinos, immigrants, and working (or unemployed) adults. The nontraditional student's access to an affordable education has been hampered by the market orientation that began in the 1990s, when community colleges began to actively respond to the needs of business and industry. Dowd decried the rising cost of tuition and the case of "lower expectations" for students who attend community college as opposed to peers who begin their academic careers at 4-year colleges.

Overriding concerns about economic development, national competitiveness, and the desire to increase productivity and efficiency have led to a stratification of curricula that limits student access, resulting in a trend that produces an "underclass" of people who meet the criteria for employment skills but lack the overall knowledge to be the well-educated, critical-thinking citizens they likely would have been if they had matriculated at a 4-year institution. Standards dictated by the business and industry segments of the market may often focus too narrowly on outputs (or "production")



efficiency) without equal attention given to inputs (number of students enrolled). This dichotomy may lead to the community college losing sight of both its mission of open access and the purpose of public investment in postsecondary education (Dowd, 2003).

Shaw and Rab (2003) criticized the role of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 as limiting low-income populations' access to higher education. The community college attracts lower income students, especially due to the grants provided by WIA. Students are placed into short diploma or certificate courses of study for expediency to get them "retooled" and ready for reemployment, as opposed to seeking education and training from a market-driven, customer-focused postsecondary education system (Shaw & Rab, 2003). The role of the WIA is one of the external forces that place demands on community colleges, while a similar constituency is served by educational foundations interested in improving the educational levels of low-income and minority citizens (Rothkopf, 2009).

#### 2.1.2 Educational Foundations' Impact on Strategic Planning

Lucas (2006) noted the role of foundations, starting around 1990, as a means for corporations to address the needs of society, particularly in the preparation of postsecondary students for work. As a result of this new funding stream, the college president's duties gradually shifted toward fiscal development, attempting to align the college's institutional plans with the interests of charitable foundations that sought to help produce "better" graduates (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Lucas cited the work of early foundations, funded with contributions from iconic families such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, McCormick, and others:

Corporate philanthropy could be a mixed blessing, particularly to the degree to which donations came with strings attached. It was often the case, for example,

that a recipient was obligated to match or even double the amount of some prospective contribution as a precondition for its bestowal. . . .many benefactors sought to influence institutional policy or to earmark funds for some specialized purpose. (p. 197)

The Lumina Foundation is an example of an organization seeking to influence community college planning while benefitting market needs, which it does through its Achieving the Dream program (Rothkopf, 2009). Achieving the Dream works with community colleges in an initiative designed to help students persist and succeed (continue fall-to-fall semesters in college or transfer to another institution) (Rutschow et al., 2011). The program is aimed at assisting underprepared students who have “faced significant barriers to success, such as students of color and low-income students” (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009, p. 1).

In looking at how to create strategies for improving the outcomes of underprepared students, Jenkins and Kerrigan (2009) pointed to metrics used nationwide for assessing institutional effectiveness in the Achieving the Dream program. Achieving the Dream is a national initiative, launched in 2004, that is now in 130 community colleges 24 states. The program helps community colleges build a “culture of evidence” by using student records and other data to examine students’ performance over time and to identify barriers to academic progress (Rutschow et al., 2011).

In evaluating Achieving the Dream, researchers found that budgeting and strategic planning are not universally aligned with student learning outcomes and that more budgetary and program decisions are made on intuition than on hard evidence supported by data (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009). Participating colleges that adopt a culture of evidence note a shift of campus culture based upon data from student outcomes, which include decisions on allocating resources, scheduling classes, and organizing student

services to meet the needs of underprepared students (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Rothkopf, 2009).

Based upon the research on the role of Achieving the Dream, better planning yields better results for underprepared and underrepresented. Research results indicate that a lack of formal planning (i.e., a lack of planning based on a culture of evidence) may hamper foundation efforts to assist colleges in meeting the postsecondary education needs of the students who require assistance students (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Roska et al., 2009; Rothkopf, 2009).

As is the case with other institutions of higher education, community colleges pursue grant opportunities, which in turn may influence planning. The Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program (UCCTOP), funded by the Ford Foundation, was established in order to improve university transfer rates for underrepresented students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Rodriguez (1987) wrote of a project at LaGuardia Community College in New York City that was funded by UCCTOP in 1984. The positive impact of the foundation's project was measured by the number of "underprepared" students who transferred to 4-year colleges and universities and, by the college's support of their efforts, earned baccalaureate degrees. The college invested considerable time and resources into developing partnerships with both local 4-year institutions and participating employers. It also redesigned curricula to better prepare students for transfer opportunities as part of the grant.

In general, it appears that foundations seek to influence policy and practice by financial contributions intended to create a culture of evidence that requires the community colleges, which are participating in the grants, to tie strategic planning to

budget planning (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Rutschow et al., 2011). The intent is the improvement of the student outcomes of improving retention and completion rates for (a) the foundation's intended service recipients, (b) low-income students, and (c) students of color, who are often underrepresented in higher education (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Roska et al., 2009; Rutschow et al., 2011; Roska et al., 2009).

*How* community colleges formally plan for meeting the needs of the foundations that aim to meet the requirements of underrepresented or underprepared students exposes a gap in the literature about community college planning methods; questions raised include the following: Is it a lack of a coordinated planning structure that separates the planning function from the operational functions of the community college? Or is it perhaps a disjointed accountability structure, in which the college answers to too many entities (i.e., federal, state, local governments, businesses, and foundations, as well as academic constituencies)? Another part of the market perspective weighs heavily on the college's planning and operational processes—the influence of business and industry on accountability. Literature on business and industry's influence on higher education serves to provide insight from the view that a college should be run like a business. Several models have been proposed for strategic planning and operations that incorporate business models for planning and assessment of academic programs.

### 2.1.3 Business and Industry's Impact on Strategic Planning

Lucas (2006) noted the rise of corporations in addressing the needs of society, particularly in the preparation of postsecondary students for work. As the role of the college president shifts toward communication with the business community and development of contributions toward institutional expansion, business and industry take a

more prominent role (Gumport, 2003; Lucas, 2006). This can lead to what Dowd (2003) skeptically referred to as a change of mission from *access* to *outcomes*, in that colleges may be preparing student for work (outcomes) as opposed to preparing students for productive citizenship (access).

A large concern of business and industry is the increase in global competitiveness and a loss of market share to developing countries; currently, the ranking of the United States' higher education system is slipping when compared to other nations (Mattis & Sinn, 2009; Rowley et al., 1997). While the educational level of adults aged 35 and older is second only to Canada, the United States ranks only 10th in degree holders aged 25 to 34. When demographics analysis is added, significant gaps of participation in higher education appear between income levels and between ethnic groups (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008).

Criticism of postsecondary education by business and industry is not a recent issue. In 1993 the Wingspread Group on Higher Education, consisting of 16 members from business, education, and government, convened with the support of the Johnson Foundation to answer the question, "What does society need from higher education?" The resulting work was an open letter to higher education, charging that too many students "leak out" of the educational system despite lowered standards for success and diverse options for students. Educators, the group charged, assume that their role is "weeding out" students and take failure for granted. Additionally, graduates of higher education often do not read or write well, lack impressive intellectual depth and breadth, and have inadequate skills for the demands of contemporary life.

In light of the changing global environment, the Wingspread Group (1993) called for more people to be educated to higher standards as “quickly and efficiently as possible” (p. 4). Colleges and universities are continually tested by business and industry for measureable performance, as the former status of being unquestioned in leading the development and interpretation of knowledge is challenged by the environmental/societal issues of unemployment, lack of familial support, and poor preparation of citizens for work or higher education. These issues manifest themselves in terms of higher operating costs, more expensive tuition, and changing knowledge and skill requirements (Rowley et al., 1997).

The community college, in particular, is questioned about its plans for continuous improvement in all aspects of programming. The absence of strategic planning for improvement may be interpreted as apathy by the business and industry entities that support and use its services to meet both global economic challenges and the need for greater participation in higher education (Farmer & Paris, 2000). However, there are attempts by the business community to influence academic planning, with the intent of making strategic planning more like business.

#### 2.1.3.1 Business Models Used in Strategic Planning by Higher Education

Beard (2009) noted the success of universities that have used the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in Education measure, called the *balanced scorecard* (BSC), to integrate planning with budgetary allocations to strategically important factors. Beard noted that colleges must respond to the following accountability questions:

- a. Are schools meeting their mission?

- b. Can schools improve their processes and create value without incurring excessive costs?
- c. Are schools using scarce resources of intellectual capital, state tax monies, and other revenue sources (including federal funding) effectively?

The BSC places the emphasis on a customer/stakeholder perspective to answering the questions posed (Beard, 2009). The college's strategy must be formal and needs to be aligned with the institution's mission and vision. It must do this in order to make sense of complex data, so the college can make rational decisions and promote continuous improvement of processes that serve students. Beard focused on two universities that have used the BSC to win the MBNQA: the University of Wisconsin–Stout (2001 winner) and the Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business at the University of Northern Colorado (2004 winner). Beard's (2009) research indicates that between the two institutions, the following characteristics appear:

- A focus on students that goes beyond their time at the college, in terms of student retention, job placement, employment and academic growth opportunities, student satisfaction, and employer satisfaction with graduates.
- Programs that are noted for (a) high-quality, active learning environments with extensive hands-on opportunities to try out concepts, and (b) technology and extensive contact with faculty who possess professional depth in their field.

Chance and Williams (2009) developed a rubric to measure the effectiveness of strategic planning by two universities. They used five critical questions as a guide for assessing the elements of a strategic plan:

- Where are we going now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know we are getting there?
- How will we sustain focus and momentum?

Chance and Williams found that strategic plans call for the common elements developed in the rubric in order to have an effective formative evaluation tool that can help an institution better align its practices with its overall vision of the future.

Card and Card (2007) examined the use of value chain management on strategic planning for three state universities in South Dakota that implemented extensive distance learning programs. They found that distance learning was more of an emerging strategy than a deliberate strategic plan. Methods of instructional delivery were developed by individual faculty as opposed to the faculty using one comprehensive institutional plan. The three colleges—one a land-grant institution, one a comprehensive university, and one a technologically focused university—all approached distance learning initiatives in different ways, according to the planning approaches and the influence of individual faculty on setting learning outcomes. The study concluded that if an initiative (in this case, distance learning) is not funded as part of the institution's regular budget, then it is viewed by faculty as peripheral to the overall mission of the institution.

While universities' evidence of planning appears abundant, there appears to be a shortage in the literature of empirical studies on formal planning to satisfy the needs of the market perspective by community colleges. An empirical study by Cjeda and Leist (2006) provides a nine-state survey of chief academic officers (CAOs), which showed



that fiscal matters were the main concern of the CAOs as community colleges strive to be all things to all people. Harbour and Nagy (2005) interviewed community college leaders concerning planning operations to meet the legislatively mandated CSFs. They found that 3 of 4 North Carolina community college campuses had improved instructional program outcomes, even though faculty interviewed were unknowledgeable or apathetic about the measures. Carducci et al. (2007) conducted a case study on activity-based cost accounting (ABC) to link mission-critical practices with community college salary expenditures. They found that the ABC model has usefulness in identifying (and thus predicting) what it costs for a community college in Southern California to perform institutional activities.

The influence of business and industry's market perspective on academic planning for higher education has generally been received with mixed results by the academic perspective in the United States. The desire for teaching without any outside input remains strong, in that higher education provides capable entry-level employees to business and industry, while the business and industry sector—like government—is preferred by academia to provide financial support, but not necessarily to provide significant input into institutional and program areas (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Burke, 2005). However, the tendency of academia to go alone may be changing as more sophisticated planning methods develop and pressure mounts from both the foundational and business elements of the market perspective (Beard, 2009; Rutschow et al., 2011).

#### 2.1.3.2 Academic Use of Business Planning and Measurement

Finding the ideal mix of management tools and institutional procedures appears to be a challenge for postsecondary institutions. Being able to get administration and faculty to participate in business-based methods of planning appears to be easier to do in

programs such as colleges of business (Beard, 2009) and engineering schools. An example of the latter is found in an article by Asan and Tanyas (2007) concerning an engineering graduate program in Turkey.

Asan and Tanyas (2007) stated that modern organizations, including higher education, need to “be global, cross functional, keep up with the rapid change of technology, have close relationships with customers and accept their intellectual capital as an asset” (p. 999). In order to accomplish this set of objectives, Asan and Tanyas noted that organizations need to strategically plan with a system to develop policies; communicate those policies; and align resources, actions, and evaluation of performance.

Asan and Tanyas (2007) proposed the use of the balanced scorecard and a process from the Japanese management method *hoshin kanri*, a means of “connecting managers and employees by a systematic deployment process through vertical and horizontal communication. In this business model organizational goals set by the management are deployed and all endeavors are aligned to the same vision and goal” (p. 1000). Asan and Tanyas concluded that implementing the two focused management tools may result in helping an educational program, especially a business-oriented program such as engineering management, recognize gaps in strategy and implementation that could be part of a continuous improvement cycle.

The supply chain management (SCM) tool is another application of a business process introduced into postsecondary education, based upon the institution’s need to respond to market demands. Al-Turki et al. (2008) cited the emergence of business concepts of mass production from the industrial revolution being applied to education systems. They presented the use of SCM as a corollary to modern postsecondary strategic

planning in order to make the institution more responsive to business/market needs. SCM in business is used to “efficiently integrate suppliers, manufacturers, warehouses and stores, so that merchandise is produced and distributed at the right quantities, to the right locations, and at the right time, in order to minimize system wide costs while satisfying service level requirements” (p. 213).

To apply SCM to the educational environment, Al-Turki et al. (2008) proposed that education is a service applied to the minds of students, who take on a dual role of suppliers and consumers. Higher education institutions are service providers for their students. Al-Turki et al. presented the following points that SCM provides for Saudi Aramco, a large oil company in Saudi Arabia, which are based on the following “strengths” that offset “inherent weaknesses” in higher education:

- a. Unity of purpose prepare students for a particular job market, not necessarily to be simply good citizens.
- b. The students are designated for a career, thus reducing the need for institutions of higher education to respond to multiple constituents.
- c. Cultures in higher education are built around expectations of the future employer—they are not “wasted” on concepts of academic freedom and rigor.
- d. The supplier–customer relationship provides for a more straightforward system of financing higher education as the *product* (successful student hire) will provide *profit* (funding from businesses).
- e. Linkage of the job market to the workforce market reduces the “unproductive” time that a student may have in deciding on a major and taking courses that may not benefit his or her career goals.

The strategic implication for SCM is to provide a seamless network between *raw material* (the student before being educated) and the *final product* (an educated graduate, groomed for ready employment or already employed by the end of his collegiate career) (Al-Turki et al., 2008). The business sector performs a double duty as a partner—a sponsor in higher education, helping develop curriculum—and as an employer, to provide jobs for graduates. This approach provides a measure of efficiency in the labor market (Al-Turki et al., 2008). This model is at odds with many approaches to higher education that emphasize access to education as a societal, versus business, goal (Dowd, 2003; Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009).

Taylor et al. (2008) noted the emergence of market forces in higher education in Portugal. Emphasis on awareness of the market environment results in the adaptability of colleges to become more entrepreneurial, to create responsive internal organizational structures, and to institute professional management practices.

Academia cannot be run like an automobile factory; rather, it functions more like a symphony, in which many individuals bring unique and highly developed expertise (Taylor et al., 2008). Unlike an orchestra, which is isolated from the world once the halls doors are closed, the college must interact with a multitude of constituents. According to Taylor et al., a strategic management approach is needed to “reduce the vagaries found within higher education” (p. 371).

Strategic management combines strategic planning and strategic thinking in a leadership style that combines formal planning and cybernetic, or self-correcting, operational methods (Birnbaum 1998; Rowley et al., 1997; Taylor et al., 2008). Figure 3 shows the relationships of leadership under a strategic management approach.

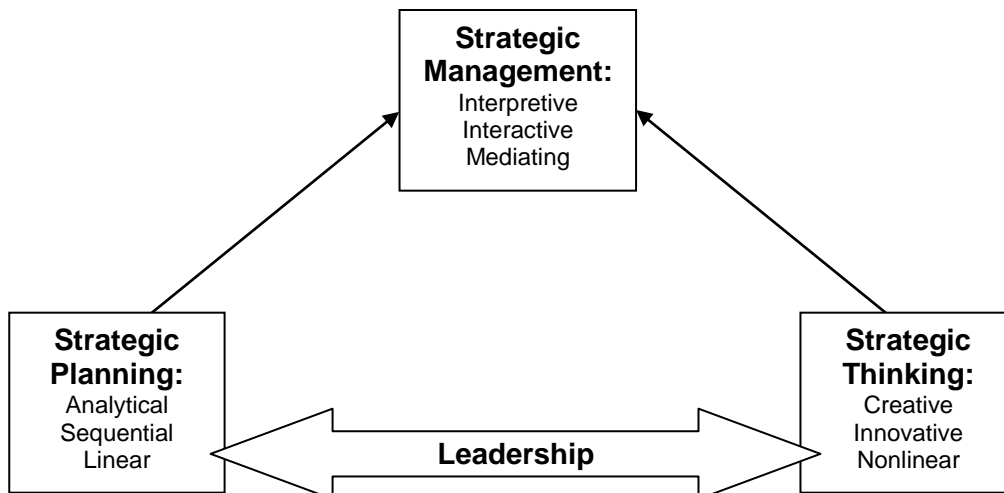


Figure 3. Strategic management. From “Leadership and strategic management,” by Taylor et al., 2008, *European Journal of Education*, p. 372.

Taylor et al. (2008) presented management in the college as starting from the bottom up to create strategic management, decision making, and the development of policy. Leadership is charged with moving the college from a static course to a more dynamic one, with a focus on the vision of a future state in concert with the external environment and the accepted reality of competition. Taylor and his colleagues explained that planning “is the mechanism that allows the articulation of institutional goals and priorities. From planning come the vital means for connecting the mission of the present with the vision of the future” (p. 373).

Taylor et al. (2008) found that “due to financial constraints, institutions do not address *intended strategies* and must instead settle for *emergent strategies*” (p. 383, Taylor’s emphasis). There was also a lack of understanding about the strategic process and how strategic planning and strategic thinking would lead to strategic management. The applications of strategic management and strategic planning have an application to U.S. community colleges dealing with fiscal constraints (Haygood, 2009).

### 2.1.3.3 Issues With Business Influence on the Market Perspective

The community college president is in contact with donors, foundations, students, parents, and business and industry leaders, among others, who seek to influence the operation of the college. Gumport (2003) stated that community colleges, and especially community college presidents, are the most susceptible to external pressure of any segment of higher education. Gumport noted,

One concern is that community colleges are cast as unduly passive and are presumed to acquiesce to the demand of their many constituencies. In demonstrating eagerness to diversify their activities based on changing demands, community colleges appear to lack a central core. (p. 39)

The danger of having such a market-based mentality is that a lack of vision can lead to incrementalism, which creates a fragmented approach to addressing the problems that the institution attempts to solve (Gumport, 2003; Senge, 1990). Gumport used an example of increased continuing education courses to satisfy business leaders, which may serve to “starve” academic credit programs of students who would normally enroll for the purpose of being promotable or for later transfer to a university. This eagerness to please business and industry customers may stem from financial stresses that the community college leadership faces due to near-total dependence upon fluctuating state funding, especially during volatile economic conditions (Zeidenberg, 2008)

In a study of community college presidents, Gumport (2003) used a focus group of current presidents to determine how community colleges respond to demands from constituents. One issue the focus groups discussed was the impact of saying “no” to financial support when the request compromises the values of the institution. Presidents noted the pressure of always needing money, but stated that the question should be “Is the program appropriate?” versus “Is it feasible?” (Gumport, 2003).

Gumport (2003) proposed community colleges should operate under two differing institutional logics. College presidents should operate in a market perspective under *industry logic*, in which economic opportunities are prioritized. An example of this is providing entrepreneurial approaches to the development of nonacademic programs to meet the mutual economic needs of business/industry and the college. According to Gumport, with industry logic, colleges are pressed to compete for limited funds—from private to state sources—and to demonstrate efficiency as academic managers.

Under the second type of logic, Gumport (2003) theorized a *social institution logic*, which is a view of public education as a means of fulfilling the educational needs of society, enabling upward mobility of its citizenry, developing socialization of diverse groups of people, fostering intellectualism and critical-thinking skills, and promulgating the nation's cultural heritage. College presidents must decide on the direction in which to lead their institutions, whether in the traditional role, emerging from an earlier time in which society funded academia and left it alone to prepare students as it saw fit, or in a more untraditional role, in which higher education is expected by economic forces to prepare a specialized workforce (Gaston College, 2010). Most presidents select a course that combines both directions (Gumport, 2003).

The presidents in Gumport's (2003) study expressed frustration in deciphering the public interest, which they described as "neither unified nor clearly defined" (p. 55). Referring to Burke's accountability triangle, there is lack of clarity on the sources of demands on all three points. Gumport reports the demands of policy makers can be either state, local, national, or personal; employers can be speaking for their company, their professional segment, their employees, or their own professional interests. She further

noted, in a similar vein, that when college presidents make demands, it is unclear as to whether they speak on behalf of public interests, their students' interests, their college's interests, or their own professional interests.

The divergence of interests makes the community college susceptible to becoming a credentialing institution for already-gained experience if the college does not have a clear mission and strategic vision concerning both industry logic and social institution logic at the core of its operations (Gumport, 2003). Gumport concluded that community colleges are not as resistant to change as 4-year universities have been charged with being in the past, but they should not be so responsive to incremental change as to be viewed simply as “service providers” in the same manner as hospitals and prisons in procuring contracts. This deviation from the mission defined by the social institution logic would be damaging to the institution in the long run (Gumport, 2003; Senge, 1990). Gumport stated that the manner in which colleges plan—*how* they plan—in a market-driven environment would be worthy of further study, a statement that supports the need for this research.

#### 2.1.4 Summary of Literature on the Market Perspective

The literature shows the pressure that higher education faces in terms of student preparation and expectations. The need for an educated citizenry has a dichotomous purpose as noted by Dowd (2003) in the need for access to higher education and the need for a competitive workforce (Al-Turki et al., 2008; Asan & Tanyas, 2007; Beard, 2009; Taylor et al., 2008; Wingspread Group, 1993). Financial pressures from state shortfalls in funding make foundations an attractive source for funding, but also add another level of constituents (Gumport, 2003; Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Rodriguez, 1987; Roska et al.,



2009; Rothkopf, 2009). Gumpert noted the demands of various constituents on the community college and expressed concern that the community college may be reduced to a service entity if it does not connect the vision process to a strategic process that would ensure maintaining the core values of the community college in the face of external pressures.

While there appears to be a deficiency in research and literature concerning the applicability of formal business-inspired planning processes in community colleges, a significant amount of literature has been applied to strategic planning at the university level (see Beard 2009; Card & Card, 2007; Taylor et al. 2008; among others). This research shows various tools that could be applied to community college planning, as well as the pitfalls of failing to plan. The research problem of finding out how community colleges plan for improvement is enlightened by the market point of Burke's accountability triangle.

In a similar manner, extant literature concerning the state, or political, perspective of Burke's accountability triangle will be explored in the following section. Financial and political implications of policy may often dictate the planning processes for community colleges due to their heavy dependence on state funds (Zeidenberg, 2008). The financial health of the community college, as contributed from the political perspective, may influence its ability to offer both access and success opportunities for its students (Dowd, 2003; Haygood, 2009).

## 2.2 The Political Perspective

Burke (2005) referred to higher education as "a public good for all Americans, and not just a private benefit for college graduates" (p. 1). The need for public access to

recreational, vocational, and adult education resources while placing cultural resources at the disposal of the community provide “a community college meeting community needs” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 20). The political perspective is influenced by federal, state, and local demands for accountability for the both the use of resources and the outcome of employing those resources.

To view the political perspective of Burke’s accountability triangle, it is useful to trace the rise of the modern community college from the needs it filled at the end of World War II. The origins of the complexity of community colleges can be traced back to the postwar period when millions of service men and women needed to be retrained for vocations after being discharged from the military (Lucas, 2006). Following the historical context of the political perspective, a review of literature on current federal, state, and local influences on accountability shows the impact of accountability on strategic planning.

### 2.2.1 Federal Influence From Post World War II Through Pre-Globalization

The post–World War II period—including the Korean War, the GI Bill (formally named the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944), and Public Law 550 of 1952—provided underwriting of the college education for millions of returning war veterans and, as a result, colleges and universities filled up with new students (Lucas, 2006). These congressional acts established an informal social compact in which Americans accepted, as an act of faith, that access to college opportunities promoted both equality and quality of life (Burke, 2005).

On one side of the social compact, for the societal benefit of developing a more educated and vocationally trained populace, taxpayers would fund public higher

education in order to keep tuition reasonably low. The other side of this informal compact would give colleges and universities great measures of autonomy to operate and teach without much governmental interference (Burke, 2005). Community colleges were governed by local agencies, such as school boards, who established policies and procedures that fit with local needs (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Community colleges benefited greatly from the postwar boom in higher education. Instead of pursuing research, the community college's primary mission was to teach students the knowledge and skill sets that would prepare them for the workplace. As the community college began to replace the earlier junior college, the transfer program to 4-year colleges and universities became a secondary pursuit in addition to the vocational mission (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). For several years, the "hands-off approach" to higher education worked as individuals and corporations paid taxes while colleges taught individuals and employees of corporations. Burke (2005) noted that changes to the social compact began to unravel this arrangement in the 1960s, with the introduction of a more socially activist federal government in Washington.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 introduced more government demands upon colleges and universities, as funding was provided for research in an attempt to find solutions to social problems in public health, poverty, public housing, and non-degreed educational opportunities (Lucas, 2006). Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1972 allowed financing of college educations for students who lacked the financial means of going to college; this financial arrangement was designed to be a partnership to permit more students access to higher education. Once the colleges and universities gained financial support from federal sources, it became more difficult for them to decline their

continuation. Community colleges have made significant gains in federal appropriations, particularly in the area of vocational education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003)

The need for financial support leads community colleges to pursue all aspects of federal funding, including sources such as the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, and Pell Grants and Stafford Loans for students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Lucas, 2006; Shaw & Rab, 2003). Community college financial aid offices provide a wide assortment of tuition assistance for students, based largely upon need (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This approach leaves the institution open to criticism that accessibility to higher education is associated with a decrease of academic quality, as traditional academic excellence may—by necessity—be secondary to developmental education initiatives as part of the “access versus success” debate (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dowd, 2003; Farmer & Paris, 2000; Haygood, 2009; Shaw & Rab, 2003).

#### 2.2.1.1 Federal Government Calls for Accountability

A recent call from a government agency for higher education came from the Spellings Commission in the U.S. Department of Education’s 2006 report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. In the report, which was echoed 2 years later in the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education’s *Measuring Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education*, the commission called for a “retooling” of the workforce to meet the requirements of a “knowledge economy” and issued findings highly critical of postsecondary education. While

Spellings left office at the end of the George W. Bush administration, calls for greater quality in higher education persist (Mattis & Sinn, 2009).

#### 2.2.1.2 Performance Indicators and Federal Government Funding

Finding a measure of how colleges and universities, and particularly community colleges, define *success* continues to be a challenge from a federal perspective. In an article advocating the use of universal measures of accountability, Boggs (2009) wrote, “Lack of commonly accepted performance measures for community colleges have led to a misunderstanding of the institutions and an underestimation of their effectiveness and the contributions they make” (p. 10). Finding the right mix of indicators that fit the community college specifically, as differentiated from universities, is a challenge when considering the various constituencies that the community college serves (Bailey et al., 2006; Boggs, 2009; Dowd, 2003).

The primary federal government’s measure for evaluating the effectiveness of colleges and universities is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). With its open access for parents and students to compare institutions, it serves as a measure of a college’s reputation. Boggs (2009) contended that IPEDS provides a misleading measurement of community college accountability due to the following reasons: (a) IPEDS measures only first-time, full-time students, while 62 percent of community college students attend part-time; (b) the goals of community college students may be based on “need to know” as opposed to degree completion; and (c) transfer data is difficult to track and is often misleading, especially if transfer students from a community college transfer from the receiving institution before graduation. Bailey et al. (2006) suggested that models based upon graduation outcomes adjusted for institutional

composition—such as student composition, college resources, size, and location—may be a more effective means of measuring the effectiveness of community colleges.

The Spellings Commission sought to create national standards that approximated those used in business for measuring quality (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). The Spellings Commission supported additional postsecondary high-skill mastery and technology competence education to prepare the United States workforce to better compete in world markets and recommended that colleges use performance measures based on a culture of accountability, transparency, and change (Mattis & Sinn, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). These measures should include the use of innovation, quality measurement and improvement, pedagogical use of technology, and an overhaul of curricula to meet those objectives (Mathis & Sinn, 2009). Measurements consist of those used for quality initiatives such as the BSC and mandatory MBNQA-reporting criteria (Beard, 2009; Mattis & Sinn, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Colleges and universities are currently required to report key metrics through the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1999 (Bailey et al., 2006). The act, referred to as Student Right-to-Know, requires colleges to report their “graduation rate for fall semester cohorts of first-time, full-time students in degree programs” (Bailey et al., 2006, p. 492). While the Student Right-to-Know Act gives students and parents a means to compare institutions of higher learning, the data falls short of what many colleges, particularly community colleges, consider appropriate measures for their populations (Boggs, 2009; Bailey et al., 2006).

Continued demands for accountability, if heeded by Congress, may require changes in the way that many colleges plan and operate. The initiative passed by Congress

in 2010, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (SAFRA), provides more funding for community colleges (Kittredge, 2010). It should be expected that more funding comes with demands for more accountability for how the money is spent. In a similar vein, states are also demanding more accountability through the political perspective (NCCCS, 2009b). The following section addresses the use of performance indicators as a measurement of state accountability.

### 2.2.2 Individual State Performance Indicators

During the 1990s, accountability in community colleges moved from outcomes assessment to performance reporting (Burke & Minassians, 2004). Colleges had been allowed to determine their own goals, indicators, and reporting methods, but the results were not effective in meeting accountability standards in that (a) campuses performed assessment to meet requirements, but often did not use the results to improve performance; (b) the concept of external accountability standards was contrary to the concept of academic freedom for many faculty and administrators; and (c) individual colleges' assessment methods did not permit governors and state legislators to compare campus-to-campus results (Burke & Minassians, 2004). Assessment was replaced by performance reporting. By 2004, 46 states required performance reporting similar to that required for North Carolina community colleges (Burke & Minassians, 2004; NCCCS, 2009b).

In a study of six state performance standards, Burke and Minassians (2004) found that community college performance standards have not met the planned results of effectively measuring societal results, as opposed to the resource input model of assessment. The following is a summary of Burke and Minassians' (2004) study:

- Performance reports lack indicators that fully reflect the mission of community colleges.
- Current reporting methods stress inputs more than outputs and outcomes.
- Equity measures (e.g., accessibility, employment opportunity) are found at a surprising rate, given reactions against affirmative action.
- Below the vice-president level of community colleges, academic administrators and faculty know very little about performance indicators and do not use them in academic or operational planning.
- Performance reports receive executive level attention, but have minimal effect on improving campus policy making.
- Community colleges place less value on reputation and higher value on community needs than 4-year colleges and universities.

Burke and Minassians (2004) concluded that performance indicators do provide a means of comparing colleges within a state, but they are less effective on a campus performance improvement level. Additional research on how lower levels of administration and academic operations can use these metrics for daily academic administration was not found. As more states begin to use performance measures, other states have had intrastate standards for a decade or more. A good example of how community colleges have been required by the political perspective to be more accountable for results is the NCCCS (2009b).

#### 2.2.2.1 Mandated Performance Measurement in NC Community Colleges

Accountability became a major theme for community colleges in the 1990s (Burke & Minassians, 2004). North Carolina followed this trend as the North Carolina



General Assembly developed measures of accountability for community colleges (NCCCS, 2009b). The most recent version, the CSFs, have been compiled on an annual basis since 12 measures were instituted in 1999. From 1999 to 2007, colleges were allowed some measure of flexibility in the CSFs that they selected. The group of core indicators was reduced to eight in 2007, with no flexible selection (NCCCS, 2009b). The intent was to focus the system on a set of strategic initiatives that would guide the system and set priorities for the legislative biennial budget process. The core indicators of success consist of the following factors with descriptors (NCCCS, 2009b):

- *Progress of basic skills students*: Basic skills students include all adult literacy students. Progress of basic skills students is a composite measure that includes the percentage of students progressing within a level of literacy, the percentage of students completing a level entered or a predetermined goal, and the percentage of students completing the level entered and advancing to a higher level.
- *Passing rates on licensure and certification examinations*: This is the percentage of first-time test takers from community colleges undertaking professional examinations prior to practicing the profession. Licensures are required by state statute (e.g., real estate brokers, nurses). Certifications are voluntary but may be required by employers or outside agencies (e.g., nursing assistants, aviation mechanics). This does not include voluntary certifications (e.g., computer certifications).
- *Performance of college transfer students*: Community college transfer programs enable graduates with associate's degrees in arts, fine arts, or

science to transfer to the UNC system as juniors. This measure determines if the transfer students make the transition and perform as well as the native students who enrolled in the university system as freshmen.

- *Passing rates of students in developmental courses:* This is the percentage of students who complete developmental English, mathematics, or reading courses with a grade of “C” or better.
- *Success rates of developmental students’ in subsequent college-level courses:* The performance of students who took developmental English, mathematics, or reading is tracked in their performance in curriculum courses in English and mathematics.
- *Satisfaction of program completers and non-completers:* This is the proportion of graduates and non-completers who indicate that the quality of the college programs met or exceeded their expectations.
- *Curriculum student retention, graduation, and transfer:* This is a composite indicator consisting of (a) the number of students who complete curriculum programs with a degree, diploma, or certificate; (b) the number of students who have not completed their program but are continuing to enroll in the program; and (c) the number of individuals who transferred to a university or another community college. The sum of all three is divided by the number of curriculum students in the cohort to determine student progress and success.
- *Client satisfaction with customized training:* The percentage of individuals who have received small business center services from a community college who indicate that their expectations have been met.

In addition, there are two *super factors*. The first super factor is extra weight given to the success of transfer students, in that juniors in a university who transferred from a community college but have a grade point average by the end of their junior year are seen as being equivalent to native students at that college (i.e., those university students who started as freshmen). The other super factor is that no licensure exam has a lower than 70 percent passing rate. Colleges that meet the requirements of all eight CSFs plus the two super factors are recognized for EIP status by the system (NCCCS, 2009b).

In a case study of an earlier version of the CSFs, Harbour and Nagy (2005) found that some college leaders viewed the CSFs as “bureaucratic meddling” (p. 445). However, most institutions had added faculty or adjusted programs to respond to deficiencies in accountability measures. The academic perspective (i.e., the faculty interviewed in the study) explicitly or implicitly illustrated what the researchers described as a disconnect between accountability through the CSFs and classroom teaching and learning. Harbour and Nagy (2005) left a question of whether there is linkage of accountability and strategic planning in order to obtain desired learning outcomes.

Determining outcomes and strategies to meet them is an issue of college governing boards. Each of the 58 colleges operates within the NCCCS (2009b). The system as a whole is governed by the State Board of Community Colleges. Each college complies with NCCCS regulations through the North Carolina General Administrative Code but has its own board of trustees, with representation appointed by the governor, the local county commission, and the local board(s) of public education (Brown, 2007). The board of trustees elects a president for each institution and complies with the State Board,

the Administrative Code, and their accrediting agency—SACSCOC. State and federal funding is dependent on adherence to the rules set by these organizations.

A recent year's funding for North Carolina community colleges (academic year 2009–10) was based on \$1 billion (77 percent) provided from the state's general fund. The remaining \$0.3 billion (23 percent) came from federal funding and tuition receipts (NCCCS, 2009d). As with other taxpayer-funded programs, public support does not come without conditions, which in the case of community colleges means a rising call for higher education accountability for both access to all segments of the population and success of all students to meet individual and institutional objectives (Haygood, 2009).

#### 2.2.2.2 Local or Institutional Control

Accounting measures have been used in several instances where either colleges impose local tight controls, as in an example of a California community college using activity-based accounting methods (Carducci et al., 2007), or the state imposes the controls (Burke & Minassians, 2004). An example of state control includes use of an accounting method to determine return on investment where students are viewed as revenue generators and funding for them is matched to the expenses incurred to educate them (Redlinger & Valcik, 2008). While these objective measures promote a businesslike environment, it can be argued that colleges are not designed to be run like a business (Birnbaum, 1998, 2000). The demands by the political perspective for higher education to be accountable for the resources it uses is not expected to decrease, especially when state revenues decrease (Bailey et al., 2006).

State legislatures have been attempting to make higher education more accountable since the erosion of the social compact between the state and colleges began

in the 1990s (Burke, 2005). The issue goes further into a triad of accountability, affordability, and accessibility (Lovett et al., 2004), so that colleges are responsible for a larger share of social issues. This discussion is important if accountability is to be tied into local college strategy, but concerns exist as to whether the metrics being used are appropriate to measure the success of community colleges (Bailey et al., 2006; Boggs, 2009; Burke, 2005; Burke & Minassians, 2004).

### 2.2.3 Summary of the Political Perspective

The political perspective can be traced back to the post–World War II period when servicemen and servicewomen were retrained for civilian jobs in industry and service sectors. A social compact was informally established, in which the government-funded programs that colleges taught were planned by the colleges without much of a mandate from the state or federal governments (Burke, 2005). With the increase of social programs in the 1960s, that relationship changed. Currently, funding has become tied to preestablished performance measures on the state, federal, and local levels (Bailey et al., 2006; Boggs, 2009; Burke, 2005; Burke & Minassians, 2004; Carducci et al., 2007; Kittredge, 2010; Lovett et al., 2004; Mattis & Sinn, 2009; NCCCS, 2009b; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

## 2.3 The Academic Perspective

The third point of Burke’s accountability triangle is the academic concern perspective. Burke (2005) described this component as serving a balanced, dual role in society as colleges and universities stay “sufficiently safe from external pressures to safeguard their societal critique yet sufficiently responsive to external needs to sustain societal support” (p. 5). In this section, literature on the role of the academic-professional

sector of higher education is examined from the viewpoint of its influence on the institution (and subsequent planning initiatives), instruction, and regional accreditation as the institution ideally seeks to provide service without subservience to the other two factors, the market and the political perspectives previously examined (Burke, 2005; Gumpert, 2003).

### 2.3.1 Institutional Leadership and the Academic-Professional Perspective

The influence of the academic professionals in an institution is often a function of institutional leadership, which, in turn, is determined by institutional culture, as discussed by Birnbaum (1988):

Once an organization has evolved into a mature culture because it has a long and rich history, that culture creates the patterns of perception, thought, and feeling of every new generation in the organization, and, therefore, also “causes” the organization to be predisposed to certain kinds of leadership. In that sense, the mature group, through its culture, also creates its own leaders. (p. 160)

Birnbaum (1988) attributed much of the academic leader’s traditional role to sustaining the existing culture by articulating it, screening out challenges to the culture, and refurbishing it. As culture is a system, it tends to lose energy and move toward entropy and disorder. Birnbaum wrote that it is the role of administration, especially that of the president, “to prevent the organization’s culture from falling apart” (p. 81). In an era when the social compact of the post–WWII pre-globalization period may have unraveled, the forces of the constituencies outside of academia place stress on this traditional model of academic leadership to prove accountability through institutional quality (Burke, 2005; Gumpert, 2003; Smart, 2003).

Smart (2003) linked institutional quality to the nature of the college culture and the belief from the president down that effectiveness and quality can be measured and

improved. Culture can be identified through a competing values framework in which the culture is on a continuum of flexibility versus stability on a vertical axis and on an internal versus external focus on a horizontal axis. The culture of the institution determines its perspective in being open to change or whether or not it responds to the needs of market forces (Smart, 2003). These competing values provide a measurement of institutional culture and can help leaders develop strategies to develop effective organizational performance (Smart, 2003).

Change in personnel, especially at the senior level, is sometimes necessary for an organization to change culture. Kotter (1996) noted that executives who have been with the organization for a long time are reluctant to point out problems for fear that they will be blamed for creating the problems they spotlight. Transformations often start when a new person is appointed to a key role, since the new person does not have to defend past actions. Challenging the culture consists of taking an honest look at the current situation and determining what can be done to improve it.

### 2.3.2 Accountability in Teaching and Learning

The role of the community college instructor does not usually involve research, so community college faculty have been free to devote time to teaching and other instructional processes (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). With effects of globalization, the previously stable profession of community college teaching has been challenged to deal with changes such as distance learning, classroom technology, and an influx of underprepared students (McClenney, 2004; Nemetz & Cameron, 2006). Faculty are asked to not only dispense knowledge but also to assess teaching methods, ensure outcomes, and keep students engaged in studies and community service (McClenney, 2004).

The Community College Student Survey of Engagement (CCSSE) is a tool used by many community colleges to measure the attachment that students have for their academic work and for the institution they attend (McClenney, 2004). The CCSSE uses five benchmarks to define the student educational experience or the active engagement of the student in his or her institution:

1. *Active and collaborative learning*: The application of principles learned and collaboration with peers and instructor in applying those principles.
2. *Student effort*: Denoted by time on task required and applied to coursework.
3. *Academic challenge*: The intellectual and creative effort required for coursework.
4. *Student–faculty interaction*: Availability of faculty for students and collaboration of faculty with students outside class time.
5. *Support for learners*: The perception of students that the institution attempts to cultivate positive working and social relationships for students.

As instructors in the community college plan coursework, sit on committees, advise students, and work on lesson plans, the additional role of promoting student engagement may be seen as outside of what Nemetz and Cameron (2006) called the *transaction* between the employer and the faculty, where research, teaching, and service are exchanged for employment compensation. This transaction theory is based on “clan” and bureaucratic controls helping to regulate the role of the instructor through adherence to societal or professional discipline norms in the college. In this view, Nemetz and Cameron (2006) saw faculty asserting that bureaucratic (administrative) controls are supposed to handle issues outside the classroom, including such concerns as student



engagement levels. Thus the institutional plan of the college must also take the role of faculty into account, for many hold onto the traditional/collegial role—as understood for many years in the social compact—that faculty teach, administrators administer, and students learn (Birnbaum, 1988; Burke, 2005; Nemetz & Cameron, 2006).

### 2.3.3 The Academic Perspective of the Social Compact

As was the case for the first two points of Burke's accountability triangle, the political perspective and the market perspective, the academic-professional perspective shows the organization's response to changes in the environment that are related to organizational dynamics. One model presented by Birnbaum (1988) is based on a *loose-tight coupling*, which can be defined as tight controls on the administrative side, with looser controls on academic content to permit academic freedom, while the bureaucratic side handles student issues (McClenney, 2004; Nemetz & Cameron, 2006).

Birnbaum (1988, 1992, 2000) is an outspoken critic of colleges emulating the operating structure of businesses. The lack of a clear mission for which the outcomes can be easily quantified, such as “profits,” make the business model impractical for higher education. There is often no central control over curriculum; the “labor force” consists of professionals who are more aligned to academic standards than to procedures and protocols, and decision makers are amateurs who wander in and out of the decision-making process (Birnbaum, 1988).

The nature of academic institutions is one of an open system that is dynamic and nonlinear. Various systems are interconnected, or coupled. An example is the subsystems of technical academia and administration (see Figure 3). Boundaries are permeable and interaction is possible between any combinations of system elements, which in turn are

subsystems themselves. Inputs that may affect the system include budgets, people, and external events, among others (Birnbaum, 1988).

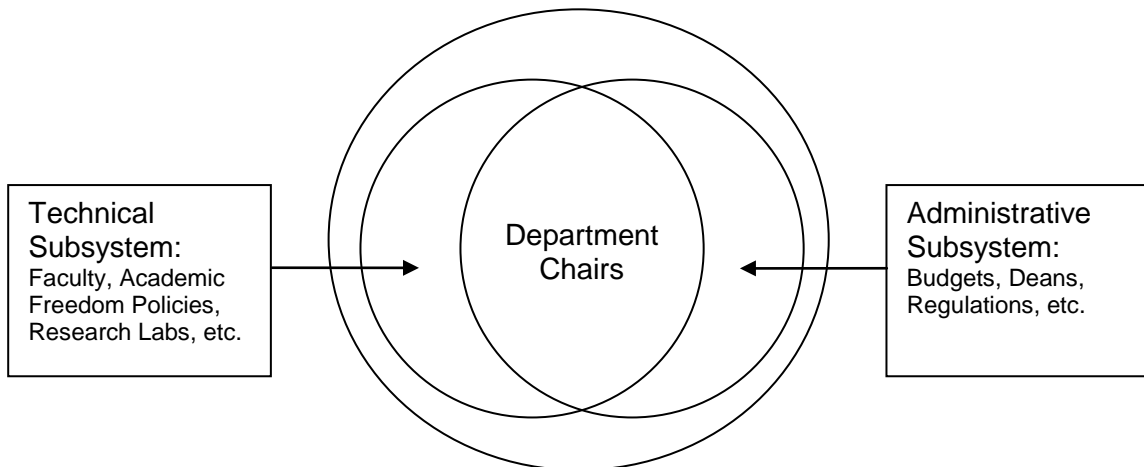


Figure 4. Open system of academia. From R. Birnbaum, 1988, *How Colleges Work*, p. 32.

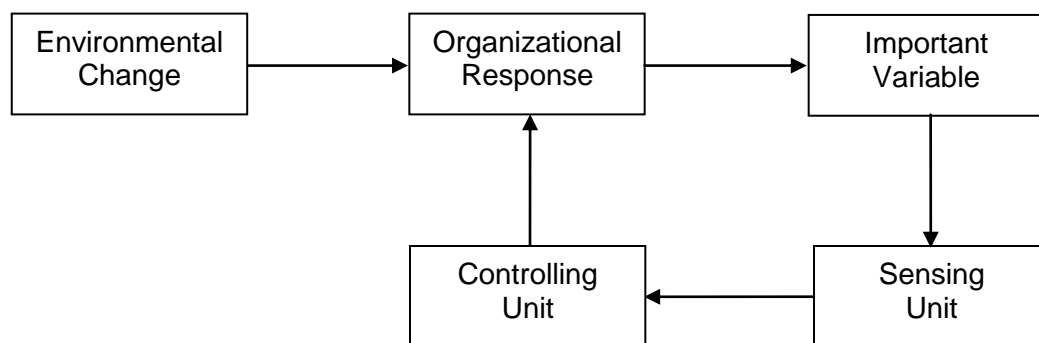
Birnbaum (1988) compared the academy to a large black box, in that instead of having all of the gears perfectly aligned and the results being predictable, the housing of the collegiate model is “perverse,” in that all of the elements or gears function more or less independently of each other. Sometimes the elements respond to each other but preserve their own identities and separateness. On one hand, the loosely coupled system has connections that may be uncoordinated, be slow to respond, and possibly work against each other. On the other hand, if subsystems have common parts, those common elements are more likely to be tightly coupled, while the system itself is loosely coupled. The result may be that the components (e.g., departmental or discipline alliances) are more valued than the overall institutional issues (e.g., mission, vision, and values; intradepartmental initiatives, such as meeting accountability measures, state mandates, or accrediting agency standards) (Birnbaum, 1988).

Birnbaum (1988) stated that because the organization is loosely coupled, decision making at the lowest levels of the cybernetic, or self-correcting, institution is usually effective in bringing back performance to the desired state. Senior administration selects only a small number of important goals and sets them to the lowest level possible in the organization. A cascading effect occurs when the lower level goals affect the next level up, and corrective action is taken to put the lower level back on track. Administrators on the higher levels of the organization thus manage by exception and try one solution at a time, as opposed to widespread (and difficult to trace) organizational changes (Birnbaum, 1988).

The process of change (in this case, responding to calls for higher accountability from governmental and market perspectives in Burke's accountability triangle) is shown in Figure 4. As an environmental change is addressed by the college, the response is to set up a variable. For example, using Birnbaum's (1988) model, the need for more support for first-generation college students leads the administration to assign special counselors to identify first-generation students. The assignment becomes the important variable. The sensing unit (the student services department) monitors the progress of the cohort of students, and corrective action is recommended to the controlling unit (dean of student services). Changes are made in the organizational response, and the cycle continues until the desired state is reached. In terms of long-range planning, there is no allocation of resources or time for the improvement; justification of the expense is based upon the importance of first-generation student success to the institution.

As Birnbaum (1988) suggested, the cybernetic institution combines all the elements of the collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical models into a fairly

effective institutional model. This model may be responsive to environmental changes, such as heightened accreditation requirements for student outputs. However, since it fails to plan for longer term outputs (e.g., transfer success and developmental student success), as a traditional model the cybernetic model may fall short of effectively responding to environmental changes (Rowley et al., 1997). In the current environment, there is a need for understanding the academic role in preparing students for the challenges of a competitive world. In many cases, the accrediting agencies take on the role of responding to the environment where many traditional planning models may fall short (Mattis & Sinn, 2009).



*Figure 5.* Cybernetic model decision loop. From R. Birnbaum, 1988, *How Colleges Work*, p. 32.

### 2.3.3 Accountability and Accreditation

A vital element of the academic-professional perspective pertains to regional accreditation or reaccreditation. The significance of accreditation is that it provides an external source's verification that the college has a mission, that it has resources available to accomplish that mission, and that its educational objectives are consistent with that mission (Commission on Colleges, 2008). One of the key elements of SACSCOC

accreditation/reaccreditation is the role of faculty in governance and in setting curriculum.

“The traditional model of accreditation was to have an institution define its mission and then to evaluate whether it was achieving it” (Smith & Finney, 2008, p. 21). Regional accreditation currently serves two purposes: (a) institutional quality improvement among the association’s members, and (b) quality assurance to the public (Brittingham, 2008). Brittingham (2008) stated that the role of quality assurance has been a function of the accrediting agencies since the 1950s when the federal government recognized accreditors as “reliable authorities concerning the quality of education” for colleges that they accredit (p. 33).

There are six accrediting agencies in the United States that ensure member colleges meet federal guidelines and standards (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). Meeting accreditation standards allow the schools to compete in federal funding proposals for student grants, program operations, and expansion. Without accreditation, colleges and universities (a) are forced to rely almost exclusively on state, local, and private funding for their operating funds; and (b) can have their reputation ruined for the prospect of attracting new students (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). The regional accreditation agency for North Carolina is the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2008).

The SACSCOC regional accreditation standards rubric is based on outcomes that are similar but not identical to those proposed by the Spelling Commission (Mattis & Sinn, 2009; Commission on Colleges, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The reaccreditation of colleges often serves as an impetus for developing strategies for

continuous improvement in college operations (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). McMurtrie (2000) noted that all six accrediting agencies in the United States rewrote their standards to reflect more outcome-based learning. Emphasis on *what* the students know—as opposed to *how* they learned it—and evaluating the effectiveness of distance learning were among the changes being pushed from the federal government’s desire through accrediting agencies, to have more proof of student achievement (McMurtrie, 2000).

An example of seeking proof of continuous improvement is the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) developed by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The AQIP focuses on quality criteria such as how students’ critical-thinking skills improved over time, as opposed to following prescriptive principles (McMurtrie, 2000). The following criteria for the AQIP are an example of improvements being driven by mission (Mattis & Sinn, 2009):

- What is the institutional mission, and how do we ensure the mission is accomplished?
- How do we ensure our students are adequately prepared to meet the challenges of the future?
- What teaching strategies are used to ensure learning is occurring, and how do we gauge this as outcomes?
- How do we ensure more than mere memorization of facts and figures occurs based on discovery and application of knowledge?
- How do we ensure lifelong engagement of our students and faculty in a community of service?

In a similar vein, the SACSCOC Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is illustrated by Balog and Search (2006) as Tallahassee Community College (TCC) engaged in the reaccreditation process. TCC used the CCSSE as a springboard into a study assessing the campus culture. The study found that TCC was below the state of Florida's average in successful completion of developmental coursework and graduation rates for associate's degrees in arts or science (Balog & Search, 2006).

As a result of the data collected, the QEP consisted of using the work of Tinto (2006) on learning communities and O'Banion (as cited in Balog & Search, 2006) on building a "learning college," among other research, to improve levels of student engagement. TCC created a teacher-learner continuum to lead a novice learner toward becoming a self-directed learner by the end of his or her college career (Balog & Search, 2006). The results of the QEP and the CCSSE are now a part of the strategic plan for Tallahassee Community College.

#### 2.3.4 Conflict Between Academia and Accountability Proponents

Given a choice between the traditional (meeting mission) means of reaffirmation of accreditation and the quality improvement/enhancement project, the mission-driven self-appraisal approach is often favored by the professional-academic concern perspective of Burke's triangle (Rowley et al., 1997). Academics may consider outside scrutiny as an invasion of their academic autonomy, and therefore they may resist participation (Burke, 2005). This resistance fits into Birnbaum's (1988) traditional model of planning, which seeks to be self-correcting, or an internal cybernetic typology of institutional organization.

Going back to the early days of Burke's social compact, where tax dollars funded education and government stayed in the background while colleges taught as they saw fit, the traditional method worked well enough for less diverse populations of students (Rowley et al., 1997). However, the traditional method of the academic-professional perspective receives more scrutiny as demands for accountability arise from the other two points of Burke's accountability triangle—the market perspective and the state perspective (Beard, 2009; Burke, 2004; Burke & Minassians, 2004; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Redlinger & Valcik, 2008; Rowley et al., 1997). Mission-driven change with its incremental approach may not satisfy the demands for accountability and rapid change from constituencies, particularly those demands of business and industry (Beard, 2009; Wingspread Group, 1993).

### 2.3.5 The Academy and State-Mandated Planning

In a study of Kentucky postsecondary institutions, Welsh et al. (2005) studied how institutional behavior aligned with state policy goals. How faculty and administrators supported the state standards was measured by five variables:

1. *Level of involvement*: This is the encouragement of campus-wide participation.
2. *Depth of implementation*: This refers to the integration of the plan into the operation of the institution.
3. *Strategic planning model*: Selection of an “open model” is more likely to result in more favorable attitudes than a “closed” or exclusive system.



4. *Institutional decision-making model*: Faculty and staff have a separate voice in decision making than administration; participatory decision making favors proper advancement of the plan.
5. *Support for state reform*: State reform is dependent upon the extent in which institutional leaders support reform as the context of strategic planning; the level of support by mid-level academic management and faculty in supporting the state reforms is unclear.

Welsh et al. (2005) found that all five of the attitudinal factors are important ingredients of support for strategic planning. At 2-year institutions, the level of involvement and type of decision making had the most impact on support for strategic planning. The comparative success of strategic planning at 2-year schools versus 4-year colleges may be due to clearer lines of authority and a more hierarchical organization.

Fifty North Carolina community colleges participated in a pilot program using continuous quality improvement (CQI) methods promoted by the sponsors of the MBNQA in a study by Farmer and Paris (2000). The study used a self-assessment by community college deans regarding the application of CQI principles in the academic setting. The Education Pilot Criteria for the survey were built around the following core values and concepts: learning-centered education, continuous improvement and organizational learning, leadership, faculty and staff participation and development, partnership development, design quality, loss prevention, management by fact, long-range view of the future, public responsibility and citizenship, fast response, and results orientation (Farmer & Paris, 2000).

The self-assessment was based on each college's senior academic officer's judgment of where the college stood in preparation to implement the criteria of the MBNQA. There was significant difference on how the administrators rated their own institutions' readiness to adopt CQI principles in lieu of a statewide plan for implementation. Several colleges reported having taken steps to implement CQI concepts. Most respondents reported knowledge of CQI above the awareness level, but not widespread application of CQI principles to community college administration (Farmer & Paris, 2000).

The perceptions of four groups of community college leaders concerning the use of the NCCCS CSFs was the topic of a 2005 study by Harbour and Nagy. Using confidential sources identified by pseudonyms at four community colleges in North Carolina, Harbour and Nagy interviewed a large suburban college, a midsized suburban college that also served smaller rural areas, a large urban regional college, and a small rural community college. The research was based on the assessments of the president, chief academic officer, director of research, and dean of the faculty senate of the 2001 CSFs as mandated by the North Carolina General Assembly.

Two themes emerged from the qualitative multi-site case study (Merriam, 2009) study: (a) 3 of the 4 colleges used the results to adjust programs and add staff for short-term improvement on specific measures highlighted by the CSFs, and (b) faculty leaders expressed that a disconnect existed between the state accountability and what actually was occurring in the classrooms of the colleges (Harbour & Nagy, 2005). One college's leadership was seen as giving "pretend" compliance by faculty, one faculty senate leader

was unfamiliar with the CSFs, and another regarded institutional effectiveness as a matter of concern for the administration only (Harbour & Nagy, 2005).

While the CSFs' measures reflected student performance, there appears to be a lack of strategic alignment as may be found in Birnbaum's (1988) loose coupling of administrative control and faculty teaching. Harbour and Nagy (2005) raised a question regarding whether state legislatures "can influence teaching and learning by identifying specific institutional performance indicators and rewarding positive institutional performance with additional institutional funding" (p. 459). Further studies are suggested for more information about whether faculty leaders are committed, unaware, or apathetic concerning the use of accountability measures such as the CSFs to demonstrate they are carrying out their mission (Harbour & Nagy, 2005).

### 2.3.6 Summary of the Academic Perspective

The literature on the academic-professional perspective of accountability in higher education provides a multifaceted approach to understanding the traditional role that faculty played in teaching and learning and the additional roles mandated by federal, state, and regional accrediting agencies (Birnbaum, 1988; Welsh et al., 2005). The traditional aspect applies to whether an institution is meeting its stated mission, while the current approach adds requirements to ensure quality to outside entities (Balog & Search, 2006; Birnbaum, 1988; Harbour & Nagy, 2005; Mattis & Sinn, 2009; Smith & Finney, 2008). Studies by Farmer and Paris (2000) and Harbour and Nagy (2005) indicate that faculty have an awareness of quality improvement, but that it is not deeply ingrained into the campus culture. Regional accreditation may be changing this perception as all six

regional agencies have put improvement projects into their reaffirmation processes (McMurtrie, 2000).

The linkage between accountability and strategic planning is highlighted by comments by Keller (1997), in which he stated the need for a reexamination of the traditional means of governance in which faculty autonomy is of the utmost importance, loose financial controls, course proliferation and redundancy, and minimal services to student are accepted parts of higher education. A view of the landscape surrounding the community college is a necessary part of dealing with the multiple constituencies that the colleges serve. Strategic planning—or, more specifically, strategic planning and its corollaries—strategic thinking, strategic management, and strategic learning point toward an institution that is neither isolated nor subservient to its environment (Gumport, 2003; Rowley et al., 1997). The following section will discuss strategic planning as a strategy for improving services to all three points of Burke’s accountability triangle.

#### 2.4 Strategic Planning at the Institution

Leslie (1996) stated that strategic planning involves what Keller (1983) called the *joint big decision committee* (JBDC) as a new form of academic institutional governance. In the financially challenging decade of the 1990s, the social compact that Burke (2005) described as a “hands-off” delegation of academic planning and teaching to the institution eroded as multiple constituents made demands on the mission of colleges and universities. The JBDCs were supposed to deal with economic and political issues through the use of the strategic planning. In a reference to Birnbaum (1988), Leslie stated that strategic planning is not a suitable model for academic institutions:

First it is possible that a loosely coupled organization simply cannot (and perhaps should not) make “strategic” decisions. One of the presumed strengths of a

loosely coupled system is that it can adapt by relying on the collective (and independent) intelligence of its constituent parts. A university with many colleges and other program units probably does not have enough centralized intelligence (or information) to impose some standardized strategy on, say, an engineering school, a school of nursing, and a department of Slavic languages simultaneously. (p. 104)

Leslie (1996) alluded to the academic point of the accountability triangle. Can postsecondary institutions be flexible enough to meet the external needs espoused by the market and political perspectives while accommodating the academic perspective without using a formal planning process (Burke, 2005)? Can faculty accept a different role than the traditional teaching through the social compact where curricular decisions are made in the loose coupling between administration and faculty (Birnbaum, 1988; Burke, 2005)? The following review of literature concerning strategic planning and plan implementation will explore how colleges respond to needs of the three points of Burke's accountability triangle.

#### 2.4.1 Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Keller (1983) stated that management is a core requirement for all organizations, not just for businesses. Colleges may be reaching the position where they can no longer afford planning based on incremental change made as a result of internal reviews; instead, colleges must effectively cope with changing demographics, increased external demands, financial shortfalls, and the need for structural and academic shifts. There is significant discussion about whether business models of any kind are appropriate for higher education (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2002), but strategic planning has persisted since the late 1970s when Carnegie Mellon University and Stanford University experimented with the process (Keller, 1983, 1997).

Strategic planning is a “formal process designed to help an organization identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment” (Rowley et al., 1997, p. 15). Burke (2005) used the accountability triangle as a visual model to propose linkages between accountability and the priorities of political, market, and academic-professional perspectives. In order to balance the three perspectives, it is worthwhile to examine the literature concerning a formal process of strategic planning.

#### 2.4.2 Benefits of Strategic Planning

Proponents of strategic planning criticize the traditional methods of planning on college campuses as merely “operational,” “annual,” or “5-year” planning for incremental changes in the status quo (Keller, 1997; Rowley et al., 1997). In the traditional method, internal goals yield objectives that are implemented in a closed environment. Faculty have a great deal of input, and traditional values such as academic freedom, reliance on institutional mission, vision, and values guide the operation of the institute on an annual basis. Short-term goals are established by the traditional method, which are “measureable, time-specific, achievable, and acceptable” (Rowley et al., 1997, p. 38).

Keller (1983, 1997) argued that the traditional method of operational planning does not provide for an adequate view of the external forces driving change in education. Keller (1983) stated that campus leaders who do not plan or otherwise look into the future become “prisoners of external forces, most of them unpleasant” (p. 67). It can be surmised that if Burke’s accountability triangle appears to support this view of multiple forces demanding action in the use of resources and an accounting for the results, then it follows that a comprehensive plan for meeting the needs of diverse constituencies would be helpful to obtain desired results.

Critics of strategic planning, however, charge that strategic planning does not work since it is highly complex, involves too many elements, and does not lend itself to short-term operational needs (Birnbaum, 2000; Mintzberg, 1994). Proponents of strategic planning counter this view by associating planning with common points in accreditation (Barker & Smith, 1998). Whether it is planning for an improvement project or for the ability of the institution to meet its organizational mission, the organization must be prepared to either maintain stability or make changes in an environment of rising costs, changes in student demographics, and multiple demands on colleges to perform (Gumport, 2003; Keller, 1997).

#### 2.4.3 Steps in the Formal Planning Process

Rowley and colleagues (1997) cited the model they used when Lujan was president of the University of Northern Colorado, Rowley was a management professor assigned to strategic planning, and Dolence was a consultant in the process. Despite opposition from both faculty and lower levels of academic administration, the strategic planning process was used to provide a broad view of the “opportunities” afforded by the environment surrounding the university. The processes that Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) used are described in the following steps:

1. Develop key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure desired outcomes.
2. Conduct an external environmental assessment of the political, economic, sociological, and technical areas that can be expected to have an impact on the college; conduct a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis to align the institution to respond to environmental effects.

3. Assess the internal environment to measure the influence of the organization's planning factors: (a) structure, (b) strategies and goals, (c) objectives, and (d) resources upon the selected KPIs.
4. Evaluate the planning factors against the KPIs using a cross-impact matrix.
5. Generate ideas in a free-flowing brainstorming process to attempt to improve the organization's performance against the KPIs.
6. Conduct KPI analysis of the ideas generated in the previous step.
7. Create the revised organizational goals, objectives, strategies, and the mission from steps 1 through 6.
8. Estimate how the organization's strategies, goals, and objectives will affect the KPIs.
9. Finalize the organization's revised strategies, goals, and objectives for implementation; make assignments to the individuals in the organization who will be responsible for the implementation.
10. Monitor and evaluate the strategies to provide feedback and to control activities.

Another proponent of strategic planning, Heydinger (1997) agreed that strategic change should include the external forces of political and market forces similar to the accountability triangle. Heydinger followed many of the same steps as Rowley et al. (1997) but emphasized the need to measure faculty's ability to meet student learning outcomes and align resources around those needs. The use of the budget to reinforce strategic planning shows that strategic plans are aligned with the needs of the college (Beard, 2009; Heydinger, 1997).



#### 2.4.4 Market Perspective of Strategic Planning

The need for accessibility versus success for the underprepared student is a major concern for the community college (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Barr & Schuetz, 2008; Dowd, 2003; McClenney, 2004; Shaw & Rab, 2003) as it struggles for funding in the face of exploding demand (Haygood, 2009; Mullen & Phillippe, 2009; Zeidenberg, 2008). This issue remains at the forefront of community college planning and successful achieving of state measures (NCCCS, 2009b).

The market perspective of Burke's accountability triangle involves students, businesses, and other external constituencies of the college. The need for programs rises and falls as the needs are expressed and supported by data in a culture of evidence (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009). Strategic plans should take into account the need for academic programs as well as the college's ability to provide them. For community colleges, access to programs (or program availability) must be balanced with the feasibility of students needing the program for future employment or for transfer to a 4-year college (Taylor et al., 2008).

Morphew (2000) presented a case study of strategic planning leading to the elimination of an academic program during a period of financial stress. Morphew noted that degree programs in nursing, education, and social work are more likely than others to be eliminated during times of fiscal problems. Resources are reallocated to more successful programs that may be able to attract higher levels of external funding.

Such a retrenchment does not constitute a long-term strategy (Israel & Kihl, 2005; Morphew, 2000). Strategic planning may necessitate reducing programs to recognize the college's market strengths and weaknesses and to reallocate resources to the stronger

programs. This restructuring process is known as *rightsizing* (Morphew, 2000). A program may be marked for termination due to lack of internal support, thus making termination a political decision. In considering the termination of a program, there are five criteria to consider:

1. the program's quality;
2. the program's alignment with the college's mission;
3. the program's demand by constituents (businesses, the state, and students);
4. the program's cost effectiveness; and
5. the program's unique nature (Morphew, 2000, p. 262).

Morphew (2000) concluded that strategic plans are useful for establishing program priorities but may be counterproductive when unanticipated issues develop. Morphew described the difficulty that colleges have with rigid plans when they need to adjust to environmental circumstances. The planning process should include contingencies to enable colleges to revisit the strategy after the plans have been implemented.

#### 2.4.5 Political Perspective of Strategic Planning

In times of state revenue shortfalls and agency cutbacks, budgets are unpredictable and may be reduced at the same time needs increase (Haygood, 2009). Israel and Kihl (2005) cited the use of formal strategic planning as a means of avoiding disruption of college services when the state budget in Texas was cut 7 percent in one year. Through the forward-looking scan of enrollment trends—including future high school graduation class sizes, the economic climate of the service area, the growth and decline of specific disciplines, faculty staffing, and salary requirements—Israel and Kihl

stated that the plan permitted an orderly, proactive approach to cutting or sustaining programs in a North Texas community college district.

In anticipation of a coming economic downturn, Israel and Kihl (2005) conducted an environmental scan and noted that incremental reductions would be insufficient to meet the expected shortfalls from the state budget. As a result of the strategic planning process, the college moved from incrementalism to solid planning. Managers were held accountable for spending, and the accountability cascaded through the leadership structure. One of the key elements was an open, debated process in which budget managers made their case for maintaining what they had or for pursuing new initiatives. The process created both “winners” and “losers,” but the college was able to meet a goal of a static bottom line with no annual increases in expenditures during the state shortfall that had budget reductions (Israel & Kihl, 2005).

The benefit of strategic planning, in this case, is the ability of the institution to anticipate changes in the political environment. Had the college discussed in Israel and Kihl’s (2005) article simply looked inward, the changes necessitated by the budget reductions would have significantly hampered the college’s operations and continued stability. However, it may be anticipated that when colleges conduct a strategic planning process, there may be significant opposition from the academic-professional perspective of the accountability triangle.

The linkage to the political perspective shows that colleges are at the mercy of state budgets and may need to make drastic cuts in programs or staff in the event of economic downturns (Zeidenberg, 2008). The NCCCS and its campuses are at a significant disadvantage when state revenues fall and they are not prepared to make

proactive cuts (Haygood, 2009). This element will be studied in the research about planning processes in the NCCCS.

#### 2.4.6 Academic Perspective of Strategic Planning

Goho and Webb (2003) cited the need for colleges to link analysis with institutional decision making. Institutional leadership often presses forward without adequate analysis because collecting, analyzing, and reporting data may be time consuming and could fail to answer the current crisis (Goho & Webb, 2003). The authors suggested that the dichotomy arises from the tendency of planners to be logical and rational thinkers, while leaders tend to be “creative/divergent/lateral/generative” thinkers (p. 377). Keller (1997) cited that faculty and administration may perceive internal operational planning, complemented by the “gut instinct” of college leaders, as being an adequate planning mechanism. This perception is one of the major obstacles for effective strategic planning (Keller, 1983, 1997).

Strategic planning often begins with SWOT analysis, which includes environmental scanning of the forces affecting the future performance of the institution (Goho & Webb, 2003). The process focuses on adaptability to change, creativity, the importance of the strategy process itself, and the facilitation of organizational learning. As Keller (1997) noted, a key element of success is the inclusion of faculty.

In their study of strategic planning at Red River College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Goho and Webb (2003) linked the process of professional strategic planning and analysis with the authority, intuition, organizational knowledge, and creativity of academic administrators. The college’s traditional planning method of a 5-year strategic and operational plan was used with two new tools: (a) an environmental scan, and (b) a

new means of consulting with senior leadership. The additional analytic inputs were designed to ensure that senior administration was directly connected to the scanning process as the college attempted to link itself to its environment (Goho & Webb, 2003).

As a result of the process, Goho and Webb (2003) found that the strategic planning process identified budget priorities that the planning team used to develop upcoming financial plans. Administrative and faculty leaders were required to analyze trends and articulate their area's future needs in response to the impact of the anticipated trends. The result was a movement from strategic *planning* to strategic *thinking*, for strategic management as "soft analysis" was used to scan the external forces that would be exerting pressure on college departments in the near future. The planning process became a corporate undertaking, no longer limited to top administration and professional planners (Goho & Webb, 2003).

Rowley and Sherman (2002) cited the budget as the key to implementing a successful strategic plan: "An institution's budget is the single most powerful activity on campus. Control of the budget is control of the strategic plan as well as control of the campus" when strategic plans have been tied to resource allocation and resources management (p. 9). For the strategic plan to be successful, faculty and staff involved in the budgeting process must be at the table for the strategic planning process. Budgeting for the success of collegiate programs reflects the capacity of the college to meet its mission, a key element of accreditation (Smith & Finney, 2008).

#### 2.4.7 Strategic Planning and Accreditation

Barker and Smith (1998) proposed the integration of strategic planning with regional accreditation. Common elements include "an examination of the institution's

mission, goals, plans to meet the goal and an assessment of how well the goals were met” (p. 741). By integrating strategic planning and planning to meet accreditation, colleges demonstrate that they are using a standard process through the intervening years between accreditation. The systems required by accrediting bodies serve as subsystems of the strategic plan on multiple hierarchical levels.

Barker and Smith (1998) summarized the common elements of both strategic planning and accreditation preparation in colleges and universities:

At the institutional level, the mission is established and periodically reviewed based on an assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses, and an assessment of opportunities and threats within the external environment. This function can be assigned to a planning or research group that best fits the organizational structure of the institution. Broad goals, plans and priorities are established for or by vice-presidents, schools, and colleges. They in turn establish or instigate the formulation of midterm goals, plans and priorities for the departments and offices. At the department and office level, specific measurable goals are determined for the budget period. Operating (short range) plans to include the necessary funding are developed to carry out these goals. This process can be the foundation for budgets based on the institution’s priorities. (p. 745)

Accreditation fits into the strategic planning model with the assumption that the articulated goals include a statement that the requirements of the accrediting agency will be met at the time of the next review. When the institution has recently completed an accreditation review, this is a long-term goal. Intermediate and short-range goals will be developed to support the long-term goal and will be based on the requirements of the accrediting agency as shown in the “must” statements. Plans would be developed to achieve the stated goals. Institutional budgets would include the necessary funds to implement the plans

With a systematic approach to accreditation, Barker and Smith (1998) stated that the college will make better use of its resources and will be better prepared for

accreditation if it has a formal process that includes planning and accreditation elements. Communication of the elements of planning (e.g., SWOT analysis, budgetary priorities) is necessary to present the need for formal planning to overcome political discord among faculty and staff (Rowley & Sherman, 2004). If done properly, strategic planning is a useful tool (Keller, 1997), but often strategic planning is viewed as a fad or has not been well executed as documented in the following section.

#### 2.4.8 Criticism of Strategic Planning in Higher Education

In *Management Fads in Higher Education*, Birnbaum (2000) decried the trendy tools often pursued by higher education as being “championed by a midlevel technocrat...who then promoted it to senior executives in central administration” (p. xv). The resulting system is one that has inputs (students, budgets, facilities, faculty, staff), processes (programs, courses, classes, libraries, student activities), and outputs (students ready for more college, for work, or for more productive lives as citizens). The college’s survival is based upon giving the customer what he or she wants, since the customer can purchase the outputs from any variety of sources in the market. Thus education becomes a commodity whose competitive nature requires downsizing faculty, replacing lectures with Internet sessions, having fewer bricks-and-mortar campus facilities, reducing scholarship, and deemphasizing faculty and student support services and the use of economic criteria to assess faculty performance (Birnbaum, 2000).

Instead of chasing fads, college administrators should focus on building on the ideals of the academy, such as “a liberating education, the free person, critical thinking, personal growth, social justice, knowledge for its own sake, and improving society” (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 226). Under the accountability model, the professor—once regarded

as a partner in shared authority—is relegated to a supporting role in how the institution functions, in quantitative terms of products and dollars. Instead of emphasizing the strengthening of deficiencies, Birnbaum (1992) asserted that administrators should build on strengths; stay engaged in campus matters over external issues; and support, challenge, and develop faculty. This should be done on a daily basis, as opposed to chasing management and academic fads, which have come and gone since the 1980s. Included among the fads are external accountability, and strategic planning for institutional success (Birnbaum, 2000).

In his criticism of strategic planning, Mintzberg (1994) defined *planning* as “a formalized procedure to produce an articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decisions” (p. 12). Mintzberg stated that formal strategic planning is actually the antithesis of what is really done in organizations—decomposing, or breaking down, complex situations and analyzing the causes or potential causes of failure. Mintzberg asserted that the product of strategic planning, strategies and substrategies, labeled in explicit terms into formalized documents are more than likely to be inadequate to deal with changing or turbulent times.

In case studies of educational institutions under economic stress, Leslie and Fretwell (1996) found a need for balance between the formal planning process making hard and fast decisions and keeping the process as open and participatory as possible: “The institutions that we studied that seemed to be adjusting well were those that remained focused on the long term, were able to articulate a vision for their institution, developed good information and open communication, and engaged in continuous learning and adaptation” (p. 217). Existing pressures from the need for capital



infrastructure, maintenance, and growth; the reluctance of state legislatures to raise taxes to support colleges; the political pressure to expand access to nontraditional and often underprepared students; the marketplace pressure to contain tuition costs; and regulations that require higher levels of administrative expense result in the need for *strategic* changes, not just incremental ones (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

It appears there is no specific model that will work for every institution, but there is a need for some type of planning process or combination of types to ensure that the organization is meeting the needs of the three critical elements—the market, political, and academic concerns perspective. The types of strategic planning used by the three exemplary community colleges in this study to meet the demands of the market, political, and academic perspectives are the purpose of this research.

#### 2.4.9 Academic Considerations and Strategic Planning

Marcus (1999) stated that “concepts of planning are based on a formalized process that provides the appearance of objectivity to produce an integrated system of rational decisions” (p. 46). Marcus argued, however, that efforts to establish institutional policy depend more on the play of power by individuals or groups to achieve their interest than rationality or objectivity. The concentration of interests at the possible expense of the greater good of the institution is called *micropolitics* (p. 46). The complication of micropolitics often occurs when change is introduced that may alter policy, challenge turf, redefine desired behaviors, or modify decision-making patterns (Marcus, 1999).

Marcus (1999) stated the effects of micropolitics in a campus planning process, as follows:

1. Planning provides for a shift of power in favor of the administration through the selection of planning team members, the bypassing of normal governance mechanisms (e.g., administrative and faculty representative bodies), and the allocation of resources to plans that match leaders' priorities.
2. The use of a shared vision can create a climate that is congenial to planning. Focusing on the future state and benefits of planning for it creates thematic concepts that faculty and staff can accept and want to be part of.
3. Participatory planning models do not serve the institution well when a financial crisis must be faced. Faculty should take a stronger role when resources are stable or expanding.
4. A participatory process has fewer risks than a controlled process, as open participation can reduce a political climate to a more supportive one.
5. A planning committee may not be the appropriate venue for discussing program closures. Reallocation of resources is a difficult process, even with the best planning. Administration should study the data gathered, make the decision, and communicate the need rather than using the planning committee as a rubber stamp for what may be an unpopular decision.

#### 2.4.10 Strategic Planning Versus Academic Culture

Swenk (1999) noted that the benefits of using strategic planning when the process is applied with foresight and flexibility to guide the organization are substantial:

Administrators recognize that institutions cannot respond effectively to change without formalized procedures for comprehensive planning and decision-making. Also strategic planners believe environmental problems are not just societal or biological problems, but organizational problems. Strategic planners remind administrators that the institution's short-term goals can defeat its long-term ones. Strategic Planning is an integrative process during which university leaders can

comprehensively analyze the institution's mission, goals, and programs. The members of the institution can become excited about new possibilities and be encouraged to adopt attitudes of rediscovery and reevaluation, thus enhancing the institution's effectiveness in balancing external and internal demands. (p. 2)

Swenk's (1999) research led her to the conclusion that the failure to acknowledge the gaps between the values of the organizational culture and the conceptual, rational, businesslike basis of academic strategic planning frequently leads to the failure of the planning process. The theory behind strategic planning is that optimal choices are made in an environment where boundaries are clear, functions are well defined, and the best alternative is clearly communicated to rational organization members. In effective planning, a hierarchy of goals is clearly stated so that each level supports the level above it (Asan & Tanyas, 2007; Swenk, 1999). Planning for change is a deliberate, structured process; however, pushing a rational business model into a collegial, expert-based faculty culture can result in a disconnect between the mission of the institution and the duty of all constituents to make the institution as effective as possible (Swenk, 1999).

As previously noted, there seems to be substantial disagreement in the academic concern—professional point of Burke's accountability triangle between proponents of the businesslike approach to planning (Barker & Smith, 1998; Farmer & Paris, 2000; Keller, 1983; Rowley & Sherman, 2002; Welsh et al., 2005) and opponents who believe the logical strategic approach is less effective in a collegial approach that makes decisions through a cybernetic, self-correcting model of planning and governance (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Harbour & Nagy, 2003; Leslie, 1996; Marcus, 1999; Morphew, 2000; Swenk, 1999). It may be theorized that the institution's internal political system and the

college's culture appear to have as much bearing upon the success of planning as the planning process itself.

## 2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

The framework of Burke's accountability triangle provides a structure for reviewing the literature on strategic planning from (a) the market perspective, (b) the political-state perspective, and (c) the academic concern–professional perspective. The literature on higher education planning is broken down into the three points. Each perspective serves as a lens to review the literature that contributes to an understanding of planning processes.

### 2.5.1 Three Perspectives of the Literature Review

The market perspective is based upon the demands of society (business and industry, parents and students, contributing foundations, etc.) as each tries to influence the direction of colleges, particularly the community college. The danger of the community college becoming a service provider (Gumport, 2003) merits consideration. As foreign businesses exert demands such as those illustrated in the markets of Portugal (Taylor et al., 2008) and Saudi Arabia (Al-Turki et al., 2008), American businesses can be expected to follow suit and should anticipate customized training or make sure that the institution is being run in a businesslike manner, including planning (Beard, 2009).

The political-state perspective shows that there is still no national measure for the effectiveness of colleges and universities (Bailey et al., 2006; Boggs, 2009; Burke & Minassians, 2004). Attempts to instill state standards meet a level of resistance (Harbour & Nagy, 2003; Welsh et al., 2005) while efficiency is gaining more of a following, such as activity-based accounting and calculating return on investment for faculty activities

(Carducci et al., 2007; Redlinger & Valcik, 2008). The concept of funding being based entirely on performance (Burke & Minassians, 2004) adds another potential dividing point between collegiate institutions and lawmakers, as the social compact is further decimated by the need to demonstrate accountability (Burke, 2005).

In the academic concern–professional point of the accountability triangle, the resistance of faculty to formal strategic planning is grounds for an ongoing debate (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Keller, 1983, 1997; Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2002, 2004). The decision to use strategic planning models appears to be best served when there is a high level of cultural openness, trust, and participation of all involved from both faculty and administrative sides (Marcus, 1999; Morphew, 2000). Still, the traditional, short-term operational planning model persists in much of the literature (Birnbaum, 1988; Harbour & Nagy, 2003), while strategic planning, when used in a rigid sense, is blamed for strategic planning failures (Morphew, 2000; Swenk, 1999).

### 2.5.2 Implications Drawn From the Literature Review

Since the 1990s, more pressure has been applied to higher education to be more accountable to both the market constituents and the political-state financial elements of higher education. At the same time, the academy has undergone changes to be more responsive to the needs of its constituents—sometimes smoothly, sometimes contentiously (Commission on Colleges, 2008; Marcus, 1999; Swenk, 1999). Models exist and have been used for successful planning (Israel & Kihl, 2005; Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2002, 2004; Welsh et al., 2005).

Most of the studies have been situated in universities and 4-year colleges. The planning method favored by community colleges has not been clearly identified in the

body of extant literature. Harbour and Nagy (2003) conducted a multi-site case study of the attitudes and perceptions of administrators and faculty representatives regarding the North Carolina CSFs, while Welsh et al. (2005) looked at all colleges in Kentucky. Farmer and Paris (2000) surveyed chief academic officers concerning the applicability of CQIs in 50 of 58 North Carolina community colleges. Research on the preferred planning methods of community colleges may provide more insight into the planning process so that other community colleges can see how successful colleges develop institutional plans.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study to answer the research questions about how community colleges met accountability demands of the market, political, and academic perspectives. The conceptual/theoretical foundation through which the research was conducted is through the lens of Burke's accountability triangle. The qualitative research plan proposal, through multi-site case studies and cross-case analysis, is provided in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The question of accountability to internal and external constituents, including the market, political and academic perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle (2005), continues to be a challenge for community colleges. Using Burke's triangle as a lens through which to view the problem of how community colleges respond strategically to the demands placed upon them by market, political, and academic perspectives permits the researcher to organize questions and create a study that examines the cases of three successful North Carolina community colleges. This study examines strategic planning as three within-case studies followed by a cross-case analysis of EIP colleges.

### 3.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study of community college accountability factors and planning is to explore the types of strategic planning used by a selection of three community colleges (bounded cases). The three selected colleges met all of the requirements of EIP status according to the state-mandated CSFs in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years after having failed to meet them in previous years (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a). I interviewed key administrators and reviewed pertinent documents at the three community colleges and found common responses in strategic plans to demands from the three points of Burke's accountability triangle.

Using the concept of *cross-case thematic analysis* (Ezzy, 2002; Merriam, 2009), this research takes an inductive approach through interviews as well as archival and public documents to understand how community colleges that had not met external

standards were able to do so. The study particularly determines the role that formal strategic planning had in the colleges' success, and it also examines the colleges' methods of planning. Planning implementation, according to the literature, ranges from the formal open-system approach of strategic planning, which considers all applicable external elements that can affect the college (Keller, 1983, 1997; Rowley et al., 1997; Rowley & Sherman, 2002, 2004), to a more informal method of a self-correcting mechanism, which does not draw upon the anticipated effect of external elements (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000). The inductive method used in this research does not imply a preconceived hypothesis of which method is used or which method is best, but instead builds toward theory from interviews, observations, and understandings from being in the field (Merriam, 2009).

This study will attempt to answer a set of research questions about planning concerning the selected set of multiple bounded cases (Merriam, 2009) of three selected North Carolina community colleges that achieved EIP status in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years after not achieving that status in the previous 4 years (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a). The bounded case study approach permits the investigator to conduct thorough, detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and report the results in descriptive, case-based themes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). The resulting study provides direct insight into the planning process at the three colleges. It is a story told by the administrators who develop, design, and implement systems to meet accountability standards and provide quality education to their students while ensuring access to all who wish to engage in learning.



The research questions that guide this study are based upon a theoretical foundation using Burke's accountability triangle. The questions were posed to study participants as an interview protocol approved by the UNCC Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B). The research questions and sub-questions consist of the following:

1. What pressures did the college face from an accountability standpoint in the years 2003 to 2007
  - a. from students?
  - b. from business and industry?
  - c. from foundations?
  - d. from state and federal governments?
  - e. from accrediting agencies?
  - f. from other avenues of demand?
2. What was the role of strategic planning in the prior years, from 2003 to 2007, that led to the college's meeting EIP standards in 2007–08 or 2008–09?
  - a. Which description of strategic planning best describes the method used by the colleges in the study?
  - b. How is planning structured?
3. What have the colleges learned about planning through the implementation of the planning process and the execution of the plan?

### 3.2 Research Design

The design utilized in this research is the qualitative multi-site bounded case study. Merriam (2009) described the strength of the case study as being delimited or

bounded, in that making a choice of what to study directs the researcher to work within limits or boundaries. Each case, or community college in this study, is a “bounded integrated system with working parts” (Glesne, 2006, p. 13).

The case study in this research consists of three institutions and their approaches to strategic planning. Selecting the colleges to invite to participate consisted of selecting cases that met the relevant selection criteria that fully answered the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam, 2009). As a bounded case study, this research can be defined as an empirical study of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context through employing various sources of evidence (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The emphasis of the bounded case study is more on *what* is studied than on the methodological choice, as data may be gathered by a variety of methods (e.g., interviews, observations, public and archival records) and then analyzed through cross-case analysis of the three colleges (Ezzy, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

This research is qualitative and exploratory in that the method and process of data collection allows for greater definition of the research questions regarding strategic planning (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Creswell (2009) similarly referred to the lack of a tightly prescribed design as “emergent design,” in that the process may change after the researcher begins fieldwork. Patton (1990) stated that a qualitative design continues to be emergent even after data collection has begun; the degree of flexibility and openness is a positive attribute of this research design.

### 3.2.1 Characteristics of the Qualitative Case Study

The design utilized in this research is the qualitative case study of three North Carolina community colleges’ approach to strategic planning. I conducted interviews of

key contributors to the planning process at each of the colleges, contextually; observations were compiled from field notes; and archival and public documents were reviewed for demographic and campus data as well as for strategic plan information. By having three colleges from different parts of North Carolina, with Carnegie classifications of large (Oak), medium (Pine), and small (Maple) community colleges (Carnegie Foundation, 2011), the bounded case study approach permits a cross section of the state, which enabled me to apply thematic coding and conduct cross-case analysis so that the study has a variety of rich and differentiated resources (Glesne, 2006; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Qualitative case studies have unique features that include being (a) *particularistic*, in that the case study focuses on a particular process; (b) *descriptive*, in that the end product is a thick description of the case under study, with “thick description” being a complete, literal description of the process under study, and shows the intersection of many variables over time; and (c) *heuristic*, in that it illuminates the reader’s understanding of the process (phenomenon) under study and allows for new meaning and an extension of what is known about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

In selecting a qualitative case study, Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted that global decisions must be made regarding the setting, site (single or multiple), population, and phenomenon of interest (what is unique, compelling, or unusual). These choices shape subsequent decisions and are part of “purposive” selection (see section 3.3, Institution and Participant Selection) (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

### 3.2.2 Advantages of the Qualitative Case Study

Creswell (2009) listed characteristics of the qualitative case study that include multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, that are organized into categories or themes that incorporate all data sources. The high degree of interaction between the interviewer and the interview participant in an in-depth interview permits an exploratory approach that leads to richer descriptions than a survey normally can provide (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that the value of using a qualitative methodology (a) lies in the ability to conduct research that elicits multiple constructed realities from participants, which are then studied holistically; (b) delivers in-depth research into complex situations and processes; (c) explains where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds in conflicting situations; (d) provides research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations; and (e) provides research on real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals. The advantages of the qualitative case study method also apply to the multi-site qualitative case study method. This study is a qualitative case study based upon document analysis and gathering qualitative data, including interviews, and observations of planning activities, if permitted by the participating institutions.

### 3.2.3 Multiple Case Studies

Researchers of multiple qualitative case studies recognize that numerous sites could be visited, numerous events or activities could be observed, many people could be interviewed, and numerous documents could be read that contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 2009). Selection of a multiple

qualitative case studies involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases. Being able to find patterns or common themes in multiple sites confirms the trustworthiness of the research findings (Ezzy, 2002; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). (Note: Section 3.5, Data Collection, provides additional design for trustworthiness.)

The multi-site qualitative case study method allows for data to be coded into themes, which are categorized while sorting through the data (Ezzy, 2002). This multiple case study examines the role of accountability and planning in the achievement of EIP status for three North Carolina community colleges. The selected colleges had not met EIP status in the previous 4 years, but attained EIP status in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years.

In the area of social research, multiple case studies have been used frequently. In the business best seller, *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) used multiple case studies to show how business organizations followed common thematic elements to outperform rivals who failed to adapt to changing environments. Bennis and Nanus (2003) identified business leaders and found common themes of the leadership traits the leaders used to be successful in their organizations. In *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal (1997) looked at multiple business and social phenomena through multiple “lenses” to show that managers and leaders can benefit from looking at problems through more than a single perspective.

On the academic side, Leslie and Fretwell (1996) examined colleges faced with fiscal stress and found elements of sustainability in their book, *Wise Moves in Hard Times*. Harbour and Nagy (2005) interviewed administrators at four North Carolina community colleges to gain their perspective about the CSFs. In a study of South Dakota

community colleges, Card and Card (2007) studied distance learning objectives and implementation in context of broader institutional mission. The use of the multi-case study is well-grounded in business and education as a means of gathering data, coding it, and having it make sense to the reader as the researcher attempts to answer the research questions.

### 3.3 Institution and Participant Selection

In order for the research design of the qualitative bounded case study to be effective, an important choice for the researcher is the selection of the cases and participants (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the cases are the three community colleges, including individuals in each community college who are involved in the planning process of their college. Qualitative research usually does not involve populations large enough to make random sampling feasible, nor is the purpose of qualitative research the generalization of a sample that pertains to an entire population (Glesne, 2006). Therefore, the selection of cases and individual participants is done purposefully, or in a “purposive” manner, to select participants who can provide information-rich cases for an in-depth study about issues and can provide answers to the research questions. This requires establishing criteria for case selection and then selection of case or cases that meet the criteria (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). This applies to both the selection of the institution(s) and the selection of individual participants.

#### 3.3.1 Institution Selection

The purposive sampling method is used for this study. Merriam (2009) described the use of purposive sampling as being “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from

which the most can be learned” (p. 77). The choice of a realistic sample is based upon the possibility of entry; there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, and structures are present for this selection; the researcher is likely to be able to build trust with the participants; the study can be conducted ethically; and data quality and the credibility of the study is reasonably assumed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The selection criteria for purposive sample selection should consist of a wide range of characteristics for the study (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) noted that four aspects may be considered: (a) the setting where the research takes place, (b) the people who are observed or interviewed, (c) the events that the people being interviewed are doing or have done, and (d) the process of events that the people are doing in the setting.

The concept of purposive sampling applies to the selection of potential participating institutions in this study. The selection of three community colleges that gained EIP status in 2007–08 or 2008–09 after not achieving it in the previous 4 years shows that they may have done something different and provides information-rich cases that help answer the research questions of this study (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

Participating institutions were selected from institutions that did not meet the criteria for EIP status for each of the years 2003 to 2007 (although some may have been recognized for a less rigorous “superior” rating in the years 2003 to 2007) (NCCCS, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009b, 2010a). I attempted to select three community colleges in various parts of North Carolina, with a mix of rural and urban settings, in order to provide a sample with rich variation. The selection of the three colleges allowed me to study each college in-depth, using multiple sources of information

such as interviews of people involved in planning, document analysis of archival and public information documents, and field notes from observations (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Having a small number of cases permitted me to conduct an in-depth investigation of the planning processes at each college with the intent of obtaining rich comparisons through cross-case analysis.

### 3.3.2 Participant Selection

Participants should be selected on the basis of how it is anticipated that their knowledge and opinion may provide important insight into answering the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Merriam (2009) cited a basis for finding as much variation as possible within the cases to fully explore the bounded case. The purposefully selected individuals, as well as the purposefully selected sites, were selected on the criteria that the individuals were able to help the researcher better understand the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009).

Creswell (2009) stated the importance of securing permission from an official to gain entry to the participating entity in qualitative research. He referred to “gatekeepers, individuals at the research site that provide access to the site and allow or permit the research to be done” (p. 178). This official has sufficient position to gain research access to the other key informants and permit the researcher to examine archival data pertinent to the planning process (Cjeda & Leist, 2006; Farmer & Paris, 2000; Harbour & Nagy, 2005).

The process of obtaining permission to conduct the interviews began with locating a gatekeeper at each college. My supervisor, an academic vice president at Cleveland Community College, talked to her counterpart at one of the colleges in the



study. Following rejections by two college presidents in nearby towns, I asked Cleveland Community College's executive vice president to contact a former colleague who is the current president of one of the participating colleges. The third college was suggested by my college president, who obtained tentative agreement, but when faced with a list of requests—including observation of a planning meeting, convening a focus group of administrators or faculty, and review of pertinent documents—refused to cooperate. Following a phone conversation with this president, I trimmed down the request list and was able to see multiple sources for interviews, but nothing in a group setting was permitted and the interview with the research director, one of the officials at the college, was limited to a half-hour.

The colleges selected were given pseudonyms, and the participants were asked to sign informed consent forms approved by the UNCC IRB (see Appendix B). Participants were promised anonymity in the informed consent. Colleges were given the names Oak, Maple, and Pine with no connection between the real college name or location and the pseudonym.

### 3.4 Interview Participant Selection

Individuals in the participating colleges were invited to participate in an in-depth interview with me, the researcher, at the participant's college. Individuals were selected based upon their anticipated capability to provide "rich information" to help answer the research questions (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). The individuals at each of the colleges were interviewed based on their experience at the institution in the years leading up to the successful attainment of EIP in 2007–08 or later, since all three colleges have had considerable turnover with relatively new presidents setting up their own senior staff.

The knowledge of the participants was well-suited to answer questions about accountability and covered all points of Burke’s accountability triangle—political, market, and academic concern. I found that collegiate officials, as listed in Table 1, provided rich data about the planning process for their institutions (not all positions were interviewed at each college).

Through the gatekeeper, I gained trust and was able to meet with additional officials (see Table 1) or was referred to others with knowledge of the accountability issues or strategic planning. The possibility of having other participants or sources point to additional contributions to rich information cannot be ignored in the design, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) called this *snowball sampling*. I found that the others not originally on the list added to the study and the general context of the cases.

Table 1

*College Officials Who Can Inform About Market, Political, and Academic Perspectives and Planning Process*

| Official                           | Market | Political | Academic | Planning Process |
|------------------------------------|--------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| President                          | X      | X         | X        | X                |
| Academic administrator             | X      | X         | X        | X                |
| Student services administrator     | X      | X         |          | X                |
| Continuing education administrator | X      | X         |          | X                |
| Research director                  | X      | X         | X        | X                |
| Academic dean                      | X      |           | X        | X                |
| Academic counselor                 | X      |           | X        |                  |

### 3.5 Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data consists of direct quotes from participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge through documents and interviews, as well as through observations, if possible (Merriam, 2009). Data collection methods consist of the instruments used to collect data and the method that was used with those instruments (Creswell, 2009; Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). Data collection steps include setting the boundaries for the study; collecting information through observations, interviews, documents, and materials; and establishing the protocol for recording information (Creswell, 2009).

The boundaries have been previously discussed with the criteria used to select the institutions and individual participants (see section 3.3, Institution and Participant Selection). The remaining considerations include protocols for interviewing participants, reviewing document data from public and institutional resources, and determining protocol for observations at the institutions.

#### 3.5.1 Interview Method

Qualitative researchers use different types of interviews, such as face-to-face, telephone-based, or group interviews, as one of their primary data collection methods (Creswell, 2009). These methods permit the researcher to attain information that is both rich and personalized, since it provides the participants' experience and opinion (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with senior administrators, including the presidents, the directors of institutional research, and vice presidents of academic programs and student services. Creswell (2009) noted that interviews should be semi-structured in that questions should be open-ended and

exploratory in nature with the intent to elicit views and opinions from the participants regarding the phenomenon (strategic planning) that they have experienced. The most common method of interviewing is the face-to-face interview in which one person elicits information from another, referred to as “a conversation with a purpose” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88).

I conducted interviews with the key participants identified by the gatekeeper. I traveled in the fall of 2010 to each of the three community colleges and interviewed the participants in their individual offices. All participants signed informed consent forms (see Appendix A). The interview questions were established (see Appendix B) as open-ended questions in the format of an interview guide or protocol (Glesne, 2006; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Interviews with the listed officials generally followed the same interview protocol (see Appendix B). The interviews were taped and transcribed. The transcripts were filed electronically and securely in my computer. One interview was conducted by phone, which was recorded and transcribed.

### 3.5.2 Ethical Considerations for Interviews

To make reasonably certain that the questions are applicable to the strategic planning process, the researcher used a pilot testing plan for interview questions. Glesne (2006) referred to collaborators who review questions as “agreeable peers who will read drafts of your questions in light of what you communicate as the point of your study” (p. 85). The questions from the interview protocol were posed to the president and three vice-presidents at Cleveland Community College prior to conducting the actual research interviews.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) listed considerations for the interview. Included in the considerations are the setting and the comfort of the interviewee, a means of recording the interview (given the participant's permission), and adherence to legal and ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and providing confidentiality of responses. In the data collection for this study, interviews were conducted at the institution and permission was granted by each of the participants to record the interview on a small digital recorder. All legal and ethical standards as stated or implied by law and the UNCC IRB were followed. The informed consent form is included as Appendix A and individually signed informed consent forms are in my possession, stored to preserve anonymity.

I found that participants from the three community colleges in the study were willing to share policies and procedures through e-mails of archival documents, through in-office review of archival documents, and through public documents on college Web sites. Individuals were given confidentiality assurances and were identified only by pseudonyms, as has been done in cases in the literature review (Harbour & Nagy, 2005; Morphew, 2000; Swenk, 1999).

“All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). The role of the researcher is to ensure qualitative validity by checking accuracy of his or her findings and following a consistent approach to what other researchers have done in other projects to ensure qualitative reliability (Creswell, 2009). This includes documenting the procedures of the case study and documenting as many steps in the procedures as possible (Creswell, 2009). For this

study, I followed the suggestions of Creswell (2009) and the direction given by the UNCC IRB (University of North Carolina–Charlotte, 2010a, 2010b).

The interviews were recorded and I took additional notes to document my observations of the research and interview site, observations made during the interview, interview notes, inflections, and body language; notes were also taken as a precaution in case the recording equipment failed (Creswell, 2009). A transcriptionist was employed to transcribe the interviews, although I transcribed some personally. The interview transcripts were e-mailed to each participant to ensure that their responses were taken in context and in the manner that they intended. I was able to code interview transcripts, notes, and other references so that thematic elements were gleaned from the interview (Ezzy, 2002). A similar, structured process was intended for observations and focus groups, but those data collection means were not used due to resistance by two of the colleges.

### 3.6 Documentation for Review

In addition to interviews, document data provides historical perspective and context in order to supplement the other collection methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Merriam (2009) defined documents as “written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 139). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) listed four categories of documents: (a) the Internet, (b) private and public records, (c) physical evidence, and (d) instruments created by the researcher.

#### 3.6.1 Public Documents

Public documents available for the researcher include the *Critical Success Factors for the North Carolina Community College System* (NCCCS, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006,

2007, 2008a, 2009a), *Data Trends and Briefings: Curriculum Student Retention Analysis from 2002–03 to 2007–08: Six Year Trend Analysis* (NCCCS, 2010b); the Community College Survey of Student Engagement's *Survey Results* (CCSSE, 2010), the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System's *Data Center* (IPEDS, 2010).

Institutional documents found at the colleges' Web sites included mission vision and values statements (all three), strategic plans summaries (all three), Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey (Oak; see Oak Community College, 2008), facilities' long-term plans (Oak and Pine), presentations to strategic planning committees (Oak), quality enhancement plans (Pine), and press releases and other miscellaneous documents and reports (all three).

### 3.6.2 Archival Documents

Archival data are the routinely gathered records of an organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Documents of importance include minutes of meetings, logs, announcements, formal policy statements, letters, etc., that can provide the interviewer with data that can be associated with themes gathered from interviews, often without being intrusive (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Glesne (2006) cited the benefits of archival data, "having gathered historical data, you might see differently the patterns of behavior that were evident from current data and you might perceive a relationship of ideas or events previously assumed unconnected" (p. 65).

I was supplied archival documents that included formal institutional effectiveness plans (Maple), SWOT analysis (Pine), strategic plan pamphlet (Oak; see Oak Community College, 2007), forms for strategic planning/program reviews (all three), and strategic objective committee minutes (Oak).

It is important to have multiple sources of data, including interviews, observations, and document reviews, in order to establish validity and reliability of the research findings (Merriam, 2009). The researcher is able to record, manage, analyze, and interpret the data collected with greater confidence due to its origination from multiple sources (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). One of the key factors is the method chosen to record and manage data in preparation for analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Table 2 provides a summary of the documentation used for this study.

Table 2  
*Analysis of Reviewed Documents*

| Type of Record             | Public Records | Archival Records | Web Site Documents | Observations     |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Facilities' master plans   |                | Pine             | Oak                |                  |
| Strategic plan             |                | Maple, Pine      | Oak                |                  |
| SWOT analysis              |                | Pine             |                    |                  |
| Planning committee minutes |                | Oak              |                    |                  |
| Program review forms       |                | Maple, Pine      | Oak                |                  |
| CCSSE                      | Oak, Pine      |                  |                    |                  |
| Noel-Levitz                |                |                  | Oak                |                  |
| President's report         |                |                  | Oak, Maple, Pine   |                  |
| Field notes                |                |                  |                    | Oak, Maple, Pine |
| Critical Success Factors   | NCCCS Web site |                  |                    |                  |
| Quality Enhancement Plan   |                | Pine             |                    |                  |
| IPEDS                      | IPEDS Web site |                  |                    |                  |



### 3.7 Data Analysis Methods

The plan for analyzing the data involves managing or making sense out of text and image data derived from interviews, field observations, and documents (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Ezzy (2002) stated that “the quality of qualitative data analysis depends on following well-thought-out procedures, and on ensuring that these procedures reveal the structures of understanding of participants” (p. 81). Coding becomes a key component of the data analysis method to be followed in conducting research.

To prepare for analysis of the case study, Merriam (2009) advised that all the information from interviews, observations, and document analysis be brought together to create a case study database. In that database information is edited, redundancies are removed, the various parts of data are fitted together, and the records are made ready for analysis (Merriam, 2009). In this case study of exemplary community colleges, Microsoft<sup>®</sup> OneNote was used to gather information about the colleges together under a specific topic. Once the data (interviews, archival documents, and field notes) was organized, I used it to create case studies of individual institutions.

#### 3.7.1 Coding and Thematic Analysis

This case study of three colleges’ approach to strategic planning used the coding and thematic analysis method presented by Ezzy (2002). *Coding* is defined as the process for identifying the themes or concepts that may emerge from the data (Ezzy, 2002). In this method, open coding is used for categorizing data from interviews, observations, and document review. In open coding, an exploratory process is used to attempt to make meaningful categories. The second stage is axial coding, in which the researcher attempts to find a relationship between codes, specify the condition between the codes, and

compare the codes with preexisting theory. The third stage is selective or thematic coding. In that process, the core code is identified to show the central major themes of the recorded data around which the analysis focuses (Ezzy, 2002).

### 3.7.2 Reporting Results

In this case study of community colleges, I followed an organized thematic coding and analysis approach. The rationale for this approach is the emergent nature of the study of colleges' use of strategic planning at a time of increased demands for accountability (Burke, 2005). The thematic analysis approach permits the data that has been collected to be categorized using a "constant comparison" between institutions for similarities and differences between them regarding the phenomenon (strategic planning) (Ezzy, 2002). The multiple case study is also well suited for this method of analysis, as each case is analyzed independently, then a cross-case comparison can be generated for generalizations about the phenomenon (the strategic planning process) (Merriam, 2009). The thick description in the analysis of chapter 4 takes into account the themes that are core to the three colleges in the study (Ezzy, 2002).

### 3.8. Quality Considerations

Internal validity of qualitative research is best described as credibility of findings (Merriam, 2009). One of the primary means of ensuring internal validity or trustworthiness is through the process of *triangulation*. Merriam (2009) noted that the term comes from navigation or land surveying in which two or three measurements enable convergence on a site. Yin (1993) discussed triangulation as "the converging of evidence that an event actually had occurred if your study showed that information from interviews, documents, and your own observations all pointed in the same direction" (p.

69). For this study, the use of multiple methods of investigation (interviews, archival and public documents) and multiple sources of data (between three institutions) were the triangulation types used based on Merriam's (2009) and Yin's (1993) typologies of triangulation. The use of multiple informed sources (college presidents, vice presidents, research directors, and administrators) between three colleges and the use of multiple sources (interviews, observations, and analysis of documents) provided the trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009) that triangulation provides.

Creswell (2009) cited strategies to ensure validity of research findings. This study incorporated the following strategies from Creswell's more extensive list:

- Triangulate different sources of information from different participants, documents, and observations at each of the three colleges.
- Use member checking to assure the accuracy of interviews.
- Use rich, thick description to convey the findings.
- Clarify the bias of the researcher concerning how background, culture, and history of the researcher may shape the result of the study.
- Present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes so that the research has all sides discussed.

For the research on accountability and strategy used by EIP-status community colleges, I used multiple methods (interviews, observations, archival and public data), multiple sources of data (different personnel selected for interviews at three different colleges) and most of the points that Creswell (2009) listed. In addition, I utilized member check methods for ensuring the accuracy of transcribed interviews (Merriam, 2009). This involved taking verbatim transcripts back to participants to ask them if my

interpretation, as researcher, “rings true” (Merriam, 2009). I provided transcriptions of the interviews and received some minor corrections.

### 3.9 Statement of Researcher Bias

One of the means of confirming case study findings that Hancock and Algozzine (2006) listed is for the researcher to list any biases and to explain how the researcher prevented those biases from influencing the research process. This statement lessens the possibility that the researcher will be accused of producing contrived findings. In the interest of disclosure, as researcher, my institution did not receive any recognition for EIP status in either 2007–08 or 2008–09.

I acknowledge biases toward a methodical planning process, such as the one listed in the formal strategic planning section of the literature review (Rowley et al., 1997) and the use of business models for planning (Al-Turki et al., 2008; Asan & Tanyas, 2007). This is a result of my 24-year career in manufacturing, as opposed to 6 full years of full-time employment in higher education. The 6 years of community college administration that I have experienced has reinforced this viewpoint that comprehensive, methodical planning is superior to a less focused, self-correcting system, as advocated by Birnbaum (1988).

I attempted to prevent these biases from influencing the research through following protocols in conducting interviews, observations, and document review as well as having expanded the literature review to include a balance of all three points of Burke’s accountability triangle (2006). I conducted interviews, made observations for field notes, and documented data collection with an open mind as the data led the research toward trustworthy data collection, analysis, and reporting that views the

influences of market, political, and academic influences on the community college planning process.

### 3.10 Summary of Research Methods

This study used qualitative methods, in particular the multi-site case study, to explore both the influences of market, political, and state accountability demands on three community colleges and the methods used to conduct strategic planning and plan implementation. The community colleges were selected on the basis on having reached EIP status in the 2007–08 or 2008–09 academic years, after having failed to meet the state of North Carolina criteria in the previous 4 years. Individual participants were selected on a purposive basis (Creswell, 2009) due to their anticipated contribution to the analysis of their college’s planning process.

The participants were interviewed individually in person, or by phone in one case. Additional data collection methods included observation and document analysis in order to provide multiple sources of information that can be compared to other colleges. Data was organized in Microsoft® OneNote and analyzed to search for emergent themes that can explain the phenomenon of successful strategic planning. Various strategies, anonymity, and member checking, as well as the IRB informed consent forms, were used to ensure the quality of findings and ethical treatment of all individuals and institutions participating in this study. The final outcome is the report of findings in chapter 4, including common themes that emerge as best practices for community college strategic planning.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The three North Carolina community colleges selected for this study were recognized for meeting the NC General Assembly's CSFs in the academic years 2007–08 and/or 2008–09 (NCCCS, 2009b, 2010a). Only five community colleges met EIP criteria in both years. This achievement is noteworthy, as it shows a measure of how the college works within the community, with governing bodies, and with its faculty and staff as cited in the perspectives of Burke's accountability triangle. This chapter provides (a) a within-case descriptive study of the market, political, and academic perspectives at the three community college in October and November 2010; and (b) a cross-case comparison of the three colleges as convergent themes emerge.

### 4.1 Importance of Accountability Measures

North Carolina universities and community colleges have experienced unprecedented growth in recent years (Perlmutter, 2010). From 2006–07 to 2008–09, curriculum student enrollment (unduplicated headcount) grew from 273,000 to 311,000. (NCCCS, 2008b, 2009b). State funding is expected to decrease in the academic year 2011–12 by at least 10 percent due to reduced tax revenues (Fitzsimon, 2010). As a result, accountability requirements (e.g., increased enrollment; costs associated with underprepared students' remediation; expectations by foundations, business, and industry; and expectations by accreditation agencies) are expected to strain the individual budgets of community colleges. This financial strain could possibly force the NCCCS to rethink the fundamental concept of open admissions (Haygood, 2009).

This study explores how three exemplary community colleges in different areas of the state addressed the issues raised by accountability standards through strategic planning, which encompasses the three points of Burke's accountability triangle—the market, political, and academic perspectives. The three colleges have much in common but are independent cases. Each college is presented in context of its specific situation with respect to setting, size, the general issues faced, and how the college planned to resolve those issues. The focus of this case study is the exploration of how the colleges met exemplary status and the common themes that emerge from each of the community colleges.

#### 4.2 Within-Case Studies of Three Exceptional Institutional Performers

The president and senior administrators were interviewed separately at each college. Applicable reports such as the CCSSE and IPEDS were analyzed when available, as well as archival strategic planning documents, documents from college Web sites, and NCCCS data reports. Interviews constitute the majority of the research conducted for this study, as the lived experiences of administrators tell the story of how the colleges overcame obstacles and achieved accountability standards of market, political, and academic perspectives. Each case is presented as a within-case study and then as a cross-case comparison as common themes emerge (Merriam, 2009).

##### 4.2.1 Case 1: Oak Community College

Oak Community College is located in a rural setting on the fringe of a medium-sized regional center. The Carnegie classification (a framework designed by the Carnegie Foundation to provide a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and to

ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty in research) is that of a large community college (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). The student body consists of approximately 7,400 students, 3,200 male and 4,200 female. Two-thirds of the study body is white, non-Hispanic. Its close proximity to several public and private universities makes the 2 Plus 2 university transfer option a popular one with its students. As with other community colleges, Oak depends heavily upon state appropriations for its annual budget, 65 percent. Full-time faculty are one-third of total faculty. Forty-one percent of the students at Oak are on federal financial aid. The college has a 59 percent fall-to-fall retention rate of curriculum students. The graduation rate within 3 years is 10 percent (IPEDS, 2010) (see Table 3 for a comparison of the three community colleges using IPEDs public data).

I arrived for interviews at Oak around noon on a weekday in October 2010. The campus parking lots were practically full, as was the newly opened student center at the edge of campus. The student center had many amenities for students to relax or study between classes and housed student services offices. The office building for the president and senior staff is an older facility, located off a frontage road that parallels a major thoroughfare. The offices of the administrators were somewhat spartan, as was noted in the public comment section of the Facilities Master Plan (Oak Community College, 2009c). Expansion of the campus has extended away from the older section. The fact that the student center was situated in a new building while the senior administration remained in an older building indicated that student priorities came before the need for modern facilities to be used by senior administration.



Administrative assistants were cordial and helpful as I waited for interview appointments. After reading the Facilities Master Plan online and visiting the campus, my observation of the Oak campus was that it was heavily used and is outgrowing much of the existing facilities in the face of unprecedented growth. I surmised (and interviews supported the idea) that the college is successfully reaching out to more students in its service area.

Oak Community College is the largest of the three colleges in this study. Growth has been in double-digit percentages over the past 3 years, including 12 percent growth in the 2010–2011 academic year. The college administration has conducted a long-range facilities plan with hopes that the footprint of the college will expand by nearly 400,000 square feet by 2019 in order to meet expected growth. The planning director stated that current space per full-time equivalent student at Oak is half the average for the state.

The college is faced with the need to expand services while anticipating a shortage of state funding, at least in the near future, from 2012 to 2014. As a result, the president and staff promote a system that requires efficient use of human and capital resources. A thorough planning process that features a closed-loop process of planning, procuring, assessing, and improving performance has been in place since the current 4-year strategic cycle began in 2007. The college is preparing for a new strategic planning cycle in 2011 with the cycle shortened to a 3-year period.

I met with the president, an academic administrator, and the research director and conducted a phone interview with the student services administrator the next day.

Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half, using an interview protocol (see

Appendix C) as a guideline. The administrators were generous with the time given for responses to the interview questions.

#### 4.2.1.1 Accountability Issues at Oak Community College and Strategic Planning

Oak Community College based its strategy on a pamphlet published in 2007, which was shortly after the president arrived to the campus. All of the listed goals apply to one or more of the points of Burke's accountability triangle. The four strategic goals encompass the following: (a) engagement and access (market perspective), (b) active learning and student success (market and academic perspectives), (c) professional and organizational development (academic perspective), and (d) financial resources and facility development (political perspective); by design, these goals encompass specific discipline and regional accreditation requirements as well as the NCCCS CSFs (Oak Community College, 2007).

The strategic plan is described in the pamphlet as a dynamic, cooperative, and continuous system that sets the future direction for the college. This is to be accomplished by (a) focusing on what the college as a whole needs to do to assure a position in the future, (b) relying on input from all areas of the college, and (c) providing direction for college operational activities (Oak Community College, 2007).

The college's vision is expressed by four statements that support the strategic key objectives. Oak's mission is to be a catalyst for transforming the individual and the community, a recognized leader for providing program and services that meet area needs, a creative partner for developing educational and economic opportunities, and a competent steward of the trust and confidence of the public (Oak Community College, 2007). The four areas of strategic initiative outlined in Oak's *Strategic Plan* (2007)

consist of (a) engagement and access, (b) active learning and student success, (c) professional and organizational development, and (d) financial resources and facility development. Oak's plan covers the three points of Burke's accountability triangle as the following sections demonstrate.

#### 4.2.1.2 Market Perspective at Oak Community College: Working With Diverse Students

The market perspective at the comprehensive community college represents a diverse range of students, from basic skills to underprepared high school graduates, to technical diploma or degree seekers to university transfer. This perspective also encompasses foundations who advocate for certain groups of students as well as business and industry who look at the college's graduates for staffing for-profit, not-for profit, industry, and health care entities. Each of these groups requires strategic initiatives to enable the college to meet the accountability requirements of its varied constituencies.

One of the market accountability issues at Oak consists of encouraging the enrollment of basic skills completers into curriculum-level courses. According to the academic administrator, the students receive a free course upon completion of their GED test or adult high school diploma, but few students had been taking advantage of the program. The administrator related how a cross-functional team was created to work on this problem:

We set up a cross-functional work between student services, the basic skills program, and the registrar's office, to market the voucher, make it easy for students to use the voucher. [We were able] to counsel [the students and we] had a couple of small tuition grants to help get our graduates—our high school graduates—to go to college.

The willingness of various departments to work together shows how Oak values the basic skills student's continuation into curricular programs.

Another market issue facing Oak Community College (as well as most North Carolina community colleges) is the success rate of transfer students when they attend a 4-year institution. Oak has given much strategic attention to this issue, as the market (notably, high school counselors, parents and students, as well as the political perspective of the NC General Assembly) looks to the community college to provide, at low tuition costs, an educational equivalent to the first 2 years at a university. One of the issues presented is the lack of tracking when a student transfers to a private 4-year institution. One administrator noted the concern that the college was experiencing and how the college worked to fix this problem:

The college established a department chair for University Transfer. ...One of her primary duties is working with faculty on advising and she has to become our expert on university transfer advising. So if there's a meeting of those people with the system office to update them on new actions of the transfer advisory committee for the state for example, she would attend...When the [local] university has a meeting and says we want counselors and advisers here to give you an update, she would go along with some of the counselors, for example. So, I think that is a marvelous idea to give focus to giving good advisement to those university transfer [students].

The use of student-centered practices—in this case, for the university transfer student—is one that is repeated at the other community colleges in this study.

Oak Community College has had significant success in the context of the open-door admissions policy in finding the appropriate starting place for its students. In this case, the student services administrator related how the strategy was applied for the displaced worker. This student (as Cross, 1976, referred to as the “new student”) often comes back to the educational setting possessing no high school diploma and/or low academic proficiency. Oak Community College addressed the issue of finding the proper

mix of academic credential and job preparation needs. The student services administrator stated how the college works with this population:

Oftentimes, unfortunately, [the displaced workers] are not in a position or they are not ready to really go into college-level work, but also they want fairly quick training so that they can get back to work. We try to get individuals to do their [placement] testing and if...this person really needs to get a job, we will put them in a 12-in-6, one of those programs to get [a year of concentrated] training in 6 months. We also want to try to set up with them a plan to transition into a curriculum program that may have greater long-term possibilities in terms of earnings. For example, a CNA [Certified Nursing Assistant I and II], we might try to get someone into a CNA but at the same time we tell them what they are going to need in order to eventually maybe try to get [and] Associate Degree [of] Nursing [and] to become a nurse.

The flexibility of combining continuing education (nursing assistant) courses with degree (nursing) programs to meet the needs of the displaced worker is an advantage that the community college has over other institutions. Oak has been able to make it possible for the student either to get back to work in a new field as quickly as possible or to invest in a longer running program to meet market needs.

Academic engagement and student satisfaction are important for the college's success at a time when it is easy to get an education online without setting foot on a college campus. Oak Community College administrators recognized the need to connect and engage students. The college used the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey for the first time in 2010 and plans to use it in alternate years along with the CCSSE.

The Noel-Levitz survey was conducted at in 2008 at Oak. The purpose of the survey was to provide information on the satisfaction level of students that leads to collegiate planning for organizational, unit, and individual changes necessary in the process of becoming a learning organization. Emphasis was exhibited in this student-centered approach at Oak Community College by using the results of the Noel-Levitz

survey to identify two areas: (a) areas of *excellence*, such as the knowledge of the academic adviser concerning the student's program of study and the rating of instruction quality; and (b) areas for *improvement*, such as parking and the comfort of the student center, which opened at Oak in 2009 (Oak Community College, 2008).

The CCSSE measures the level of engagement of community college students in their learning environment. The survey results help community colleges assess their educational practices so they can improve student outcomes. CCSSE states that research shows higher levels of engagement with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject correlate with higher levels of learning outcomes and academic achievement. The CCSSE permits colleges to establish benchmarks, with a standardized mean of 50 to permit colleges to plan for improvement and to measure results in terms of student engagement that leads to increased learning and persistence (CCSSE, 2010). Table 3 shows how Oak rated in 2009 against the standardized median of the CCSSE. While active and collaborative learning and student effort were below the median, there were high marks for academic challenge, and very high marks for student–faculty interaction and support for learners.

Access to higher education is one of the priorities of the college. Matching need and available resources is the concern of student services. The student services administrator promoted interventions that encourage expanded participation and retention for underserved populations through a NCCCS grant program, Minority Male Mentoring:

Since 2006, we have been able to increase the black male population by over 40 percent, and that was intentionally designed for that purpose. We identify about 100 black males that may be graduating from high school in June and with [or without] postsecondary plans and bring them on campus for a quick orientation and follow up until they graduate.

The growth of the African-American population at Oak is indicative of the efforts made to provide an inclusive environment at the college. However, it requires more effort than the initial recruitment and enrollment process to enable student success.

Table 3

*Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2009 Benchmark Summary Report: Oak Community College*

| Category                          | Benchmark Rating |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Active and collaborative learning | 47.9             |
| Student effort                    | 49.0             |
| Academic challenge                | 51.6             |
| Student–faculty interaction       | 54.7             |
| Support for learners              | 52.7             |

*Note.* CCSE *Mdn* = 50. From “Survey Results,” for Oak Community College, by Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2009.

As with the displaced worker returning to school, the approach at Oak Community College was to develop intervention strategies, including financial aid, to help underserved populations such as African-American students. The student services administrator discussed how the college pursues educational benefits through intervention strategies:

One of the major areas is the access to financial aid, and we make a herculean effort to communicate to the public at large in things like deadlines for FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid]. We go into the high schools. Both my admission counselors as well as a financial aid staff [member], and we try to communicate directly with the high school population. Even on campus, in the academic success [ACA] classes we come to make the students aware that they need to do the FAFSA every year. We go to our GED and adult high school classes, so we try to communicate in effect to the issues that relate to financial aid.

Providing access to the college's financial aid packages is part of the mission of Oak Community College. Often the student who most needs financial aid is underprepared for the rigors of college.

The underprepared student presented a special problem to the community college. To help student progress, it is important to know where the student is beginning, in terms of academic achievement. This is imperative to implement the open-door philosophy of taking students where they are academically and moving them toward their goal, using all of the tools of the comprehensive community college. The student services administrator described the diagnostic function at Oak, as the placement test is used to determine the starting place:

If they're not at a high school level—in fact, if they're below ninth grade level—even if they have a high school diploma they really need to go back to basic skills and do some work. But it also means even if they're high school level, they might spy some weaknesses and they'll know what to watch for. So [we say], “Yes, come on in the class, but we know what you need for remediation,” or “ No, you're not ready for this class until you work on your skills.” We also have a Study Skills lab, where they can get help to improve—[for example] if they don't really need basic skills but they could stand to improve on their reading comprehension or certain math skills.

Oak Community College strives to be an open-door institution. Consistent efforts are made for intervention with underrepresented groups, such as African-American males. A program for attracting and retaining this demographic group, the previously mentioned Minority Male Mentoring, is used at Oak Community College. The college Web site provides information on how this program works:

The NEXT LEVEL Minority Male Mentoring program is designed to provide participants with the tangible and intangible skills necessary to obtain success regardless of where life leads them; as well as instill in its participants the importance of civic and community involvement. Through the use of weekly meetings, hands on activities, mentor relationships, peer tutoring, and self evaluation the program guides its participants toward achieving the highest levels



of academic, professional, and personal development. (Oak Community College, 2009d)

Developmental studies encompass the remedial needs of dislocated workers, underprepared recent graduates, and potential employees. The economic role of the community college is to help develop the service area's workforce. This requires a partnership between the college and the public or private entity to determine current status and the needed prescribed training or educational needs of potential employees.

#### 4.2.1.3 Market Perspective at Oak Community College: Working With Business and Industry for Training and Advisement

The market perspective at Oak is frequently referred to in planning and decision making. Business and industry in the service area are clearly regarded as partners. An academic administrator related an issue that the college encountered with the local fire department. The fire department hired individuals first, then determined needs. This created the issue of matching education with vocational requirements. The academic administrator stated the following:

In firefighter training, there are very specific math skills they need; so if they're not handling it on the TABE [Test of Adult Basic Education] or the CASAS [Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems], then they know [what they need to do]. Unfortunately, we learned that the hard way...It's a little hard to control that if you're doing an academy through another entity, in our case [the local] fire department said, "We need these people in, we've already hired them." We really had to let them find out with us the hard way when a student couldn't read very well and we worked with them and we got him through, but what they learned from that is to do more [front-end] assessment before they hire people. So, it helped an organization learn to better assess their employees, as we were also showing them how we had learned to better assess students to make sure they were prepared to be successful in a continuing education or an occupational class.

The ability to assess the needs of the individual helped the fire department to determine how to staff their needs and reduced wasted time in basic skills training when the employer had jobs to put the candidates into immediately.

The role of the advisory committee is an important function of the market perspective. The advisory committees are required to meet at least annually to provide input into programs, to review existing programs to determine whether they are up-to-date, and to recommend the termination of obsolete programs or the pursuit of new ones. An academic administrator cited the college's coordination of programs with business and industry through advisory committees:

[Industry is] very well represented on all of our advisory committees...The programs work very closely with their [advisory] committee members for placement of students in cooperative education...to make sure that we keep our technology up-to-date, up with industry; cutting edge is what we really want. We want to be ahead of the game on that. And sometimes we are able to get equipment donated in vocational technologies or health sciences, sometimes we have to buy it to do that, or sometimes it's a combination; like [a major manufacturer] allowed us to use a sonography machine as a demo for a few years, and then they said, "We need to sell it." We said, "We need to buy it, can you give us a good deal?"—and they did.

The example of the borrowed and then purchased-at-a-discount sonography machine is testimony that the business and health care community has great confidence in Oak's ability to provide for the market's needs. As with the students that the college prepares for the workplace, business and industry apparently see the school as a capable training partner.

#### 4.2.1.4 Political Perspective at Oak Community College: Funding College Growth

From the political perspective, the biggest issue pointed out by Oak administrators is the lack of funding to do the things that they need to do for programs. In the year that Oak met EIP standards, there was no money to permit reversion funding to accrue to the college. This created disappointment when much of the strategic planning was set around meeting the EIP standards. Another source of full-time equivalent (FTE) funding that the

college depends on is Huskins Bill dual enrollment of high school students. Formally titled G.S. 115D-20(4), Huskins Bill is a North Carolina program that enables high school students to enroll in tuition-free community college classes that are usually taught on the high school campus by college instructors (NCCCS, 2008e). The potential loss of dual enrollment from action by the NC General Assembly created a loss of several hundred students, according to Oak's president. To offset increasing costs, as FTE formulas for state funding are always based upon the previous year, cost-cutting measures such as switching to a less expensive online classroom management system are necessary (Oak Community College, 2009a).

Facilities at Oak have not kept up with the growth of the student body. Oak's research director stated that Oak "[has] approximately half the number of square feet per FTE as the average [NCCCS campus]". The president cited the community's financial backing in the face of lagging support on behalf of the state:

We have a strong relationship with the Chamber of Commerce. They were the prime advocate for us when we went first to the legislature, then to the local voters for a local sales tax. We and the public schools first had to get the permission of the General Assembly, and then after they gave us the OK, then we went through a voter referendum here just to use a quarter-cent sales tax for buildings on our campus and on the Public Schools, and that is really what's funding the three buildings that are currently just starting construction.

The political perspective is an important one to the college. Without fresh state spending on facilities, the local aspect is limited to what it can provide in terms of programs and quality improvement. The college expected to receive additional state revenue from gaining EIP status in the year following recognition.

The ability to attain EIP recognition was set up as a major accomplishment in the year that Oak attained it. There was widespread disappointment when the state General

Assembly did not fund the award due to a reduced state budget. The president commented on pros and cons associated with the CSFs:

I think we've gone toward retention and completion a lot more maybe because of [the Critical Success Factors]. Certifications, that's the screwiest part of that performance measures and you know, that business that if you have any below 70 percent, it kicks you out. And it's kind of like a greased pig; you get one area set, then another one falls off...I think the Critical Success Factors have been more of a benefit to the state as a whole. My feeling is the strength of the Carolina system is its equity and quality across the whole state. ...Individually, I think there's been gradual increase in quality in those areas that they've identified, especially as the Critical Success Factors...I think that there is hope that we can make a leaner group of performance measures in the future and we could perhaps look at measures that are not quite so—I don't want to say arbitrary, but ones that we are—it's out of our control, you know, like the GPA of students that transfer to [a UNC system institution]. I mean, we love to see them do well, but if they don't do well is that because of our lack of preparing them? And the “n” [number sent] has been so small with those groups.

The officials that I spoke with expressed some level of concern with the CSFs and the challenge that they pose for achieving exemplary status. There are many elements of the CSFs that appear to be out of the college's control, such as the university transfer example. At the same time, funding is such a big political issue that provides the lifeblood for the college's growth, and that issue does not appear to be going away any time soon. Oak continues to do the right thing in its operations, despite the somewhat arbitrary manner in which the CSFs are evaluated. The political perspective is of prime concern to Oak; as it continues to meet the needs of the market, the political means apparently is falling short of support for this thriving community college. As has traditionally been the case, the most prevalent factor of success is not the legislature but the faculty and staff that make up the academic perspective of Burke's accountability triangle.

#### 4.2.1.5 Academic Perspective at Oak Community College: Faculty–Staff Participation, Resistance, and Regional Accreditation

From an academic perspective, the president noted that some areas of the college have been more receptive to the strategic planning process than others. Programs such as Allied Health are used to provide outside accountability through their discipline-accrediting agencies. Others, such as the liberal arts areas, are not as used to being asked to demonstrate accountability when it comes to reporting and assessing learning. The president noted the concern that some departments have when it comes to planning and assessment:

I don't think [strategic planning] is as threatening to them as assessment of student learning. Assessment of student learning—then you're stepping in to maybe criticize the performance or their productivity. This [strategic planning] is more of the big picture. You're looking at the broad goals of the institution, and who can argue with employee professional development? Or focus on learning? They're things that everybody can endorse. Now, [the question is] whether everyone will embrace it and get involved in a big way... There we've just tried to work through department heads and keep persuading them that this is important. We've kept it on agendas for convocation and for different campus meetings. We've communicated out on the Web site, and the director of institutional effectiveness has kept communicating to people by e-mail and things like that.

There appears to be a mix of responses to formal planning and accountability reporting. At Oak Community College, the president noted that “some departments are more religious about following the plan than others.” To close the communications loop, a constant message was sent throughout the organization, as the president stressed his commitment to planning and assessment of performance:

So, they know at the beginning [that] the president believes in this and he supports it. ... We have a leadership institute here that every year we get about 30 to 50 employees involved. It's a 2-and-a-half-day thing and they get a dose of strategic planning in that. So, you know, you just, you can't do it all at once. Like orientation, people get so much stuff thrown at them, it's overwhelming, but if you touch on it enough and you get the right people to articulate things, then I think it has some chance of success. Assessment of student learning is a different

matter. There you get, “Well, this is my area, I teach English, you shouldn’t tell me how to teach English or what the results should be.” That’s a little harder challenge.

The research director at Oak noted the ease of getting the Allied Health programs to participate in planning as opposed to another faculty’s resistance to planning:

They [the Allied Health faculty], because of program accreditation, understand the purposes of assessment. They understand performance measures. . . . They know that this is an assessment plan to diagnose your performance and that’s clear in their mind, and then they realize that once that assessment plan has been completed. . . . then you use those results to design improvements. . . . once you leave the Allied Health then it requires more and more leadership on the parts of the deans to make that happen; then the VPs. . . . So, this fall [the vice president] is meeting, having some real heart-to-heart talks, with each of the divisions one at a time to talk about, particularly, the assessment of student learning. . . . [asking,] “So, tell me how you’re assessing student learning [outcomes]?” And of course, [the vice president] has been having some real blunt conversations with those divisions, emphasizing the importance of that, and our plan.

Regional accreditation, by agency principles, requires the active involvement of faculty and staff, not just administration. The process requires extensive review, and the requirements are more stringent than the CSFs. On a wider scale, the assessment of student learning at Oak was accomplished through the embedding of questions into capstone courses. The assessment provided feedback on the program level and fit into the measurement of outcomes in the accreditation reaffirmation process. The academic administrator described the process:

[The research director], the dean of arts and science, and the department chair for social sciences . . . and faculty have helped implement it. To [assess] three things—reading comprehension, critical thinking, and computer literacy—our three target general education assessments that we’re working on across the campus. . . . The methodology they are using is embedding exam questions in classes that large classes of students take [in order to] to assess critical thinking and comprehension. . . . They embed the questions so that it’s hidden to the students, and they’ll take it seriously. . . . That should help a number of things, including success after transfer. If we improve our teaching, [it is partially] because of this assessment of student learning outcomes.

A major role of accreditation is to encourage continuous improvement. Oak's research director cited the dangers of being too insulated and the need for outsiders to look in at the college and its operation:

[Regional accreditation] has generally a positive impact. As much as SACs frustrates us, at times I think it's a good thing. You have a group of learned people getting together and saying, "OK every decent college should at least do this," and what could be wrong with that? I think we, and I suspect a lot of other schools, have been guilty of navel-gazing, not looking outside their own house. But by having organizations like SACS, it forces us to look beyond our front doors and look at expectations and practices that we may not be initially concerned about.

The student services administrator's staff began the planning process at an annual retreat as a means of reflecting upon what was done the previous year and to plan for the upcoming year. Associated with that approach, the administrator brought in an outsider to perform an unofficial peer review. In this review, the evaluator examined the outcomes, quantitative data, and assessment means in general. By having a fresh set of eyes review the programs, the administrator believed that his team could benefit from a simulated version of a SACS visit from a peer.

Oak Community College appears to be well positioned to meet SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation. Principles 2.8 reads in part, "The number of full-time faculty members is adequate to support the mission of the institution and to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs" (Commission on Colleges, 2008, p. 18). Given the growth that this college has experienced over the past several years, the challenge has been to make sure the number of qualified faculty has kept up with the number of students on campus. The president commented on this challenge:

We've depended a lot on the full-time people and we've expanded our faculty pretty consistently. We just added 15 new faculty positions this year, and that's because we grew. This year we're up 12 and a half percent head count and so,

you've got to have the full-time people that are at the core of what you're doing. You[']ve got to make sure that those new people are integrated with your existing faculty, so we've really tried to preach department orientations and department communication... You have to have good department chairs to prep them, monitor them, and support them. I think once you get the good people, then quality follows that as long as they know what you're about as an institution.

The academic perspective is evolving as the traditional instruction-only role of faculty moves more toward a team approach to strategic planning and problem solving at Oak Community College. No longer are instructors just teaching; rather, they integrate general education topics across the curriculum, they advise students on the options that they have for transfer, and they mentor them to make good choices. Faculty and staff collaborate on the strategic goals of Oak, and the process of planning and assessment becomes part of the day-to-day operation. With all of the elements of the comprehensive community college, the ability to plan and successfully meet the plans requires a sophisticated structure. Oak's process is explained in the following section.

#### 4.2.1.6 Implementing the Strategic Plan at Oak Community College

The college's goals are laid out in a pamphlet entitled *Strategic Plan 2007–2011* (Oak Community College, 2007), which includes each goal, the assumptions underlying the goal, and the key objectives that will lead to accomplishing the goal. The key objectives are then distributed among four strategic teams, each led by one of the president's direct reports. The teams then meet and report to the planning committee on how the key objectives have been met. The key objectives are delegated to the department or work-unit level, which then completes its Workunit Effectiveness (WE) Tracker Form to ensure that progress is being made on the departmental objectives.



Oak Community College begins its strategic planning cycle with a committee that quickly spreads out into the community. The process in 2006, the beginning of the current planning cycle, consisted of a member of the board of trustees taking a lead role in convening a planning committee of faculty and staff. The committee received external input from constituents in focus groups to gain their perspective of how the college was doing. The resulting list became a series of general goals with key objectives that could be broken down into specific departmental targets. The measurement of the targeted objectives became the basis of a data-driven accountability system.

The president described the data-driven system and its role in motivating Oak Community College to continuously improve its programs and services:

We have an objective and outcomes process for which we use a Workunit Effectiveness Tracker Form. It's a way to document where they [an academic department or supporting function] are trying to go. That can help justify a need for faculty, or staff, or equipment and so forth; and then every year we ask people to submit strategic activity worksheets for the following year, saying what they're trying to do and what money they need to do it. And we ask them to connect that to the strategic [plan], as well as to the college's mission.

The principal tool used for strategic planning on the department level is the WE Tracker Form and its corollary, the Strategic Activity Worksheet (SAW). This process combined the alignment of organizational objectives (described as *hoshin kanri* in the literature review of this research; see chapter 2) with input from individual academic departments or staff support functions to “bubble up” needs from the department. The resulting system keeps everyone at the college focused on the overall mission and strategy.

The president of Oak emphasized the need for a closed-loop system. *Closing the loop*, in this instance, means having a unified process. It begins with adopting a mission

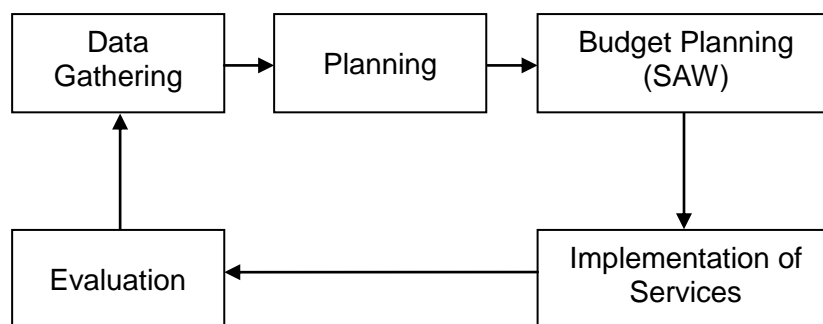
statement, setting strategic goals and key objectives, and determining means of measurement. To promote the plan, administrators talk about the plan and how it helps the college at every opportunity. The consistent message keeps the plan and the planning process from becoming just another nice-looking book on a shelf.

Oak owes much of its success to designing what they call the *bubble-up effect*, bringing faculty and staff into the planning and implementation process. Once the process moves from the market and political inputs down to the work-unit level, the work unit has its opportunity for input. In assessing progress, the work unit may meet or exceed the measures expected through key objectives. If more resources are needed, then the work unit shows a quantifiable need for more faculty, more equipment, more space, and so forth on the SAW. This data-driven approach to resource allocation is then taken to the next level, where prioritization between allocation requests is determined first by the department chair, then by the division dean, the vice president, and finally the president's leadership team. The measurement process forces faculty and staff engagement in prioritized planning. The planning director summarized the process and the accountability that is built into it:

First of all, every goal ties back to the mission and every goal has a performance measure. For example, if you're teaching in the nursing program and you want to have licensure success as one of your goals, [that is] successful completion on the Licensure Exam, then there is a measure and a standard. What is the acceptable standard? Then a year later; for example, right now those Academic Units are looking at their plan from last fall and say[ing,] "OK, how did we do?" and "What was the result?" We ask that question and then the next question is really the most important: "Now that you know the outcome, what are you going to do about it?"

Each spring, the work unit completes a process of assessment tied to the WE Tracker Form. This *Annual Comprehensive Program Review and Summative Report* is presented to the campus-wide Planning Committee. Three phases are identified: planning,

implementation, and evaluation (see Figure 6). Each work unit has a mission that is tied into the college's mission; everyone at Oak Community College knows where he or she fits into the plan. In the evaluation phase, if the work unit is meeting goals, new goals or objectives are developed; and if not, the other means of helping the work unit meet its goals are prescribed (Oak Community College, 2009a).



*Figure 6.* Planning model for Oak Community College. Adapted from “College Planning Model Explanation,” by Oak Community College, 2010.

#### 4.2.1.7 Summary of the Oak Community College Case Study

Oak Community College employed strong leadership in establishing a complex strategic planning process. This process was extensively involved with all three points of Burke's accountability triangle. Community needs, as well as business and industry input and concern for student success, constituted the market point of the triangle. Funding for facility expansion and the concerted effort to achieve strategic goals consistent with the CSFs made up the political perspective. Overcoming faculty resistance to planning and assessment by involving them in planning brought the academic perspective into the college's operations. The WE Tracker Form, a comprehensive system of goals, objectives, resource allocation, and assessment, enabled both a top-down and bottom-up,

or bubble-up, method of shared management responsibility between administration and faculty/staff. It is clear why Oak is one of the exemplary community colleges in North Carolina.

The means by which strategic planning is established and presented vary, but the essential elements of good planning are consistent across all three colleges in this study. The other two cases strengthen the data gathered at Oak Community College, which indicates that EIP does not occur by accident. Although the processes vary with each college, the example portrayed by Oak demonstrates the wisdom of good planning, implementation, and intervention in order to meet accountability measures such as the NCCCS CSFs and regional accreditation standards. Two other exceptional colleges, identified with the pseudonyms Maple and Pine, are presented as descriptive cases with elements of effective planning in common with Oak.

#### 4.2.2 Case 2: Maple Community College

I conducted interviews with the president and the research director at Maple Community College on a Tuesday in early November 2010. Maple Community College is located in a medium-sized town. The area has had a significant loss of manufacturing jobs in recent years. There are no public or private universities or 4-year colleges in the immediate vicinity, but three private universities offer classes leading to specific majors on the Maple campus. The college serves a one-county area and has a satellite campus approximately 15 miles from the main campus.

Maple Community College has over 3,600 curriculum students. The student body is approximately 85 percent white, non-Hispanic, with the other 10 percent equally divided between black non-Hispanic and Hispanic. Women comprise two-thirds of the

student body. Forty-three percent of the students have federal financial aid packages. The fall-to-fall retention rate for curriculum students is 66 percent. The graduation rate within 3 years is 15 percent. Full-time faculty constitute 19 percent of the total faculty. The state appropriation is 66 percent of the total budget for the college (IPEDS, 2010).

Upon arrival at Maple, I found a well-designed campus with available visitor parking. The administrative building is prominent, located in the center of the campus. The president had been ill and had just recently returned to work. A sign was on the front of the administrative building welcoming him back. The president's administrative assistant was friendly and welcomed me into the president's office. While the president took a phone call, I noted the presence of a wooden rocking chair, some pottery, and other examples of products made in the college's service area. Noticeable on the president's desk was a copy of Collins' *Good to Great* (2001), one of the books included in this study's literature review. In the ensuing interview and in a later interview with the director of research, it became clear that much of the planning process was based on Collins' book, as the college culture is being transformed—from the president's perspective—from being satisfied with mediocre performance to striving for "great" levels of performance. The market, political, and academic perspectives of Maple are presented in the following sections.

#### 4.2.2.1 Accountability Issues at Maple Community College and Strategic Planning

Maple Community College based its strategy on Collins' book, *Good to Great* (2001). Collins provided a framework for transforming an organization from mediocre to exemplary status, primarily through changing the organization's culture. The elements that Maple considered in its planning process apply to one or more of the points of

Burke's accountability triangle. The four strategic goals are as follows: (a) provide educational programs that meet individual and community workforce needs in a transitioning economy (market perspective); (b) secure adequate fiscal resources to equip the college to help students succeed (political and academic perspectives); (c) utilize the (satellite) campus center, the emergency services training center, and off-campus sites to best serve students and the community (market perspective); and (d) continually improve operational plans, policies, and procedures to promote student success (academic perspective) (Maple Community College, 2010a). Maple's *Strategic Plan 2007–2010* was used as a broader approach to annual presidential initiatives. As was the case with Oak Community College, Maple's strategic goals encompass specific discipline and regional accreditation requirements, but less specifically address the NCCCS CSFs.

#### 4.2.2.2 The Market Perspective at Maple Community College: Building Relationships

The importance of the community is emphasized by Maple's president. The president visits a different part of his college's service area several times a year to keep business and community leaders apprised of what is going on and to ask for input on how the college is serving the community. This "Breakfast With the President" is popular with community leaders and lets them know about programs and trends at the college, such as construction progress, enrollment trends, and available scholarships. The president uses multiple forums to hear from the community (the market) of the constituents' perspective of the college. The input is used for the annual specific objectives, which are known as the president's initiatives. The president discussed these meetings with constituents:

So this is a chance to hear back from them [on the questions], "What do you think we do well? What would you like to see us do better? What are some things we don't do that you think would be good for the community?" We did the same kind

of things with the trustees, the foundation board of directors, students, faculty, staff, and all kinds of constituents. We had focus groups on campus with faculty, staff, and students. We involved trustees and all kind of constituents.

The environmental scan or analysis enables the college's planners to establish priorities. As the planning director stated, "You can't improve everything at the same time." Maple Community College's environmental scan provided information in six areas for planning:

1. *Demographics*: The scan showed that the population groups tended toward older age groups and that the largest growing group was the Latino/Hispanic population.
2. *Community values*: The citizens surveyed value education and appreciate the role that the college plays in the community. However, those surveyed feel the college needs help in removing certain barriers, such as tuition and textbook costs, and improving day care and transportation needs.
3. *Economics*: The survey indicated a profound loss of economic base (due to manufacturing plants closing) and the need for the college to be at the forefront of training for jobs of the future; a rising sentiment was that service industry jobs were seen as replacing manufacturing jobs, thus resulting in training needs for those jobs.
4. *Administrative*: Challenges loom from the proliferation of online colleges, the need to respond to higher tuition and textbook costs, transportation costs, and the need for more programs in the health care field.
5. *Political*: Challenges arise from expected state budget shortfalls, depleting Workforce Investment Act and Trade Adjustment Act funding for displaced

workers, and changes mandated by federal legislation (e.g., health care and immigration bills).

6. *Technology*: The college will be challenged to stay abreast of current technology in academic programs and classroom pedagogical technology (e.g., SMART Boards, interactive software, etc.), as well as the need to become more immersed into distance learning (Maple Community College, 2010c).

To address the concerns raised by the environmental scan, it became necessary to develop a strategic plan. This plan involved developing a sense of community, client-centeredness for students, and responsiveness to all constituents. The existing culture of Maple at the time the president arrived was not sufficient to respond to the needs exposed by the scan.

Current administrators came to the college following a stormy period in which senior leadership, including the previous president, virtually turned over. As a result of the tumult, there was an atmosphere of parties blaming each other. To stabilize the situation, the president placed relationship building, for the college as a community, as a key element for the college to adopt. This relationship building puts the student in a position of client, in which the student is a valued member of the campus community. With emphasis on a relationship-building environment came a requirement of civility and a term that the president calls *radical hospitality*. To create that culture, the president found it necessary to make some personnel changes, an action that Collins (2001) referred to as “getting the right people on the bus, and the wrong people off the bus” (p. 84). The president discussed his decision for promoting radical hospitality:



I passed a civility-in-the-workplace policy, and the philosophy there was, ...if we don't treat each other with respect and dignity, then we won't treat our students and community with respect and dignity. ...In every position vacancy announcement, we require that the successful candidate will treat people with respect and dignity and work as a team player. It is in every job description, including mine. It is in the annual evaluation. [Failure to follow] it has been included as a permissible reason for dismissal. And so we have taken it very seriously. And so radical hospitality, civility to people in the workplace, and having the right people in the right seat [has contributed to our success].

The president recalled the origin of radical hospitality as a client-centered strategy when he visited a local church:

Well when I got there, they were a different congregation. They were all the people that were never thinking about going into the typical church...all the people who never go to any other church, and the place was packed. The minister came out and she stood there and stood up and said. "Welcome to our church, where our mission is to serve God through dynamic worship and radical hospitality." And she said, "Now let us all greet one another," and all of a sudden, people there began to move around and emerge, and there I am standing in a military uniform feeling out of place. I had people coming up to me and welcoming me...I stood there and I watched that, and I [thought to myself] they are not just tolerating each other, they are not just accepting each other, they are embracing each other, and I thought that term, "radical hospitality," has a place on our campus.

The president made radical hospitality a presidential initiative because he felt that the norm of customer service "falls way short" of serving students on the Maple campus.

The college pursued radical hospitality by streamlining admissions and the registration processes through reducing the amount of shuffling to various offices that students usually encounter when they enroll in a college. (This client-centered approach is similar to Oak's attempt to enroll more basic skills students into curriculum programs by simplifying the voucher system for a free class.)The Maple standard is that the student should leave the campus after registering for classes saying, "Wow, that was radical hospitality," rather than saying, "Wow, I'm glad that's over with."

To further illustrate this theme, the research director at Maple illustrated the importance of radical hospitality in the college's approach to retaining new students.

Through analysis of data, the director found that 15 percent of attrition occurs from new students within the first 4 weeks. A plan called "Ask Me" was developed to reverse that trend, which the director explained:

We have a team of 10 people. We are intrusive the first 3 days of the term. We wear bright orange shirts. We all look alike. We are out there and in-your-face for a new student. We advertise on Facebook and on campus. So anyway, we are just putting ourselves out there to help new students. When a student no-shows a class, we get on the phone and call them. We attempt to reach 100 percent of the students. ...[We ask] "What happened and what can we do? We want you back here." Our goal is to have less than 15 percent...exit. We have clear, set, quantitative measures.

So far, it appears that the "Ask Me" plan is working. The director reported that the fall 2010 attrition rate was below 10 percent.

To increase retention rates, the college pursues a gateway concept, combining a study skills course with the lead course in the major (in this case, Introduction to Business). The students go through the study skills course in the first 4 weeks, and then they are better prepared for the rigor of the college subject course. What Tinto (2006) described as a learning community develops relationships between students and faculty, and between students and students. The research director described how this works:

[The students in the business program] have already indicated an interest in the business field, so we want to get them in and get them engaged with a passionate instructor. ... We want them to get hooked in with us first, so that they have a vested interest. They like us. We like them. They know we are there for them, so part of that whole driving force is the push for engagement. The ACA course is tailored to the program area, so the things that the students are learning in that one-credit-hour course is tailored to [their program of study]. In a pilot run, the African-American male students who take that are about 20% more persistent fall term to spring term than similar students who do not take ACA 111... It really boils down to relationships. Students will make a decision to stay or go based on relationships, so we preach engagement here.

The issue of retention is prevalent at all North Carolina community colleges. Literature on the subject substantiates that the ease of entry followed quickly by the realization that much work has to be done to graduate often strikes the underprepared student as a daunting task. Maple brought the concepts of civility and radical hospitality into the strategy that building relationships with students is an effective antidote to the tendency to flee the required academic rigor. The college's president noted the emphasis on a NCCCS-sponsored Minority Male Mentoring program by making it a part of the president's initiatives. With the Minority Male Mentoring grant, a retention counselor was hired and a tracking system was put into place to find the status of the selected students at the point where they often drop out. The resulting intervention has helped to attract and retain more African-American males in the student population. The research director described the rationale for intervention into programs, such as Minority Male Mentoring, designed to improve student retention levels:

[Research shows] students that come in at the lowest levels [of needing developmental courses] have about 9 percent probability of ever getting out of development. Nine percent—and those were high school graduates...so we are trying to do some things like a new Minority Male Mentoring program...for underserved minority males [consisting of] tutoring, leadership development, and all sorts of things. [The program director] is very passionate about it...when you have a passionate person leading them, they are almost always successful...So far, we here we have been very smart about who we choose to lead interventions and we usually let those people lead who have a natural inclination to do that type of intervention. I would say that is part of our success here.

The Minority Male Mentoring program and developmental studies are designed to get all students on the same academic level as they begin their majors. Placement tests determine whether the student starts in developmental or curriculum for certain courses.

The research director described how Maple prepares students for college work without an overly burdensome approach to developmental coursework:

Our developmental math starts with Math 060. But so they won't get stuck a whole semester, when maybe what they really need is just two core math areas, ...if they can get those quickly, they can go onto the next, so it will be a pretest–posttest sort of design. The student will pretest; they will qualify for boot camp. They will go through and take whatever it is that they show to be low on, those core areas, and then take a posttest, [the] same placement test, to see if they really can just skip that course and go on. So we are really trying to help students...save money [and]...move along faster in math, because math is cumulative; however, what we are finding in our classes is we are holding students up by having them go through a whole semester of something and really all they needed was 3 or 4 weeks.

As noted earlier, the more developmental courses that are prescribed for a student, the more likely it is that the student will not persist toward completion. The process described by Maple is similar to a new initiative by the NCCCS to modularize the developmental math sequence so that students only work on competencies prescribed as deficient, as opposed to going through three to four developmental math courses (Developmental Education Initiative, 2010).

#### 4.2.2.3 The Political Perspective at Maple Community College: Funding Growth

Maple is faced with a continuing challenge to supplement state and local funding for programs, equipment, and facilities needed to serve the market perspective. In an area where many of the students come to community college because of lost jobs, there is concern that Workforce Investment Act and Trade Adjustment Act funding for retraining the displaced worker is nearly depleted. To pursue the strategic goals it sets, the college is required to seek governmental and foundation funding. College development efforts secured grants to support two curriculum programs, an internal lighting project, and its library services in 2010:

- Duke Energy Community College Grant program funds Welding for the Workplace.
- Golden LEAF Foundation helps to acquire machining equipment for the Machining Technology program.
- NC Department of Commerce, through the State Energy Office, installed more energy-efficient lighting.
- State Library of North Carolina, through the Library Services and Technology Act/Basic Equipment Grant, improved and increased access to the Internet (Maple Community College, 2010d).

To ensure adequate funding, the political perspective can create friction between a college's administration and faculty if the college is determined to meet the CSFs. This friction, often resulting in change, is sometimes necessary to address chronic problems. At Maple, the president struggled with complacency in faculty and administrative ranks and explained how the political perspective forced changes in the operations of the college. The first example is the expectation that a faculty member would get a promotion to department chair based upon longevity, in the way that promotions had been handled in the past. Another change was due to the low nursing exam scores that showed up in the CSFs. To change the way things had been done with the previous administration dictated the need for the president to challenge the existing culture. The political perspective provided the means to make this challenge. Overcoming this resistance to a new way of operation was difficult, as the president did what Collins (2001) called "Facing the Brutal Facts" of student lack of achievement (p. 65). The president discussed this need for change:

One of the brutal facts is [this: Is the faculty member] ever going to provide the leadership to do things any differently, or do we just give him that job for 5 years as a going-out gift and then he retires? Well the program is not going to change with him over it, and that was a brutal fact and we had to face it. Nursing was not going to change [from behaviors contributing to students' low state test scores]. That was a brutal fact. I sat down with the college transfer group and said, "Let's talk not about why [our students perform lower than the state university average for non-transfer students]; let's talk about what we do about our college transfer program to go from 'good to great' in terms of student outcomes. We have to be more accessible to students. That is a brutal fact." And we had to do some things differently, and so we faced the brutal facts.

The political realities of finding additional funding sources and making changes in the culture of the college to attain the goal of CSF standards provided the impetus to make significant changes in the college, using the theoretical framework of Collins' *Good to Great* (2001). The academic perspective of the college would require additional work to buy into the changes needed for the transformation.

#### 4.2.2.4 The Academic Perspective at Maple Community College: Challenging the Existing Culture

The president of Maple Community College found a need to change the culture upon arrival at the campus. There had been a major issue with an external funding source that was indicative of a complacent culture. In the wake of a state audit in 2004, which found problems in its business office, the president and other key administrators resigned (Cohen, 2006) and an interim president was put in place until the current president was appointed. The president found a need to change the culture to achieve exemplary status using the *Good to Great* framework:

We have tried to change not only the procedures and the processes but [also] we tried to change the culture of the college. The mission has been...not about just the nuts and bolts thing, but [also] about the culture of the college, and so one of the guidelines I used for that was, "Does the college look [like the successful organizations in] *Good to Great*?" And in that book, it talks about a number of things. One is getting the right people on the bus and getting them in the right

seat, and we have used those kinds of things. Then I have added some things along there with it where we are trying to change the culture of the college.

To accomplish the culture change, the president made some sweeping changes based upon the results or scores departments received on the program evaluation instrument. Changes included adjusting the teaching schedule and increasing the faculty's on-campus hours to accommodate students. This met with significant resistance from faculty, including the faculty association. The president recalled the faculty confrontation:

Let us stop and ask ourselves what is it that we can do to help our students succeed. Let's start evaluating things like the way we schedule our classes...I took this on with the faculty association...we had a situation where our faculty, well they had kind of a gravy train because of during those dark years in the past. [The former president said,] "Schedule classes anyway you want to. If you don't want to be here on Thursday and Friday, then that is fine, schedule everything Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday"...[The current president said,] "We can't do this [anymore]," and you know they discussed it from the point of view [of] "Well, we have papers to grade at night," and then finally the one thing I said is, "Let's be consistent. We have been talking 3 years about *Good to Great*. We have this percentage of students that drop out from one semester to the next. When students who are struggling walk up and down the halls of our classroom buildings and faculty doors are closed and the lights are out, is that 'great'?"

They didn't argue with that. ...You can argue that you teach and grade papers at night, but I want you to explain to me from a student's perspective, is it 'great' that classroom buildings are basically locked up when students...are contemplating on whether to drop out or ask for help, walking up and down halls and they can't find faculty members? We made that change and the president of the faculty association actually came to the trustee meeting to speak against that policy, [but] the trustees said, "We are moving from 'good to great' and we suggest you get on board." So it has been a transformation. It has been a culture change.

This president made a point of what Collins (2001) called the "Stockdale Paradox." James Stockdale was a Vietnam Prisoner of War and was imprisoned in Hanoi. Stockdale said, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your

current reality, whatever they may be” (Collins, 2001, p. 85). The situation at this college, upon the appointment of a new president, was more serious than the situations at Oak or Pine. Performance was not at the desired level, several programs had slipped, issues existed with the handling of federal programs, and the president felt the need to instill a sense of urgency throughout the campus. With meeting the CSF standards, there was evidence that the existing culture had changed. The president summarized the importance of both radical hospitality and accountability in the following statement:

We have to treat each other with respect and dignity. We have to go out of our way. We don't point directions [to students and visitors]—we take them... We have our strategic plan and our initiatives and our trustee goals together, and the result is that people around here don't tolerate mediocrity too well anymore. People are held accountable to stand up and do the job.

The planning director used the strategic plan as a means of orienting new faculty and staff to the culture of continuous improvement that the president was and is attempting to develop. The planning director explained this:

I meet one-on-one with every new employee who is hired here and we talk about planning. We talk about assessment. How we make changes here, that sort of thing, make improvements and how that drives our budget, so this is kind of the visual that they get. Everything we do is driven by our strategic plan first. You can become involved with our strategic plan. We have an environmental scan, we determine what our values are, we determine our vision, our mission, what our goals are, our initiatives, and we have performance indicators as well... When a planning unit [an academic program or functional area, such as financial aid or business administration] determines from their review and assessment what it is they are going to bite off the following year, it is [either] in support of one of the strategic goals or...it does not become a part of the operational plan.

The alignment of goals of which the research director spoke is similar to the process used at Oak in that the mission of each work unit is designed to support the overall mission of the college—in the case of Maple, to go from “good to great” in terms of performance. The process of implementing the strategic plan and the president’s initiatives involved a



complex process of planning, implementing, and assessing, similar to the closed-loop process at Oak Community College.

#### 4.2.2.5 Implementing the Strategic Plan at Maple Community College

The environmental scan and analysis enabled the college's planners to establish priorities. As the planning director stated, "You can't improve everything at the same time." Maple Community College's environmental scan provided input from the community concerning trends and economic realities. The college used that information as a beginning point for its strategic plan.

The Maple Community College planning process addressed what the college is doing well, what it is not doing well, and what it needs to do that it is not doing. As a result of the environmental scan with constituent input, the college created the strategic framework for the coming year. The established values of the college guided the strategic plan in the areas of community, employees, quality education, radical hospitality, and student success (see Appendix E for the full explanation of the Values of Maple Community College) (Maple Community College, 2010c).

While the approach that the college took emphasizes mutual values and relationship building, the plan relied heavily upon data-driven decision making. In this aspect, Maple resembles Oak Community College. Maple used an in-depth program review process. The Maple planning director described the value provided by a data-driven system for decision making:

It's not enough to find out how well you perform, but it's to be reflective and think "OK, based on these outcomes, what am I going to do about it?" It could be that you say, "Well, that's good, let's keep on doing what we're doing." It's also likely and happens a lot, you say, "Hmm, we didn't meet our performance measure. What can we do about it?" Then we develop an intervention of some

sort...this is an assessment plan that we're talking about. It's similar in a way to the NCCCS performance measures and standards, except it's at the program level.

Using Collins' (2001) model in *Good to Great*, Maple Community College based financial and operational decisions on how the proposal supports the strategic initiatives of the college, as they pertain to successful student outcomes. The planning director stated that the factual aspect of the planning process started with recognition of the current situation. The director explained how this process of gap analysis ties planning to budget:

In the form of *Good to Great* where we identify brutal facts, "What would it look like if it were ideal in a perfect world? What are the gaps, what does it take to cross that bridge?" ...Then we also include in our plan our assessment of the years before the plan, and then our last part...is our plan for the upcoming year, which leads on to budget. The first question that [the vice president of administration] asks when someone says, "I would like to do this [project or other resource allocation]," is "Is it in your plan?" And so folks have grown to learn over the last few years that, if you want to do something and it is going to cost some money, that the first step in getting that money is getting it in your plan. So when you have senior leaderships setting that standard, it does not take long for all of us to learn that this is the way that we get what we need.

The elements of the planning process, as stated in the college's Institutional Effectiveness Plan, which was provided to me by the college, consists of the following:

- review of mission, vision, institutional goals, and the development of short-term initiatives;
- collection of data, external input by constituents, bridge or gap analysis, evaluation, and assessment;
- development of annual continuous improvement plans, program objectives, and budget needs; and
- implementation (Maple Community College, 2010e).

The process stresses that analysis leads to finding emerging markets or community needs to address regarding the college's mission and goals of the college; the college's mission and goals guide unit-level goals and strategies; evaluation results set objectives and help determine strategies for improvement; objectives drive the budget; and the plan becomes the blueprint for implementation (Maple Community College, 2010b).

The principal report, called *Good to Great Report*, presented the elements of the institutional effectiveness plan. The report, like Oak's WE Tracker Form, evaluated performance on several levels:

- program elements,
- SWOT analysis,
- performance versus standards,
- continuous improvement plan results, and
- assessment.

The *Good to Great Report* serves as a program review for the planning unit. The report begins with the analysis of faculty positions and the incumbents, and then reviews the adequacy of facilities and curriculum. The review brings in the advisory committees' membership and the committees' recommendations. The student program enrollment and costs associated with operations for the work units are included along with statistics on the courses and the program levels.

Review of the continuous improvement plans for the previous year was the next part of Maple's process. This included accomplishment of objectives, the measurement used, the status of the objective (completion, future implementation, or abandonment), and documentation of improvements and changes. This was reported to senior leadership

and an update was provided to the trustees. A forward-looking section in the report links the upcoming year's objectives to institutional goals and provides an avenue for the work unit to propose additional personnel, equipment, or other resources necessary to meet those goals.

#### 4.2.2.6 Summary of the Maple Community College Case Study

Maple Community College used quantifiable data for decision making but placed institutional values as the principal guide to planning and implementation of strategic goals. The president continues to strategically build a culture of positive relationships, based upon civility and radical hospitality for faculty and students in a client-centered culture. The attention to community needs and community input into the operational plans supported the local area value of the college. Concepts of what is required to rise above mediocrity, as expressed in the college's *Good to Great Report*, permeate the college's environment. There are many similarities with Oak, as the two focus on measureable performance, but one contrast exists between the two: Oak had a more stable past, while Maple was forced to be more challenging of an existing culture. More comparisons between Maple and Oak will be discussed in the later section of cross-case analysis following the Pine Community College case description.

#### 4.2.3 Case 3: Pine Community College

Pine Community College is located in a wooded, rural setting. In reaching the college from an interstate highway on the main highway, I noticed signs for agritourism as well as for traditional agriculture. The town in which the college is located had few closed businesses downtown despite the loss of significant manufacturing and

agricultural employment. Initial interviews with the president and the vice president for research and assessment were held on a Tuesday in early November, 2010.

The campus layout is more like a small 4-year college than a community college. It is spread out over many two- or three-story buildings on 40 acres, as opposed to the normally tight footprint of many community college campuses. A school bus was delivering early college high school students to a dedicated building near the front entrance to the campus. Located across from the early college, a recent modern building houses a new technology program. The main entrance sign was designed by arts program students (as the president later pointed out) and is composed of native stone and wood. Parking is an issue at this campus, as I had to park in a lot some distance from the administration building.

Pine Community College has over 5,000 curriculum students. The student body is approximately 94 percent white, non-Hispanic, with the other 6 percent equally divided between black non-Hispanic and Hispanic. Women constitute nearly two-thirds of the student body. Forty-three percent of the students have federal financial aid packages. The fall-to-fall retention rate for curriculum students is 67 percent. The graduation rate within 3 years is 25 percent. Full-time faculty constitute one-third of the total faculty. The state appropriation is 60 percent of the total budget for the college (IPEDS, 2010).

While the president was initially reluctant to participate in this study due to the multitude of requests for surveys and interviews (my college president made a special request on my behalf), the reception at Pine was cordial and the interview with the president exceeded the promised half hour by 20 minutes. Another interview with the vice president for research and assessment lasted 45 minutes, with extra time to review

SWOT analyses that the college conducted for its environmental scan. Other interviews were held on the following Tuesday with other members of administration who gave interviews ranging from 30 minutes to over an hour.

The college reaches two counties in its service area. It has satellite service centers, where classes are held or student inquiries are met in the remote parts of the two counties. There are no universities in the immediate vicinity, but the college has several public and private universities meeting on its campus. Of the three colleges in this study, Pine has the highest full-time retention rate and the highest graduation rate. In several of the interviews, the theme of advisement for students, particularly the college transfer students, was a main topic. As with Oak and Maple, the market perspective is a key driver of how the college operates.

#### 4.2.3.1 The Market Perspective at Pine Community College: Community Input and Intervention Strategies for Student Success

Pine Community College began the planning process with an environmental scan of the community in terms of economic, political, sociological, and technology needs that the college could help provide. The inclusion of diverse constituencies follows the classic model used by Oak and Maple to evaluate the status quo and to plan for improvement. Pine Community College's president stated that the planning process began with surveys and focus groups consisting of community leaders, elected officials, the chambers of commerce in both counties, board of trustee and foundation board members, high school students, displaced workers, and community groups. The president recalled the setting for the SWOT analysis:

We had a fairly good turnout because this was during the week, during a workday. The one we had here, if I can remember correctly, I think was a breakfast meeting and we just had coffee and Danish [pastry] and just talked with folks and said,

“From your perspective, what do you think are the strengths of this college? From your perspective, what do you think are the challenges that are going to be faced? From your perspective, what would you like to see us incorporate?” There was a list of questions we went through...The strength of that meeting was that we had a diverse group.

An academic administrator stated how community program advisory committees influence the strategic plan of the college. The advisory committees meet on a regular basis and the college uses their input in the continuous improvement efforts for individual programs. It is important for the college to report back to the advisory committees about how their suggestions have been considered in the overall plan for the college, according to the administrator. The academic administrator explained this process:

We make sure the first thing we lead with is a report on what we've done with their recommendations since our last meeting. It's been our experience that the more results that they can see of their input, their feedback gaining traction and how we change things, the more apt they are to come back and feel like it's a useful experience for them. Once we do that, we've shown them, "Since you were here last and you offered these improvements here's how we have implemented them"; "Here's how this has worked for us"; "We're going to continue this, it was great, or we're going to tweak it." However, I can't think of something they've ever suggested that we just tried and was a flop. It's always good stuff.

The enthusiasm in which the college pursues external input is more than just symbolic. The community values the college as its own, since no 4-year college or university is in the immediate proximity. The president stated that in 2009, in a bad economy, the college's golf tournament to raise student scholarships raised over \$50,000, a mark that greatly exceeded a similar endeavor at the president's previous employer, a much larger community college.

The successful community colleges in this study have an emphasis on the student and his or her accommodation and academic success. Pine's president noted that it is important to identify conditions that dissatisfy students. The example that the president

cited is the input from the community forums (including student input) concerning campus parking. This issue garnered the largest amount of comments on the environmental scan. To reduce this dissatisfaction, the college made an extra effort to improve parking. The approach was to remove a barrier to student satisfaction (and potential attendance) at the college through a concrete, yet symbolic, representation that the students' satisfaction was important.

At Pine Community College, the student development function serves as a welcoming and informative point of entry to the institution. The importance of building relationships with students became a priority for this staff function. An administrator described the role of this student service function as being the "front door" of the college:

In all aspects, whether it's the financial aid counseling, whether it's the career counseling, just class schedule counseling and everything that comes with that counseling and with that interaction, I consider student development to be the front door...the portal to the college. So to us, making our students successful starts out with building a relationship...When we devise our annual goals, you'll find that a lot of the goals that we set involve how we can build relationships with the students and truly be an adviser, a counselor, a resource, and a support service for them.

In the process of making students feel welcome, Pine follows a path similar to Oak's decision to build a modern student center and Maple's choice to make radical hospitality its prime value. As with the other colleges in this study, Pine works to help all students, regardless of their goals and academic ability coming into the institution.

As with the other two colleges, the issue of "access versus success" challenged Pine. Being able to offer the university transfer student the course equivalent to the university education, while bringing along the student who is not prepared for the lowest level of curriculum courses, brought out the need for creative solutions. An academic administrator stated the problem with persistence that a lower performing student faces:



If you are in Math 060 or 070, it's not the end of the [academic] road, but it means that you are going to need a long-term commitment [to graduate]. As a faculty member in the Associate of Science area told me, "It's not impossible, but we have to be realistic and the student has to commit the time to remediation."

To work with underprepared students, Pine Community College uses a blending of basic skills and developmental programs, which is unique to the colleges in this study. While some students may place into higher level algebra developmental courses or place out altogether, basic math is an area in which many students struggle, as it may have been several years since even a recent high school graduate would have been required to do simple math (e.g., numerical skills). The college breaks out the students who place low in numerical math skills but do better in algebra from the student who struggles with the numerical skills without any algebra proficiency. The school also partners with the local high schools, using a transition team that works to prevent the lower achieving students from getting discouraged by offering a lengthy remedial prescription at their first contact with the community college. A student affairs administrator listed sources of support:

We have a plan for [lower performing] students to be successful. We have a college path for them, but it will take some of that support from the parents and from outside agencies on that transition team. We have vocational rehabilitation. We have people from the school systems that feed into our college who are designated to work with challenged students. So we try to give them that infrastructure and that support before the student has the opportunity to feel like they're not successful.

Once students get into the remedial programs, their development is incremental. Research in developmental education is still evolving, as the practices that colleges and universities use is evolving. The approach that Pine has taken has been to designate a chair of developmental education. An academic administrator explained how this works:

We're trying to emphasize the developmental department. We have a chair now that is really very strong with data analysis and does a really good job of saying, "Here's what I noticed when we tried to run developmental English online," or

“Here’s what I found, we tried to use an interactive software package in these accelerated developmental classes.” I know the [NCCCS] system office is really putting a lot of emphasis on developmental issues. So, our person is really staying closely connected with that. We have [developmental education] set up as its own planning unit. She tracks it. She promotes ideas for how we should be handling developmental students and things we ought to be doing with that population.

Evidence at Pine indicates a strong effort to remove barriers for students and to use data to drive decision making, in a manner similar to Oak and Maple Community Colleges.

The cooperation with business and industry at Pine leads to more removal of barriers as students get the opportunity for real-world experience.

Pine Community College has a unique program in which the construction and other skilled trades programs partner with the nonprofit Habitat for Humanity to build houses. Experience gained in hands-on building is invaluable to the program. This experience in code-complying building practices incorporates the latest conservation or “green building” practices. The goodwill generated in the community, not to mention the service provided to the local citizens receiving a house, creates a true collaboration with the builders and material supply firms in the service area. An academic administrator described the mutual benefit derived from this endeavor:

We can talk about building walls, centering joists, putting on siding, and to some extent we can do that in the classroom, but to do that on a live house is an incredible hands-on experience for the students. The members of Habitat are members of the advisory committee for those different programs. Those programs meet a need for Habitat, and now with all the green initiatives, with mandates from the federal government, we started the sustainable energy program at the college. ... This is where the building of housing is going. In talking with the Electrical Advisory Committee, more and more people are going with solar panels and solar heating and are looking for different ways not to burn oil or coal. They are going to sustainable construction (practices), you don’t see big dumpsters at a construction sites as much as they are recycling materials—siding, insulation; that whole sustainable concept coming from the advisory board is implemented into the program.

One of the key elements to Pine's success appears to be the college's willingness to listen to its constituents and ask what can be done to help the community through programs that (a) include all of the citizens and (b) listen to business and industry on new trends and practices that better prepare students for real-world experiences. The approach that Pine takes not only accepts accountability, but embraces it in both the market and the political perspectives.

#### 4.2.3.2 The Political Perspective at Pine Community College: Maximizing Resources

Just as the market dictates the direction that the community college must go to reach the community constituents, the political realities of crimped budgets, expanded outreach, and quality of instruction affect the planning process. The president of Pine stated that planning involves the political implications of increased accountability expectations of the community college and includes doing more with fewer resources:

I went to the American Association of Community College Trustees' meeting. I attended the session on accountability because there is not enough information we can grasp onto. We just need to keep getting more and more information about how we can improve in this area because we are being held to a higher and higher standard with accountability each year. In that session, what I walked away from was more or less reassurance that we're doing a lot of things right. That a lot of things that we already have in place here at Pine Community College are the things they're talking about in workshops at national conferences.

We began the year...looking at what we currently had in place with our strategic plan. We've got an in-house planning committee that periodically reviews what we have and say[s,] "You know, it's good"...but one of my favorite lines that I'll use is, "There is no finish line to perfection."...Even though 90 [on a CSF] might be exceptional, we can always get better and streamline our resources. Even if we stay the same, how can we streamline our resources so we're still getting that same exceptional result? But we are streamlining the resources because of what's happening with budget and it's just good, good management.

From discussions with various administrators, it is clear that setting high goals is a cultural characteristic of Pine. This shows in the high performance on the CSFs and in the ambitious project for quality enhancement.

The environmental scanning document points to political issues that will influence the direction of the college. These issues include President Obama's American Graduation Initiative to increase community college graduates by 5 million over the next 10 years and greater access to funds for going to college, including the GI Bill and Pell Grants (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Along with those grants, the college will have to satisfy more rigorous reporting requirements (Pine Community College, 2010a).

One of the political implications at Pine Community College comes from the Golden Leaf Foundation of North Carolina, a nonprofit agency funded with tobacco manufacturers' state settlement dollars. Golden Leaf was created to help distressed areas; the foundation's initiatives are designed to improve local economic conditions (Golden Leaf, 2011). Pine is a recent recipient of the Community Assistance Initiative and uses the grant to promote wider access to the college in the more remote locations of the service area. An administrator commented about the politics of obtaining the foundation grant:

We opened two new centers this past year [in different parts of the service area]. It was the result of a yearlong facilitated discussion of our area through the Golden Leaf Foundation. We had a series of six to seven meetings, that anybody could attend, to talk about 2 million dollars to spend in our county, to figure out what to do with it to meet our needs. After seven meetings that were attended by 60 to 80 people every meeting, it was determined that at the western and eastern ends of our service area we needed a workforce education center where people could get retrained and [where] an extension of our college [would be present] in those communities. Those have now opened and part of the staffing for that is an outreach coordinator. ... The idea was that it would be the proverbial one-stop

shop for the student regardless of what they wish to do. It has really opened a lot of doors. Essentially, we went through the process with Golden Leaf and were competing with towns with water and sewer issues and things all over the map. [Our success] was because we were out in the community and they were aware of things we could do, and we listened to the people, causing us to rise to the top and get...the bulk of that money.

In competing with other political factions for limited fiscal resources, the organizational skill and political acumen of Pine Community College has positioned it well for an expected downturn in funding for community colleges across the state. Recognizing that the college, like many businesses, must be prepared to do more with fewer fiscal resources creates a pragmatic approach to planning and makes the need for good program development, implementation, and evaluation highly important.

#### 4.2.3.3 The Academic Perspective at Pine Community College: Communication and Teamwork

Upon arrival at Pine Community College toward the end of the 2000s, the president found a culture where communication was sparse and where faculty were able to stay comfortably insulated within their respective disciplines. The president made challenging the existing culture a major priority, to change to a planning and communicative culture from the president's office on down:

One of the things that I have tried to do is kind of work on the communication standpoint. When I got here, they had one faculty–staff meeting a year. I changed that. We now have one to start our fall semester, one in January to start our spring semester, one in May before folks leave for summer. And when issues come up we have an additional one. I went to different groups because even though we did a survey, we still want to talk with people in groups because then you get that synergy. They start bouncing ideas and building upon each other's ideas, and that gives you a whole different level of what we can do and some ideas.

To gain buy-in from faculty, the president met with groups on campus above the director level in order to get their input into what the college strategic plan should look

like. The president met on a regular basis with faculty and worked to improve the quality and quantity of campus communication:

When I came it was a good school, but we were heading towards some challenging economic times. When you're not getting raises and you're not getting a lot of things, like the monies for professional development like we had before, so forth, we knew that we would have some issues with that. When I first got here I went and met with all the different divisions and chatted with them. I had the cabinet members meet with their groups more often. The person who is over academics just met with our division chairs but didn't meet with full faculty. Just met with division chairs and had the division chairs kind of filter up the information. You need to meet with full faculty. ... I can meet with cabinet, which is the vice presidents, once a week, which we need, which is fine. But sometimes, through nobody's fault, that information that we talk about at cabinet doesn't always get filtered on down through the organization. [In addition to meetings,] we have the weekly newsletter, the student monthly newsletter, lots of other forms of communication. But there is something about the face-to-face communication. I always think face-to-face is critical because you not only hear the words, but you see what that person is saying.

Pine Community College has been very successful with the performance of transfer students in the receiving universities and 4-year colleges. Pine achieves successful outcomes in part by dedicating a transfer counselor to closely coordinate advisement for transfer students. The counselor described the development of this process, which brings faculty directly into advisement:

When I came here there were two college transfer counselors and we saw most of the 700 to 800 transfer students that we had at any one time. I said I would like to set up an advisory system that would use the faculty more, which was just in name-only at the time. Over time we did that that... We trained faculty in groups on a periodic basis and we also worked on orientation for the students. That evolved over time... But there was more individual attention for students. You will get mixed reviews on faculty advising... some like it and some don't. There is a continuum of quality of service, but there was a continuum of service at peak registration when there were two of us and 700-plus students; not very efficient and extremely stressful. I'm not sure we gave them the time and quality [of advisement]. So we got that going and the [academic] administrative side and the student [development] side worked together a lot. We formed a new advisement committee to see what we can do to improve. Then we developed a transfer Web site a few years later.

Some innovative approaches that the counselor has taken include an extensive orientation for incoming university-bound students and their parents in the summer before classes start. This orientation provides an in-depth planning session to prepare students for successful transfer and involves them and their parent(s) in a small-group setting with an adviser who is also a department chair. An academic preparation course designed for transfer students, ACA 122, is required during the first semester of the student's academic career (which is similar to the efforts of Oak and Maple). The counselor cited reasons for the success of transfer students from Pine when they go to a university:

I think [orientation] and ACC 122 [Study Skills for Transfer Students], along with the emphasis that we have put on advising over the last decade, helped our Critical Success Factors on transfer. There are only a few [community colleges] that have [consistently] met it over the last 10 years.

The role of faculty as advisers is a relatively new role for faculty at this college. As the counselor noted, the response has been mixed regarding the addition of advisement to the duties of instruction. Regular mandatory training sessions, including training new faculty for transfer advisement, have improved the quality of advisement. There remain some skeptics on the faculty that disagree with this concept, according to the counselor:

We did a mandatory transfer advising sessions for 32 faculty members in October 2009. I worked with the arts and sciences dean on this because I'm not over the faculty, and pretty much have to force the issue. Nobody wants extra meetings, but we have to make sure we are passing along good information to the students, at least a couple of times a year. For example, we have an advising committee meeting in December. It's nice that the academic side has taken the mantle of advising. A couple of years ago, I was pushing the whole ball; as time has gone by, more people have gotten involved, and it is now a team effort.

Overcoming faculty resistance to advising, improving communication, and having clear objectives helped Pine meet student needs. Its transfer success rate is among the best in the NCCCS. The transition process for high school students and underprepared students enables them to be successful, where the absence of such support may leave students at other colleges feeling set adrift. The elements of engagement appear to be in place at Pine Community College.

The CCSSE at Pine shows that the college is near or above the mean for benchmarked items of student engagement in 2010, the benchmark year for the survey. The higher rating of the college is indicative of the effort that the college puts forth to reach all students. As with Oak (Maple does not participate in the CCSSE), the median is 50. The highest rating for Pine is support for learners, 2 points over the median. Student effort and academic effort are indicative of the high expectations that administration and faculty have for students. Faculty–student interaction and support for learning demonstrate the support that the college provides for students.

Table 4.

*Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2010 Benchmark Summary Report: Pine Community College*

| Category                          | Benchmark Rating |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Active and Collaborative Learning | 49.5             |
| Student Effort                    | 50.4             |
| Academic Challenge                | 50.9             |
| Student–Faculty Interaction       | 49.9             |
| Support for Learners              | 52.1             |

*Note.* CCSE *Mdn* = 50. From “Survey Results,” for Pine Community College, by Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2010.



The points of Burke's accountability triangle coincide with Pine's intentional gaining of input from its constituencies and being market (student) centered. The political specter of reduced resources led the college to be better at the things that it does and to search for additional resources outside of state funding. The academic perspective overcame resistance to student advisement to help the college be a leader in transfer student success. In order to accomplish these things, there needed to be a strong system of planning, implementation, and review. Pine accomplished this as well.

#### 4.2.3.4 Implementing the Strategic Planning Process at Pine Community College

Of the three colleges in this study, Pine Community College more closely follows the classic model of strategic planning given in the literature review. This classic approach consists of environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, setting goals based upon the academic demands and environmental factors, implementing plans, and assessing progress made toward the goals.

Pine used a Web-based strategic planning system, Strategic Planning Online™ (SPOL), as its principal planning device. The inclusion of a separate program review process with the Web-based program marks Pine as different from both Oak and Maple, as their program reviews were integrated with strategic planning. An artifact from SPOL shows that the planning consists of several elements common to both Oak and Maple (Pine Community College, 2010b):

- stating institutional goals;
- the unit purpose, tasks;
- assessment measures;
- intended outcomes;

- actual results, the use of results;
- gap analysis, SWOT analysis; and
- associated standards (i.e., accrediting agencies such as SACSCOC principles or standards) and associated outcomes.

This process provides a way for the work unit to encompass the external and internal planning and assessment on an objective-by-objective basis. The system permits entries to be made at various levels of reporting and allows for live updating for senior administrators. The strategic plan is on a 3-year cycle.

A Pine Community College academic administrator described the computerized system that is used for planning and serves as the entry point for budgeting and decision making:

The connection to [the budget is] a lot easier since it's connected in that package. Through the years, before we've had this in the SPOL, we were planning in a vacuum. ...[With the present system,] in terms of prioritizing equipment, the first thing I'm going to look for is: How is it connected to the student's learning? That's going to be my first priority every time. If it's connected to something operationally, if it's really going to greatly enhance your efficiency, then that will be second. ...So I think that's something, again that's kind of a pure, simple concept that our administrative team has tried to reinforce.

The universal access and use of SPOL permits real-time evaluation of the progress that individual units are making toward the plan. It ties in nicely with the political perspective of making data-driven decisions. An academic administrator noted how the QEP, required for regional accreditation reaffirmation to improve critical-thinking skills, fits into the SPOL model. A secondary benefit has been a ready means of including faculty in decision making processes. The academic administrator emphasized the importance of involving faculty in an outcomes-focused strategy:

One of the things that I make sure we do is present...the Associate of Arts [AA] and Associate of Science [AS] as programs that have goals and outcomes. I'm starting with the mission, and part of the mission is to produce excellence in teaching and learning. We want excellent instruction, but we also want excellent learning. So all of our learning outcomes are focused on producing learning in students. We have college values, including collaboration, communication, and critical thinking and technology, to improve learning. We try to fold those together. Then we have strategic goals for the next 3 years, some of which are related to what we try to do, such as increasing diversity, increasing student awareness of the global world around them, and producing excellent academic programs. We want the objectives to feed back into each of those. [Faculty members are instructed to] identify a strategic goal that ties into what they are trying to do. One of the reasons that I like strategic goals is [that] faculty and chairs can write objectives on [for example] diversity—"What can we do in an English class to promote diversity?"

The program review that feeds off the strategic plan is as robust as the assessment instruments at Oak and Maple. Measures of NCCCS CSFs are woven into the review, which is completed on a 3-year cycle (unless the unit falls short, then it reports again the next year). Measures include the program mission, the employment outlook for graduates, and listing of faculty and their academic credentials in the section entitled "Program Overview." Viability indicators show the need for continuation of the program. The indicators include enrollment and earned FTE, retention and graduation, workforce demand, and students placed in employment in the field within 1 year. A third section consists of quality indicators, including stated program learning outcomes, the means of assessment, and the results of assessment. The program review includes advisory recommendations and accreditations. The resources expended by the program over 3 years and the justification for additional resources is the final section of the program review.

The program review was first examined by the department's divisional dean. Like the process at Oak, the review bubbled up through the levels of reporting. According to

an academic administrator, each program is required to have two strategic goals and two program goals. The program goals are what the students will leave the program with, and strategic goals are operational goals. The faculty developed initiatives using the SPOL system. The unit manager reviewed and approved it and sent it on to the department chair. The department chair reviewed it to determine feasibility. The chair discussed the request with the faculty member before approving the goals. The dean went through the goals to be sure that they are congruent with the department's outcome goals, then reviewed the method of measurement to make sure that the measurement is going to support the goals, and then repeated the process for the strategic/operational part of goals. The bubbling up continued to the vice president for academic programs for review, who made sure the goals were supportive of the overall strategy of the college. The dean commented on the process:

It is [a] very time-consuming and thorough process. I told the chairs and I told the faculty, that this may not be very flattering, but that's fine. I'd rather know what the problems are and try to fix them than to sit here and think everything's rosy and find out it's not. Some come back rosy, some not so rosy, and some are a little of each.

#### 4.2.3.5 Summary of the Pine Community College Case Study

Pine Community College provides a classic view of the strategic planning process as presented in the literature review. Alignment of goals, based upon an environmental survey of elements affecting its service area with a thorough SWOT analysis, gave Pine a clear picture of the conditions in which it operates. Strategies were formed for continuous improvement and for achieving the CSFs. Communication as a constancy of message—as stated in the president's statement, "Perfection has no finish line"—set the stage for

overcoming faculty resistance to a new advisement assignment. Results indicate that the college is serving its population well and it is deserving of exemplary status.

#### 4.2.4 Summary of Within-Case Analysis of the Three Cases

The three community colleges in this study are unique in their governance and management. Oak Community College is very strong in data-driven decision making, with a strategic management instrument that serves as an assessment tool and permits faculty and staff to recommend actions to achieve strategic goals. Maple Community College emphasizes data-driven decision making as well, but first promotes the client-centered relationship between faculty/staff and students through radical hospitality. Pine Community College follows a more traditional plan of setting strategy with extensive SWOT analysis and the use of a computerized program of planning, assessment, and program review.

As each of the three colleges in the study of EIP pursues excellence, some common themes begin to emerge. The colleges take different approaches to achieving the standards set by the state, but the achieving of those standards is important to each college's administration. Each college uses a closed-loop system of planning and quality assurance. Each places high levels of importance on the relationship of faculty and students. All three value input from their external constituents. Each college is heavily invested in documentation that requires data to drive decisions.

None of the colleges leave the planning process solely to faculty. Accountability standards filter down through constituent-based environmental scans, the setting of key objectives or values, and operational objectives. The academic perspective then manages the bubble-up effect of requesting resources, assessing course and program outcomes,

and developing quality improvement plans. The convergence of the three plans is shown in section 4.3, Cross-Case Analysis of Emerging Common Themes, with rich descriptions of how each college promotes the culture of the closed-loop system.

#### 4.3 Cross-Case Analysis of Emerging Common Themes

Cross-case analysis permits the comparison and contrast of the three cases. As each case is discrete, emerging themes have meaning. Through triangulation of three cases, the trustworthiness of the converging themes becomes more apparent.

##### 4.3.1 Emergent Thematic Elements Related to Burke's Accountability Triangle

Over the course of conducting interviews at the three community colleges, certain mutual themes emerge as successful practices. Using Burke's accountability triangle as a lens for viewing the colleges, I explored the market, political, and academic perspectives as pressure points for accountability and how the colleges responded to that pressure, thus giving an indication as to why each college earned its status as an exemplary institution. The use of open coding to identify themes along the loose stratification supplied by Burke permits inductive reasoning, allowing themes to emerge and to be compared among institutions when common practices are shared. This inductive method is consistent with Ezzy's (2002) thematic and axial coding. Some of these explanations will be about within-case analysis and others will be cross-case analysis when comparisons are appropriate.

One feature of both Maple and Pine contrasts with Oak Community College. The president of Maple and the president of Pine placed a strong emphasis on communications and relationship building with the community and with emphasizing faculty performance, while the administrators at Oak primarily emphasized performance

measures based on data-driven decision making. Maple and Pine appear to be in the mode of culture change, while the existing culture at Oak seems more stable. All three of the colleges followed a closed-loop design of strategic planning.

Similarities exist with all three in the way that they structured their planning processes. All looked for input from constituencies, with fairly sophisticated environmental scan processes. Objectives were generated to departments and work units; work-unit assessments bubbled-up back through the reporting process, thus creating a closed-loop system at Pine, as well as at Oak and Maple. All three colleges used the NCCCS CSFs as elements in measuring their operational outputs in program reviews.

#### 4.3.1.1 Market Themes

The first emergent theme associated with accountability demands of the market perspective of Burke's accountability triangle is the relationship that each college had with its service area. Community colleges in North Carolina have assigned services areas, as opposed to competing for students in and out of the immediate area as 4-year colleges and universities do. They may offer online programs that cross service area lines, or they may collaborate on certain programs, but they are not permitted to recruit students or program partners in another college's assigned service area. Interviews with the president of each college, as well as other officials, led me to understand the importance that the colleges place on having a strong presence in the communities and with the students and employers that they serve.

##### 4.3.1.1.1 Market Theme 1: Build Relationships With the Community

The participants in this study all had a great appreciation of the role of their college in the community. While statewide policy is set by the State Board of Community

Colleges and financial resources are set by the NC General Assembly, each college has local control through its board of trustees. The structure ensures that at least two-thirds of the board, appointed by the county commission and local boards of education, has a distinctly local interest (one-third is appointed by the governor). It is imperative that the community college president has a good relationship with the local community.

The recognition that other sources are available is but one factor that the successful community colleges based on the need to develop relationships with their respective communities. This is true when strategic planning takes place. All three of the exemplary colleges in this study used a formal planning process that started with the community's input into creating a snapshot of how the college was doing and what market constituents think needs to be done. The community input was supported by the extensive use of advisory committees to help on the program level. Each college required programs to consult with the committees, consisting of practitioners of the skills, owners of businesses that provide internships, cooperative opportunities and hiring for students, and graduates and experts in the field of study.

There appears to be no significant differences in the way the each college approached community relations. Oak, as the largest college in a regional center, has the most variety of constituents, while Maple and Pine rely heavily on a more concentrated base of support. They all valued the relationships and built on them through their environmental scans.

#### 4.3.1.1.2 Market Theme 2: Conduct Environmental Scans

The complexity of the open-door, comprehensive community college makes it important that the college not become overly insulated from the external environment.



The successful colleges invited outsiders and insiders to comment on strategies and conduct analyses of where the college is succeeding and where weaknesses exist. The most extreme measure of this was the Oak peer review of student affairs by other colleges; Maple and Pine both invited the community, in many different forms, to participate in the initial planning for the coming year.

Pine Community College's approach to the environmental scan was more directly based upon an established model. This college's research department asked external and internal constituents to participate in multiple levels of SWOT analysis (Pine Community College, 2010c). SWOT analysis is a commonly used tool for analyzing the internal and external environments to ascertain direction and support for decision making. Maple and Oak both accomplished the same means, but asked for input more indirectly than Pine.

#### 4.3.1.1.3 Market Theme 3: Focus on the Student

The emphasis on being client centered stems from the various constituencies that constitute the stakeholder pool. This can be the students themselves, their parents, grant-funding agencies, business and industry, and others who use the resources and outputs of the community college. However, by putting the student in the position of the client, the community college is able to respond to the demands and needs of the market without undue patronage to the collateral factors, such as parents, employers, and other interested, but not engaged, parties.

One measure of client-centeredness is the CCSSE (2009, 2010). This is a survey of students in classrooms that is based upon five metrics of how engaged students are in their community college experience. The five measures attempt to portray the student's perception of academic challenge and support by the college. Two of the colleges in this

study, Oak and Pine, participated in this voluntary survey. The results are not intended to be used as a ranking tool, but rather to show how students perceive the college.

Maple stressed the importance of engagement (although it did not participate in the CCSSE). The concept of radical hospitality emphasized that, as Maple's president said, "customer service falls short." Requiring more varied class offerings and greater availability of faculty to students created some friction with faculty at Maple. Greater emphasis on advisement, particularly college transfer advisement, created friction with faculty at both Oak and Pine. The emphasis on retaining students is strong at all three colleges, as Oak and Maple use the Minority Male Mentoring program while Pine has a transition program for underprepared students to keep them engaged and show them that they are supported. The "Ask Me" experience for beginning students at Maple shows the determination of the college to keep students in school during the first few weeks in hope of their maintaining engagement. All three colleges' strategic efforts toward engagement and persistence seem to be paying dividends.

Another practice of being client centered is the use of learning communities. A good example of this concept is found at all three of the exemplary colleges, particularly with the requirement of an academic study skills course. This has proven to be helpful for transfer student success as well as for student persistence in technical courses.

The relationship with students, both the prepared and the underprepared, is seen as a convergent theme with the three community colleges in this study. The extra attention each college paid to students—providing a welcoming environment on campus, reducing bureaucracy (registration and advisement at Maple) and points of irritation (e.g., parking shortages at Pine), the response to address facilities crowding (at Oak) when

possible, and the engagement of students in their respective fields of study—helped the students feel connected to their institution. This extra effort manifests itself in the market perspective in that the student finds his or her needs met in terms of the academic aspect and the sense of belongingness or engagement.

#### 4.3.1.1.4 Market Theme 4: Collaborate With Business and Industry

The North Carolina CSF *client satisfaction with customized training* is defined as the “percentage of businesses/industries who have received services from a community college indicating that their expectations have been met. This measure is intended to “determine the satisfaction of organizations that received services from a community college” (NCCCS, 2010a). All three exemplary institutions considered their relationship with local business and industry to be crucial for their growth and community support. Each college approached this measure in a different manner that included collaboration with business and industry.

An emergent theme is the use of program advisory committees consisting of practitioners and potential employers of the colleges’ students. These committees reviewed programs, conducted SWOT analyses, made suggestions to improve programs, contributed machinery and equipment, and provided hands-on training or internship opportunities (sometimes for both faculty and students). The support received from the business and industry core was invaluable in enabling the colleges to remain current in methodology and technology.

It appears that all three colleges recognized that there are competing forces for the resources of the college (e.g., transfer, careers, remediation, certification, and customized training). In promoting the economic welfare of the community, the president of Oak

Community College stated belief that the needs of business and industry are met along with the interests of the student. The strategic initiatives related to business and industry included adding programs that (a) reflect the changing needs of the community in a global economy at Pine and Maple (as the local area transitions from a manufacturing to a service-based economies), and (b) effectively utilize advisory committees for program planning and evaluation. Additional subsets of the initiatives that provide for collaborative relationships with business and industry included the colleges' commitment to provide technology equivalent to what students will use in the workplace and to increase written communication and critical-thinking skills that extend well outside the classroom and serve to increase students' employability.

The three colleges in this study have had successful collaborations with the business community. Advisory committees provided direction for program relevance and improvement. Partnerships provided opportunities for student internships or co-op experiences and connected the business and health care community to the college through equipment donations and class project experience.

#### 4.3.1.1.5 Summary of Themes From the Market Perspective

All three colleges built collaborative relationships with constituents. From valuing the relationships and acknowledging the responsibility that the community college owes its service area, the colleges began the strategic process with an environmental scan of community needs and interests, surveying the world in which they operate for existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The colleges placed their clients (students) in the center of their operational strategies to provide access to underserved populations, to provide transfer opportunities for additional higher education, and to

serve a broad range of educational needs in the community. Finally, the colleges collaborated with the business and industry sector to stay relevant in their offerings through advisory committee input and partnerships with local health care and business entities to make sure that their programs are current and to make a connection with employers for their graduates.

Closely associated with the demands of the market perspective, the political perspective requires attention to be paid to efficiency in addition to the effectiveness of programs. In a time of shrinking resources for the community college, this becomes an important factor. The second point of Burke's triangle provides accountability to the state and federal political entities that provide financial support to the colleges.

#### 4.3.1.2 Political Perspective Themes

The trend toward political accountability increases as funding from more sources, particularly on the federal level, increase availability of Pell Grants and other financial support at the community college. Measurement of academic outputs reflects state or political priorities and manifests itself in accreditation principles. The NC General Assembly's CSFs is a good example of accountability demands in the form of performance reporting as a state report card.

The political perspective encompasses, in one way or another, all eight of North Carolina's CSFs. In the research of literature for this study, two areas stand out from the political perspective: the access and success of students who enter via the open door of the community college, and the need for fiscal accountability in program operation. Themes emerge from interviews and reviews of documents, which establish that successful community colleges set strategies and implement plans to attempt to ensure

the success of all students while at the same time prove to be good stewards of public funds through data-driven decision making.

A central value of the North Carolina community college is the *open door*, in which all students who meet age criteria are admitted, as opposed to the admission criteria of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), class ranking, and high school grade point average that governs many 4-year higher education institutions. The pressure that exemplary colleges in this study felt concerning the success of basic skills students is shown as the first emerging political theme. The second theme shows the colleges' efforts of getting the underprepared student ready for postsecondary academic rigor through developmental studies as viewed through the lens of Burke's accountability triangle (2005). The third political theme focuses on the strategic approaches that the three colleges in the study used to efficiently and effectively manage their financial resources.

#### 4.3.1.2.1 Political Theme 1: Building Access and Success for All Students

Community colleges in North Carolina are legislatively mandated to provide instruction for 2-year college programs, workforce development training, adult literacy training, and adult education programs in the state (NC General Statute, 2010). Typically, the adult education and developmental programs are broken out into two separate functions: the academic programs function (including remedial or developmental studies) for students pursuing a degree, and the continuing education (nonacademic credit) function for students who are either high school dropouts or recipients of a nonacademic high school diploma or certificate of completion. The successful community colleges in this study have blurred the lines between the two functions and strive for the success of all students, regardless of their academic status upon entering the open door of the

community college. The three colleges in this study have strategically embarked on developing the academic skills of underprepared students.

Oak Community College took a slightly different tack with the displaced worker. Recognizing that the displaced worker is interested in gaining enough new skills to be re-employed in a new field requires a different type of thinking than the traditional academic program normally provides. This may consist of getting the basic skills required to be ready for future jobs as the student's situation requires, instead of following a static model. The use of the "12 in 6" model fits nicely with the position taken by Jobs for the Future, in that the time-to-completion needs to be reduced in order to accomplish an individual goal. In comparing and contrasting the strategies used for the dislocated worker, it appears that Oak has the more comprehensive of the strategies for this population. Pine and Maple have been working with transitioning workforces, but neither stressed the rapid re-education and redeployment of dislocated workers.

Placement of students into the appropriate basic skill or developmental program enables the college to create effective plans for student success. In blurring the lines between adult education and collegiate remedial education, Pine Community College used a variety of skills assessment testing, ranging from the Test of Basic Adult Education (TABE) and Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) to collegiate reading and algebra diagnostic tests. No matter where a student falls in the continuum between basic education and college-level classes, no one is denied admission. The matriculation of basic skills students to curriculum programs is a concern across the state community college system.

The underprepared student is different from the basic skills student in that the student is a high school graduate and is in an academic program but enters with academic deficiencies that serve as barriers between their present status and graduation or transfer. This student's academic deficiencies in English and math may stem from socioeconomic status, past educational experiences, first-generation college attending status, race, or ethnicity (Barr & Schuetz, 2008). The exemplary colleges in this study addressed the need for remediation and subsequent success in curriculum (college-level) courses.

Two of the colleges in this study, Oak and Maple, worked with underprepared students in a state-based initiative called Minority Male Mentoring. The mission of this program is to improve the graduation and retention rates of minority male students. Grants are awarded to colleges that use the program to provide activities that promote the development of academic, personal, and professional skills in minority males in order to increase their access, retention, and graduation rates. The colleges that use Minority Male Mentoring have corresponding operational strategies to encourage exploration of baccalaureate degrees and to receive extra mentoring and counseling services.

Often, students who have to take multiple developmental courses before they get into their major get discouraged and give up. The exemplary colleges provided the needed remediation to prepare for the rigors of college without discouraging the students by prescribing a huge menu of developmental courses to take first. The use of academic preparation courses at all three colleges aided in this effort. The use of the gateway course at Maple is a good example, supported by research, which points to success in curriculum courses by embedding developmental concepts into the course, rather than requiring extensive remedial or developmental prescriptions. Oak's use of general



education questions in capstone courses provided a measure of the effectiveness of instruction, carried to the end of the program of study. Pine placed a campus-wide emphasis on critical-thinking skills as part of the QEP to prepare students for additional education or employment. All of these efforts level the field for all students, if they persist, regardless of where they start.

As community colleges in North Carolina become more adept at providing services for all students, the basic skills and developmental programs will grow in importance. It is necessary for all colleges to create strategies to assimilate the students from those programs into the main curriculum for degree completion or transfer as seamlessly as possible. The three colleges in this study have demonstrated how they blur lines between academic programs and basic skills to find the most appropriate means of teaching basic and remedial skills. The goal is to prepare students for jobs or for the rigor of college work. As political entities review the outcomes of these programs, there must be consistency of purpose and customization to individual need for the programs to work and thus receive needed funding.

#### 4.3.1.2.2 Political Theme 2: Developing Systems for Data-Driven Decision Making

The three community colleges in this study based decision making upon qualitative measures (community involvement, student centeredness and relations with business and industry) and quantitative measures of outcomes and effectiveness. The quantitative measures relied on data and supported decision making from the department level on though the president's administrative functions. Funding came from county, state, and federal sources and usually has been restricted as to its use. In order to effectively use the fiscal resources, it was necessary to design systems that both support

the mission and strategic plan of the college and meet the needs of the constituency of students, employers, and the community at large.

Each of the colleges aligned needs, mission, fiscal responsibility, and accountability from the administrative through the departmental program level. The ability of the colleges to develop policies, communicate policies and procedures, allocate resources, focus and align actions, and control and evaluate performance in a closed-loop process was vital to organizational success. Organizational failures can be traced to the absence of explicit links between strategy and operational initiatives.

The political perspective is well served though this process of incorporating fiscal accountability with program accountability. The colleges that achieved EIP status intentionally set targets (focus) throughout the organization (align), used bubble-up operational planning (integration), and closed the loop (review) for corrective action (continuous improvement). Neither the BSC nor *hoshin kanri* were mentioned in the interviews conducted at the colleges, so it may be that the methods used are inherent in good collegiate management.

A common theme seen in all three community colleges is that effective strategies and institutional operations are done in a closed-loop system, starting with faculty and staff determining the best method to reach the desired outcomes as determined from constituent inputs. The use of program reviews and the bubble-up approach is consistent with the academic perspective of faculty input into program and department management.

Building the department or program review enables the college to meet its political accountability standards as good stewards of public monies. This bubble-up approach to team problem solving is initiated by the faculty at the department level, with

checkpoints at the mid- and upper-administrative levels (dean and vice president) before being presented to either the president's cabinet or a planning committee. In reviewing committee minutes and documents showing the format and/or results of this planning process (e.g., at Oak), the exemplary colleges in this study share the closed-loop and bubble-up concepts through their strategic processes.

#### 4.3.1.2.3 Political Theme 3: Use of Data-Driven Decision Making to Create a Balanced Accountability Triangle

Burke (2005) cautioned against an institution becoming overly attentive to a particular perspective. Oak, Maple, and Pine all found ways to strike a balance between the market, political, and academic perspectives. This approach avoids the danger of losing sight of the mission to be accessible and fiscally sound, and it emphasizes learning as the principal reason to be a college. Using the approaches that Oak used to assess programs and that Maple and Pine used to evaluate the effectiveness of expenditures on the program level enables the college faculty and staff to bubble-up suggestions that meet all three perspectives. The logic behind this process is evident as competing perspectives enable college administrators to prioritize where limited resources are placed.

#### 4.4.1.3 Academic Perspective Themes

Burke (2005) cited the point of the accountability triangle concerning academic concern as being based on accreditation, assessment, reputational ratings, and academic audits. Prior to the 1990s, the academic perspective or concern dominated the political and market points of the triangle. As the need for funding sources grew simultaneously with the need for access to affordable education, institutions of higher education became more dependent on federal grant programs, state support, and business and foundation

assistance and endowments. The result is that the institutions ceded some authority from the academic perspective to state accountability standards, federal guidelines, and market demands for student outcomes.

The result is a dynamic system in which all three points—the academic, political, and market perspectives—compete for the resources of the institution and demand accountability for their own interests. The three community colleges in this study appear to have successfully attained the linkage between the market and the political perspectives. The academic perspective appears to be the last to align with the other two points of the accountability triangle. In this section, the emergent themes focus on how the colleges in the study handled some faculty resistance to change and developed strategies to include faculty in decision making.

#### 4.4.1.3.1 Academic Theme 1: Presidential Leaders Challenge the Culture

One of the most interesting aspects of this research has been the approach to planning at the three community colleges. Often, a clash of cultures occurs when institutional improvement is viewed by faculty as intruding on their traditional role of establishing and managing accountability standards. The academic constituents generally understand the importance of the accreditation and assessment focus on improvement, but may be less enthusiastic about the need for published accountability measures, assessment related to reporting student outcomes, performance reports to third parties, and reputational ratings (e.g., CSFs, IPEDS data, and the CCSSE).

Maple Community College is an example of faculty showing a lack of enthusiasm for organizational change. In line with the culture change at his college, Maple's president reported that some people had left the college since the emphasis had been

placed on their *Good to Great Report*. A certain amount of turnover is expected as a result of conflict during cultural change. Collins' (2001) first principle in *Good to Great* concerns getting the "right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus)" (p. 41). Here, the president found it necessary to produce a dramatic change in faculty schedules in order to meet the institutional value of radical hospitality. Without making those changes, the welcoming, helping culture that he envisioned may not have occurred, and—by extension—the attainment of exemplary status, comprised of many smaller steps, may not have been achieved.

At Pine Community College, the president faced a situation not quite as dire, but the college had not met the standards of the CSFs. The president found a culture where communication was sparse and faculty was comfortably insulated within their disciplines. The president made challenging the existing culture a major priority; he intended to change to a planning and communicative culture, from the president's office on down.

To challenge the culture to make the organization competitive, the presidents of the three community colleges made decisions that changed the environments of their respective colleges. At two of the colleges, this involved changes in several senior administrative positions. The three colleges in this study had not achieved EIP status in recent years. All three had relatively new presidents who saw opportunities to improve upon the status quo. Challenging the culture involved moving faculty, staff, and administration away from complacency to a sense of urgency in order to move the college forward. Integrating the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation into the fabric of the new culture enabled the colleges to serve students, to become more accountable to outside agencies, and to involve faculty in the improvement process.

#### 4.4.1.3.2 Academic Theme 2: Integrate Accreditation Principles Into Strategies

While the colleges in this study recognize the need to meet the NCCCS CSFs, the prevailing sentiment is the need to comply with the regional accrediting agency's principles of accreditation. SACSCOC is the accrediting agency for North Carolina colleges and universities. The accrediting agency serves as a surrogate for the federal government in that the agency ensures colleges and universities meet established guidelines and standards as outlined by the U.S. Department of Education, thus permitting federal and state funding for continual operation and upkeep (Mattis & Sinn, 2009). Without accreditation, transfer from the college or university may not be recognized and overall funding may be reduced to some state and local sources; grants and loans to students would not be possible without the college being accredited.

SACSCOC accreditation has an impact on community colleges that is greater than the NCCCS CSFs. The analogy is that meeting the CSF is a "carrot," to be dangled annually and given if funding is available. Regional accreditation is the "stick," occurring on a decennial basis and results in warning, sanction, or loss of accreditation if the principles of accreditation are not being followed. Alignment of strategic plans, assessment or program reviews, and SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation are necessary for continued operation. At the colleges in this study, the approach has been to embrace accreditation and work it into the fabric of the college.

#### 4.4.1.3.3 Academic Theme 3: Overcome Faculty Resistance With Inclusive Strategies

The successful colleges all developed plans to meet the strategic challenges that were presented through the environmental scan. The academic perspective is the insider's

view of the college. As Birnbaum (1988) pointed out, a dualism of controls exists in the organizational structure. This manifests itself as a conflict of “two structures existing in parallel: the conventional administrative hierarchy and the structure through which faculty made decisions regarding those aspects of the institution over which they had jurisdiction” (p. 9). The colleges in this study have made changes; that is, they have added advisement to faculty job expectations to enhance college transfer rates, changed promotion procedures to create a sense of urgency, and worked with faculty to create a more client-centered environment. Changes create friction between administration and faculty, and the colleges in this study have strived to overcome this resistance by creating strategic involvement in the planning process for faculty.

#### 4.5 Summary of Findings

The use of Burke’s accountability triangle provides a useful lens to view the market, political and academic perspectives of accountability demands on the community college. Three colleges make up this multi-site, qualitative case study. All are independent of each other, and all achieved EIP between 2007 and 2009 in different regions of North Carolina. Interviews with college administrators and analysis of public and archival publications provided a means of data collection that permitted open and axial coding to analyze data. The data analysis produced a convergence of themes covering the three points of Burke’s accountability triangle.

Themes from the market perspective included the need to build relationships within the community of which the college serves. The outreach to constituents in these exemplary colleges brought diverse input into the environmental scan that led the colleges’ strategic planning process. The second market theme was that all three colleges

did some sort of environmental scan that included formal or informal SWOT analysis. The third theme was that the colleges focused on the student as a client. This approach included the CCSSE and the Noel-Levitz survey as two measures of students' satisfaction with their college experience. The colleges strived to become easier to navigate and succeeded in becoming more welcoming institutions. The fourth market theme involved collaboration with business and industry through advisory committees, collaboration with equipment purchases, and preparation of students to enter the workforce.

The second perspective is the political perspective. An important feature of the community college is the open-door philosophy. This enables maximum access to the college for adults, regardless of their current status. The colleges in this study worked with a variety of students to prepare them to move forward with their academic endeavors. The political theme was data-driven decision making. This process involved work-unit effectiveness tracking, the concept of "Good to Great," and the use of a strategic planning online as assessments of performance and resource allocation tools.

With the academic perspective, three themes emerged. The first was challenging the existing culture with change management strategies. The second theme integrated accreditation principles into strategic plans. The third theme of the academic perspective consists of involvement strategies intended to reduce the potential alienation of the faculty.

An interesting comparison can be achieved by averaging the CSF scores of the three colleges in the year they achieved EIP status with the CSF scores of three colleges with similar student populations and locations that did not attain exemplary status (see Table 5). The developmental student success and transfer student success are the most



striking differences between the exemplary colleges and the non-exemplary comparison colleges. It is not coincidental that each of the colleges in this study devoted strategic formulation and operational implementation to these two areas.

In contrasting the approaches of the three colleges, the following points emerge:

- From my perception from interviews with the three colleges' presidents, it appears that Oak, with its stable culture, is less affected by academic perspective resistance to increase availability of the faculty to students than Maple or Pine.
- Constant communication of the strategic messages appears to be easier at Oak and Maple than it is at Pine, due to the low levels of top-down communication that the president inherited.
- The major emphasis on relationship exists at both Maple and Pine. This does not seem to be as much the case at Oak, which takes a more businesslike approach.
- The procedure for planning and execution of plans has the same elements of data-driven decision making that Oak has, except Maple calls it "Facing the Brutal Facts" and Pine includes it as a formal program review.
- One of the values expressed at Maple is radical hospitality—making sure that the student has a good experience in admissions/registration and has advisement with faculty and in the classroom—while Pine tries to improve parking to reduce student dissatisfaction. Oak is struggling with record-breaking enrollment taxing its existing facilities, so there is currently a limit on what can be done for student satisfaction outside of the classroom.

- At both Oak and Pine, the faculty-to-student ratio appears adequate to handle more students. At Maple, with the lowest full-time faculty percentage of the three colleges in the study, it appears that having enough faculty available to meet the needs of students is an issue.
- It appears that faculty need to be available for relationship building, such as providing student advisement for college transfer students and support during non-class time, at Maple and Pine more so than at Oak.

Table 5 shows a comparison of the average CSFs of the three community colleges in this study with the system average and with a comparison set of three colleges that did not achieve EIP. The comparison colleges were located in the same region and were of similar size to the exemplary institutions. While there should not be extreme differences between the colleges in the study and their comparison pool, two areas are notable.

The differences between the two groups for the success of transfer students and the success of developmental studies students stand out from the other success factors. The differences are supported by the interview data from administrators at all three exemplary community colleges. At Oak and Pine, the dedication of a developmental studies chair, whose responsibilities included coordinating a smooth transition for the students needing remediation, may have had a role in developmental student success. The student-centered approach at Maple may have kept more students in class when they became discouraged after seeing precollege courses ahead of them. In a similar vein, Oak made a significant effort to promote transfer success by having a chair for college transfer and maintaining a dialogue with 4-year colleges. Pine pushed transfer advising as a responsibility of all faculty and has several 4-year programs on their campus.

Table 5

*Comparison of Colleges in Study With Three Non-Exemplary Colleges, 2007–2009*

|   | Performance Standard | System Average | Average Study | Average for Comparison |
|---|----------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Progress of basic skills students             | 75                   | 84             | 83            | 82                     |
| Passing rates on licensure                    | 80                   | 86             | 89            | 87                     |
| Performance of transfer students              | 86                   | 85             | 89            | 80                     |
| Passing rates in developmental courses        | 75                   | 80             | 85            | 76                     |
| Dev.success rates in college level courses    | 80                   | 87             | 91            | 85                     |
| Student satisfaction                          | 90                   | 96             | 96            | 97                     |
| Curric. student retention/transfer/completion | 65                   | 72             | 74            | 71                     |
| Client satisfaction with customized training  | 90                   | 94             | 94            | 94                     |

*Note.* Data from “2008–2009 annual statistical reports” by NCCCS, 2009b; “2010 critical success factors for the North Carolina Community College System: Twenty first annual report” by NCCCS, 2010a.

Tables 6 and 7 show a comparison between the three colleges in key areas. Table 6 shows the environmental aspects as reported as IPEDS (2010) data. It should be noted that none of the colleges have a perfect record. Oak Community College has a graduation rate of only 10 percent within 150 percent of normal program time; Maple has issues with SACSCOC regarding the adequate number of full-time faculty to complete the college’s mission; and Pine has higher retention and graduation rates, but still only has 25 percent graduating in the IPEDS window of 150 percent of normal matriculation time. However, as a group, the three colleges provide an aggregate description of best practices of

effective planning and execution of the accountability factors for which they are held responsible by the three points of Burke's accountability triangle.

Table 6

*IPEDS Data Cross-Comparison of Participating Community Colleges*

| Category  | Oak   | Maple | Pine  |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Campus Setting                                  | Rural | Town  | Rural |
| State Appropriations Percentage                 | 65%   | 66%   | 60%   |
| Percentage Full-Time Faculty                    | 33%   | 19%   | 32%   |
| Percentage of Students on Federal Financial Aid | 41%   | 43%   | 42%   |
| Full-time Student Retention Rate                | 59%   | 38%   | 73%   |
| Graduation Rate within 150% of Normal Time      | 10%   | 15%   | 25%   |

*Note.* Data from "IPEDS Data Center," by Integrated Postsecondary Education System, 2010. Individual college names have been withheld due to confidentiality.

Table 7 compares the planning processes of each of the three community colleges. Note that all involve their community; all have a system that uses technology to manage their strategic planning/implementation/assessment systems. Of particular importance is the closed loop, which is inherent in all three systems, to make sure that discipline exists and that a constancy of message is delivered, leading to the alignment of goals. My perception, as researcher, is that while there are similarities between all three colleges, there are slight differences in primary institutional emphasis: Oak emphasizes efficiency, Maple emphasizes relationship, and Pine emphasizes accountability. Each college reflects the culture that has been ingrained by the leadership of the college.

Table 7

*Cross-Comparison of Three Community Colleges' Planning Process*

| Category  | Oak                  | Maple                       | Pine                 |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Type of strategic planning instrument                     | WE Tracker Form, SAW | <i>Good to Great Report</i> | SPOL, Program review |
| Community involvement                                     | Yes                  | Yes                         | Yes                  |
| Live system online  | Yes                  | Yes                         | Yes                  |
| Closed-loop system  | Yes                  | Yes                         | Yes                  |
| Tracks Critical Success Factors                           | Yes                  | Yes                         | Yes                  |
| Researcher's perception of primary importance of planning | Efficiency           | Relationship                | Accountability       |

Chapter 5 discusses the conclusions of this research in detail. The conclusions are triangulated as the three points of Burke's accountability triangle are examined in relation to the three colleges' response to the research questions. With each response, there is a theoretical framework found in the literature regarding collegiate responses to accountability standards and demands related to the accountability triangle.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Three exemplary community colleges in this multi-site, qualitative, bounded case study of strategic planning were selected due to their successful attainment of the measures set by the NC General Assembly as CSFs. All three were recognized for EIP status in either or both the 2007–08 and 2008–09 academic years. The colleges have other elements in common as well.

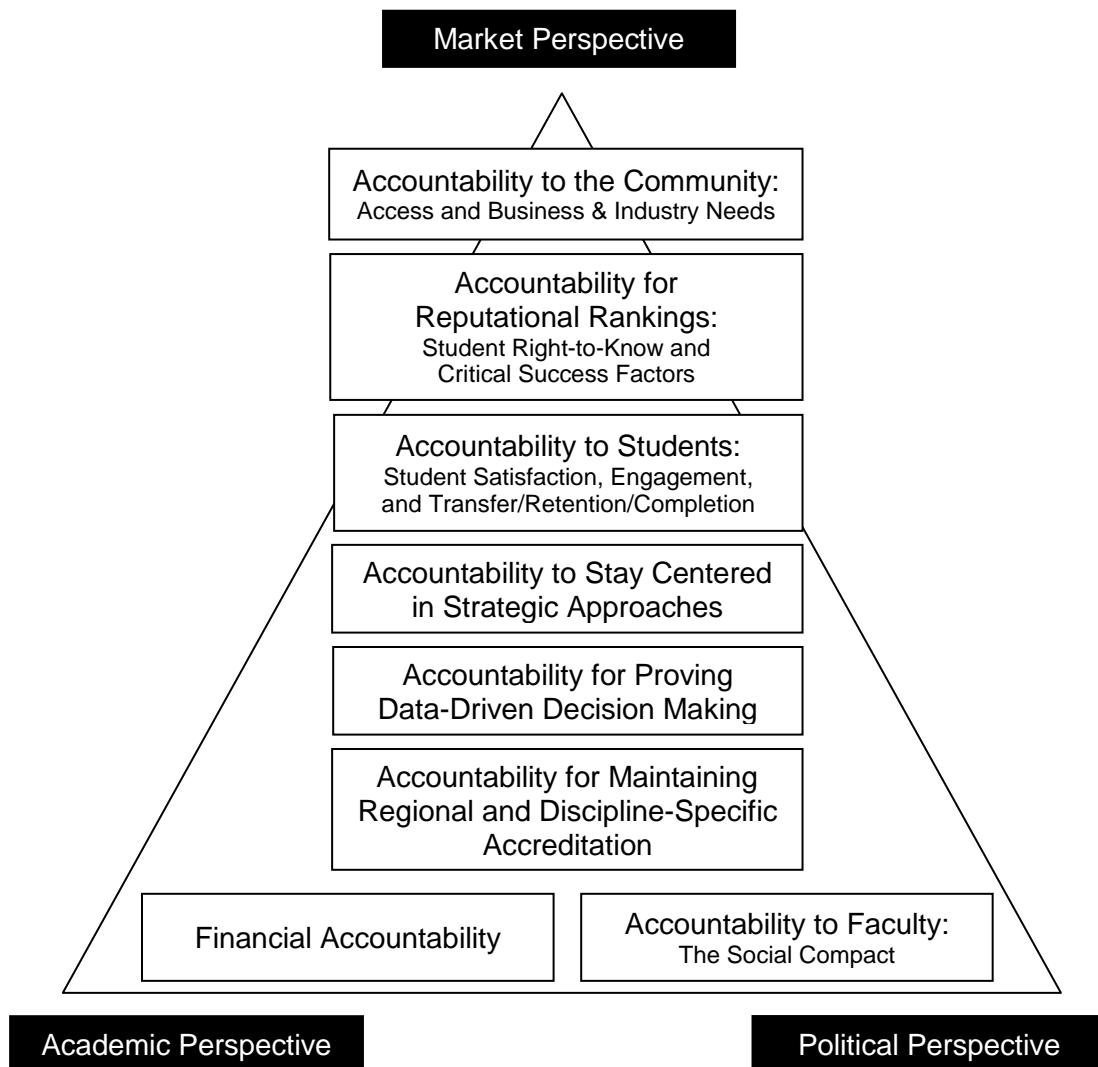
The common elements can be viewed through Burke's accountability triangle (2005). Among the elements discussed in this chapter is the market perspective, as seen in the case when a new president spent time learning the needs of the community and found community support, which was carried into a strategic plan. In that plan, student needs are central to the strategies for improving measurable goals, including expanded access and support for all students and a resulting determination to remove obstacles to college access and to conduct successful intervention activities to retain them. A political perspective theme is the presence of a formal strategic process that shows awareness of the market, political, and academic perspectives and provides a means to stay centered, to align strategies, to have input from all perspectives without overemphasis of one to the detriment of the others. The academic perspective is shown as a college president first challenged the existing culture to perform at higher levels to improve student outcomes. Once the changes were made to the culture, faculty and staff were brought into the planning process that encouraged the bubble-up of ideas through a disciplined, formal system of strategic planning.

The theoretical foundation of Burke's accountability triangle provides a lens through which to view the breakdown of the accountability influences upon community college decision making. The market, political, and academic perspectives have a profound influence on both the long-term plans and the daily operations of the college. The findings of this research are consistent with literature concerning accountability and strategic planning in universities and community colleges, specifically Burke (2005), Burke and Minassians (2004), Rowley et al. (1997), Keller (1983), Taylor et al. (2008), and Asan and Tanyas (2007).

Figure 7 shows the various accountability pressures exerted on the colleges in this study, which include the NCCCS CSFs, accreditation requirements, reputational pressures, and other market, political, and academic perspective accountability pressures. While it appears that the market perspective in this model may tilt the balance away from the desired location in the accountability triangle's center, it should be noted that the market is the origin of the strategic plan and the college must establish the plan so that market inputs are heeded but are not the exclusive goals of the plan (Burke, 2005; Gumport, 2003; Rowley et al., 1997). Striking a balance between the accountability factors in order to meet the college's mission is of prime importance to college leaders (Burke, 2005).

The conclusions drawn from the research of the three participating North Carolina community colleges have implications for other colleges to draw upon as best practices of collegiate planning and management. The implications are based upon the research questions and sub-questions, with convergent themes pulled from archival documents and personal interviews with college officials. A list of recommendations is shown as

implications from the themes drawn from the responses to the research questions. A connection back to the literature on the subject accompanies the discussion.



*Figure 7. Accountability factors using Burke's accountability triangle. Adapted from *Achieving Accountability in Higher Education*, by J. Burke and Associates, 2005, pp. 296–324.*



## 5.1 The Research Questions

The research questions this study attempts to answer pertain to the accountability pressures that serve as factors for strategic planning. In order to answer the research questions, this study considers the convergent themes found in chapter 4 and applies those themes to the research questions. As with the other sections, the theoretical foundation of Burke's accountability triangle provides an efficient lens through which to view the accountability factors and convergent themes as research implications and recommendations to community college leaders.

### 5.1.1 Accountability Pressures: The Market Perspective

*Research question 1.* What pressures did the college face from an accountability standpoint in the years 2003 to 2007 (prior to meeting EIP in 2007–08 or 2008–09)? The sub-questions for the first research question specified pressures from students, business and industry, foundations, state and federal governments, accrediting agencies, and other avenues of demand.

The market perspective's pressures for accountability are derived from the constituents of the community colleges in this study. All three colleges value the relationships they have with the community they serve and strive to keep communication lines open. As a complex operating unit, the college serves a variety of constituents that include the community, students, business and industry, and foundations. The next sections will attempt to answer the research question based upon the sub-questions of these three areas.

#### 5.1.1.1 Accountability to the Community

The exemplary colleges found that the community's support is critical to their continued success. By bringing the members of the community into the planning process, the colleges built upon the goodwill that already existed in the community. The environmental scans used SWOT analysis to ask members of the community about their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs, often from their evaluation of the colleges' graduates. They asked the following: What opportunities are available that are not being explored by the college? What threats are perceived that could affect the colleges' ability to meet its mission or could harm the relationship between the college and the community?

All three colleges share a similar economic situation, as the North Carolina manufacturing base has experienced significant erosion and many employers closed domestic operations to open facilities in cheaper labor markets in Latin America or Asia. Accountability pressures exist for all three colleges to retrain often poorly educated dislocated workers from textile, furniture, or tobacco industries for the remaining higher technology, higher skill jobs. Businesses that remain in the colleges' service areas need workers with higher level skills pertaining to critical thinking, computer usage, and teamwork to compete in the global economy. The business sector expects the community college to provide graduates with those skills.

#### 5.1.1.2 Accountability to Students

Maple Community College emphasized an institutional value that the president calls *radical hospitality*. This unique term is at the heart of being client centered. The opposite of this is being bureaucratically centered, where the student has to overcome

many obstacles to gain success. The exemplary colleges displayed this accountability by attempting to remove demotivating factors for students (e.g., lack of available parking, complicated registration and advisement protocols) and by going into the community to establish easily accessible portals to the services of the college. As the president of Oak Community College pointed out, the availability of online education makes it possible to get a full education without setting foot on a college campus. The competition that this aspect of technology brings makes it imperative for colleges to make services and classes easily accessible.

The expanded interest in community college education comes in part from the loss of the lower skill manufacturing jobs in the economy. The open-door admissions policy of the community college means that no student over 18 years of age is denied admission. As a result of this policy, many students are not prepared for the rigor of college courses, thus placing accountability pressure on community colleges to teach basic skills, remediate underdeveloped secondary school skills, and develop retention strategies to keep students from getting discouraged and quitting when faced with rigorous course challenges or lengthy remediation schedules.

Colleges are measured and compared on graduation rates, retention rates, and transfer rates with public information being posted on the IPEDS Web site under the Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act. Additionally, colleges that participate in the CCSSE have the results posted to inform potential students and parents about the level of student engagement and students' perception of campus support. To provide appropriate levels of support and enhance retention rates, colleges participate in federal programs, such as Minority Male Mentoring (Oak and Maple), and informal programs,

such as “Ask Me” (Maple), to intervene with underrepresented and underserved segments of the population and to ensure a smooth start of students’ academic careers.

Another strategy for retaining students is the gateway or gatekeeper course. Colleges using this approach pair an academic preparation course with the first core course in a program. The students create a community of learners (Tinto, 2006) that develop informal support systems in the academic preparation course. This system of support and social acceptance carries over to the gateway core course. An example of this approach is Maple Community College’s pairing of an academic success course and Introduction to Business for new business administration majors.

Strategies for improved college transfer advisement serve the needs of the student to be able to attain an associate’s degree and successfully complete a baccalaureate at a university. Strategic interventions include separate transfer academic preparation courses, dedicated transfer counselors, and arrangements for 4-year colleges and universities to establish satellite units on the community college campus. These practices were reported most prominently by Pine and, to a lesser extent, by Oak and Maple. This is both a market- and political-perspective issue, as the success of transfer students is difficult to track. It is one of the most challenging CSFs.

Pressure for student financial aid is another market perspective that meshes with the political and academic perspectives. Student access to financial aid is dependent—to a large extent—upon the college’s marketing of the availability of financial aid, chiefly, federal Pell Grants. Oak Community College did this with a program developed by a cross-functional team to streamline the process for basic skills students to obtain a voucher for a free academic course. Making financial aid services available requires

substantial marketing efforts by the student development service function. Pine Community College began this awareness with high school students by using a team that consists of college and high school counselors to smooth the transition between high school and the college. Workforce Investment Act funding supports the retraining efforts of dislocated workers by providing a stipend, as well as tuition and book payments, so that affected students can attend college full time. All of these efforts are channeled through effective communication and supportive student development and business office services.

#### 5.1.1.3 Accountability to Business and Industry

The business sector is invited into partnership with the institution at all three colleges. This partnership produces opportunities for collaboration in equipment sharing or purchasing, internships, clinical opportunities, and job placement. Through advisory committees, businesses provide input into the direction of programs, for example, Pine's construction trades program working with Habitat for Humanity to build energy-efficient housing, and hospitals providing access to specialized equipment for sonography classes at Oak. Businesses provide input into the effectiveness of collegiate efforts through program reviews and serve in a consulting role when colleges contemplate instituting new programs.

Sometimes the demand for new programs can place strains on the limited resources of the college. One president stated concern when business partners requested a new program that would have been expensive to start and may not have had enough employment demand to make it a higher priority than alternative programs. As Gumport (2003) noted, there is a necessary balance between the college meeting the needs of the

community and being all things to all people. The accountability expectations of business and industry add financial pressure to the colleges to purchase technology that would enable a student to use the same equipment or software that is an industry standard.

Sometimes an employer creates a problem for the college to deliver student success, such as Oak Community College's local fire department, which hired employees without prescreening. The fire department expected the college to provide training for newly hired—but underprepared—trainees, even though some stringent math requirements were present. After working through this problem, the fire department now works with the college to prescreen employees before hiring. Now prospective applicants can take developmental math before they are hired in order to ensure greater levels of success, as opposed to the college trying to train underprepared students to meet an employer's immediate requirements.

Referring back to the literature on the pressures for accountability imposed by business and industry, the Wingspread Group (1993) emphasized the need for job-ready graduates who are educated to high standards of spoken and written communication, have intellectual depth and breadth, and are prepared with contemporary life skills. Pine Community College emphasized critical-thinking skills that lead to students becoming successful employees. Farmer and Paris (2000) noted that the support of business and industry is predicated on the need to have a globally competitive workforce; Oak Community College prepared students using modern equipment and techniques, with the assistance of their industry partners. In the literature, the model reported by Al-Turki et al. (2008), in which the college in Saudi Arabia was used as a supply chain for Aramco,

has similarities in the expectations that business and industry has for the colleges, but in a much more limiting basis than is done in U.S. community colleges.

The practices found at the exemplary colleges in this study to prepare the upcoming workforce may run counter to what Dowd (2003) called the move toward outputs (trained or easily-trainable workers) versus access of all students to gain a well-rounded education, regardless of their income status or race. Gumport (2003) expressed reservations about the tendency of the community college to acquiesce to the needs of varied constituencies and diversify activities according to demand. This is a balancing act that community colleges must follow in order to meet the obligations of the community and the obligations of the students to be well-educated.

#### 5.1.2 Accountability Pressures: The Political Perspective

The role of the community college is to provide access to adult students regardless of their academic preparation. This creates accountability pressures when standards for the progress of basic skills students, progress of developmental students, and developmental student success in academic classes are measures of the NCCCS CSFs. Actions taken by the colleges in this study provide means of proactively assuring that students get the support needed to be successful. Additional pressure comes from elected bodies to ensure that financial resources provided by state and federal governments are being spent effectively.

##### 5.1.2.1 Financial Accountability Pressures

Given the unprecedented growth in enrollment of the community colleges in North Carolina, it is not surprising that the facilities of the colleges in this study are stressed or in need of updates. While state funding levels are always a year behind and

often do not reflect current enrollment, the needs of the college to provide adequate faculty, as well as updated technology and campus facilities, create pressure on the college. With limited resources, the presidents of the colleges in this study emphasized the requirement of departments to conduct self-study of their effectiveness and make the case for additional resources up through the reporting chain of command.

In developing accountability to state, federal, and local pressures, each of the community colleges in this study required decisions to be justified by data. The mode of preparing this data varies from college to college, but the basis for all is in sound management principles of prioritizing and adherence to mission. The use of data-driven decision making, however, places extra pressure on the relationship between administration and faculty, especially if faculty believe their primary duty is to teach only and do not feel an obligation to financial/political accountability.

#### 5.1.2.2 Pressures for Data-Driven Decision Making

The methods of reporting department or work-unit effectiveness are basically the same for all three colleges. The mission of the college is paramount, divisional missions and objectives filter down to departments and programs, and then the priorities and accomplishments are reported up the chain of command. Oak used a WE Tracker Form, which consolidates the mission, strategic objectives, and departmental supporting objectives into one report. Maple used measures from Collins' *Good to Great* (2001) as the thematic element of both fiscal and academic accountability. Pine used a comprehensive budgeting and strategic planning software tool, SPOL, to ensure that all departments were held accountable for their allocation and usage of resources.



The need for data to make informed decisions about spending is one of the major points driven home by all three colleges in this study. Rather than a top-down approach to budgeting, each college used a bubble-up approach to ensure that all elements of the college have input into the resources available for the college's operations. In an era of reduced public funding, the need to stretch federal, state, and local funding without decreasing service or academic programs is a challenge for the community college as well as for other providers of public education.

### 5.1.3 Accountability Pressures: The Academic Perspective

The academic perspective has taken on a new meaning since the 1990s. No longer is the classroom out-of-bounds for administrative input and oversight. The loss of a significant amount of institutional control to federal and state authorities, through accountability measures such as regional accreditation and the CSFs, makes it imperative for the college to exercise increased levels of management over academics. Creating an environment or culture to meet the needs of students took precedence over permitting faculty to set their own schedules at Maple Community College. Oak assessed faculty on the effectiveness of their departments, using the same form, the WE Tracker Form, which a nonacademic department used to evaluate how it sets and meets strategic goals. Pine used comprehensive computer-generated strategic planning and reviews from the discipline or department level up to the president's cabinet.

#### 5.1.3.1 The Academic Perspective and the Social Compact

All of these examples may sometimes place administrators at odds with a diminishing social compact (Burke, 2005) in which programs are established, departments are operated, and courses taught with state financial support, but with little

or no input into outcomes. Accountability demands embodied in the CSFs, CCSSE, and surveys of student satisfaction along with internal goals such as student/client-centered models (radical hospitality at Maple, additional transfer student advisement at Pine) conflicts with Birnbaum's (1988) cybernetic or self-correcting model of decision making (see Figure 5 in chapter 2).

The model that emerges from the three colleges in this study shows a much more involved presidency, one that is much at odds with Birnbaum's collegial model in which the job of the president is primarily to preserve the existing culture. The loss of the social compact (Burke, 2005) to accountability demands of the political and market forces requires a shift to a more strategic model in which market and political perspectives are considered equivalent in weight to the academic perspective. The strategic model, with vertical loops being closed between departments and administration, is more closely related to Birnbaum's (1988) bureaucratic model.

The need for accountability forced the colleges in this study to make more wide-ranging decisions, similar to those businesses deal with for department evaluation, allocation of equipment, and use of supplies. Presidents at all three colleges addressed the need to change complacent cultures and reenergize the campus to meet the needs of market and political perspectives. At times, the academic perspective resisted improving the client-centeredness of the campus environment (Maple) or worked less than wholeheartedly on strategic planning goals (Oak). Further demands for individual advisement for transfer students created additional friction at Pine for additional training and use of discretionary campus time. At all three campuses, however, the tasks were

accomplished as a part of meeting strategic goals and the CSF standards were achieved more as a collateral benefit of good strategic management than targeted planning.

This study suggests that for a campus to meet the requirements of the market and political perspectives, leaders should assert more control over the academic perspective, especially in setting faculty schedules and in supporting the achievement of classroom outcomes. The theme of challenging the culture goes straight to leadership. In the interviews, each college's president displayed characteristics of being a strong leader. Each had made structural and cultural changes within the first few years in office. Each set a path for the college to follow with a strategic plan. Each realized that in a market-driven environment it is necessary to maximize resources by putting them in alignment with strategic goals. Being accountable means being able to be measured, but it also means having the input of faculty and staff throughout the organization. In doing this, the presidents used the concepts that Asan and Tanyas (2007) referred to in the literature as strategic alignment or *hoshin kanri*.

With the proliferation of online education, including for-profit organizations such as The University of Phoenix or more student-friendly state community colleges, it is imperative that the market perspective is satisfied. It is necessary to satisfy the political perspective to keep funding coming to the community college. That leaves the academic perspective as the only corner of Burke's accountability triangle that the community college directly influences. The academic perspective is the catalyst that makes the college's strategic responses to the accountability factors happen.

### 5.1.3.2 Accountability Pressures From Accrediting Agencies

Accrediting agencies apply pressure from an academic perspective in order to maintain compliance with agency principles. This applies to nursing programs and licensure programs as well as regional accreditation. Maple Community College responded to board of nursing accreditation issues through changes in personnel when the programs did not meet the external certification. The Maple president took firm action.

Oak's president noted the ease in which Allied Health programs transitioned from external accreditation to internal accountability. These programs were used to being held accountable for the outcomes of student. In contrast, the liberal arts faculty were slower to respond to the need to cite how their students met outcomes and how their programs contributed to the mission of the college. The academic perspective becomes very important when addressing regional accreditation requirements through the QEP.

### 5.1.3.3 Accountability Pressures for Quality Improvement

The pressure from accrediting agencies significantly manifests itself in planning for the QEP, which is to be completed as part of the reaffirmation process. Faculty is responsible for leadership in this effort. The QEP (a) identifies keys issues that the institution assesses; (b) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning; (c) demonstrates institutional capacity for initiating, implementing, and completing the QEP; (d) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in developing and implementing the QEP; and (e) identifies goals and assessment plans for the QEP (Commission on Colleges, 2008).

Pine Community College used the QEP as a measure of outcomes for critical thinking. The way that the college had this featured in its program reviews folded the

QEP into the objectives of an academic department. Oak developed strategic goals that wrap around the QEP and meet reaffirmation requirements without extensive revision. Maple aligned faculty and staff to meet the QEP goal of effective written communication requirements in all courses. The presence of an ambitious, campus-wide goal, especially one that was voted upon by faculty as QEPS are required, provided a means of uniting faculty toward reaching that goal.

## 5.2 Prior Years' Planning and Exemplary Status

*Research question 2.* What was the role of strategic planning in the prior years, from 2003 to 2007, that led to the college's meeting EIP standards in 2007–08 or 2008–09? The sub-questions of the second research question were as follows: (a) Which description of strategic planning best describes the method used by the colleges in the study? (b) How is planning structured?

All three colleges have a planning process that closely resembles the Rowley et al. (1997) model. Intense planning at all three colleges preceded the colleges' success in earning EIP status. It appears that finding a theoretical framework was an important step to take in the years prior to gaining exemplary status. Instead of creating a system from scratch, the each college leader was able to tie into an existing framework.

The president of Oak Community College arrived in the 2000s and shortly thereafter instituted a formal planning system, based indirectly upon MBNQA criteria as used at Howard Community College in Maryland. The system instituted by the president included the WE Tracker Form as part of a system that encompasses strategic goal setting, key operational objectives for work units, and assessment of performance. It has the closed-loop concept at the heart of the system in which departments or work units

provide input into resource needs and have a degree of freedom as to the method used for accomplishing key objectives in work units. The bubble-up concept of closed-loop communication served Oak in an effective manner and was seen in the strategic goals, key objectives, college mission, SACSCOC principles, CSFs, student engagement, and student satisfaction. See Appendix C for the WE Tracker Form and Appendix D for the SAW.

Maple Community College's president arrived to the Maple campus a few years later than Oak's president arrived at the Oak campus, but Maple's president instituted a similar structure based upon relationship building and theoretical framework discussed in Collins' *Good to Great* (2001). Maple made the exemplary list the following year. The situation at Maple required presidential leadership to challenge the existing culture and instill a client-centered value of radical hospitality in which college faculty and staff were readily available to assist students and help them maneuver through college bureaucracy. Elements similar to Oak's WE Tracker Form are included in Maple's *Good to Great Report*, a means for an individual department or work unit to reflect on and assess its performance. See Appendix E for Maple's values and Appendix F for the *Good to Great Report* form.

A similar situation occurred at Pine Community College, where the new president improved communication, emphasized advisory relationships, purchased a Web-based system, and used those elements to earn exemplary status. The lapse in time between instituting a formal strategic planning system was one academic year before the year in which each college gained exceptional status. Pine's planning structure has elements in common with both Oak and Maple, in that the closed-loop and bubble-up elements of

planning and reporting are in place. Pine used a comprehensive computer program, SPOL, to establish plans, report on plan progress, and assess the effectiveness of the department or work-unit efforts. Pine's strategic form is found in Appendix G.

### 5.3 Developing Successful Strategic Planning Systems

All three colleges have systems that are based upon templates. The Oak Community College template was adopted from a community college in Maryland that uses the MBNQA criteria. Maple Community College used Collins' *Good to Great* (2001) theory of organizational development as its template. Pine Community College purchased software, SPOL, as the foundation for its planning and assessment system.

All three colleges in this study have a strong linkage between strategic planning and assessment. All three took a systemic approach to planning and plan implementation. When the colleges used a system to produce a campus-wide plan, covering both the academic and staff support subsystems, the key objectives were specific to the work unit with stated quantifiable measures of success. Through the year, the work units reported to planning groups on their progress toward meeting objectives.

The bubble-up aspect of planning involved all faculty and staff in the planning process. Departments or staff functions justified the continuation of programs by how the program supported the strategic goals of the college, through the meeting of key objectives. The departments justified additional resource allocation (more faculty or new equipment or technology) through this assessment process as all functions competed for resource dollars. The assessment was reviewed at the levels of function, department, division, and the college as a whole, with the president and the president's direct reports making the final decision.

The inclusion of faculty and staff in the allocation decisions permitted all three sides of Burke's accountability triangle to have input into the planning process. The constituents' input in the environmental scan and through advisory committees provided market input. The political input was based upon the success of colleges meeting growth targets, financial accountability, and governmental requirements (such as funding from the Perkins Act for vocational programs).

#### 5.4 The Cyclical Nature of Strategic Planning

*Research question 3.* What have the colleges learned about planning through the implementation of the planning process and the execution of the plan?

The participants in this study expressed a desire for continuous improvement of the process that they use for strategic planning. While the current model meets the current strategic goals and objectives, a need to improve the process and make it more inclusive of all constituents was expressed. The complexity of the comprehensive community college with all the constituents whose needs must be met makes it imperative that a responsive strategic system is in place.

The colleges in this study expressed that the planning process is cyclical. Pine Community College uses a 5-year plan; Maple uses an annual planning process; and Oak uses 4 years, with the intent of cutting the next cycle down to 3. All of the colleges use a reporting system that requires a work unit to report back to the planning/oversight committee the next year if the unit's performance falls below the objective measure.

Further emphasis on data-driven results was one of the areas mentioned by Oak's president, along with continued participation of faculty in the college's leadership institute. The institute is led by the president and top administrators to prepare faculty and



staff to have more effective, data-based contributions to the bubble-up decision-making process and to close the communications loop. The institute at Oak is another example of how this college provided a constant message of improvement, which is heard from the president and others involved in leadership roles.

Maple Community College used orientations to emphasize the need for both relationship building and better data-driven decisions. The use of Collins' *Good to Great* (2001) promoted the need to expand the values that the college promoted throughout the organization. Holding individuals accountable for their programs' results became an outcome of communicating expectations.

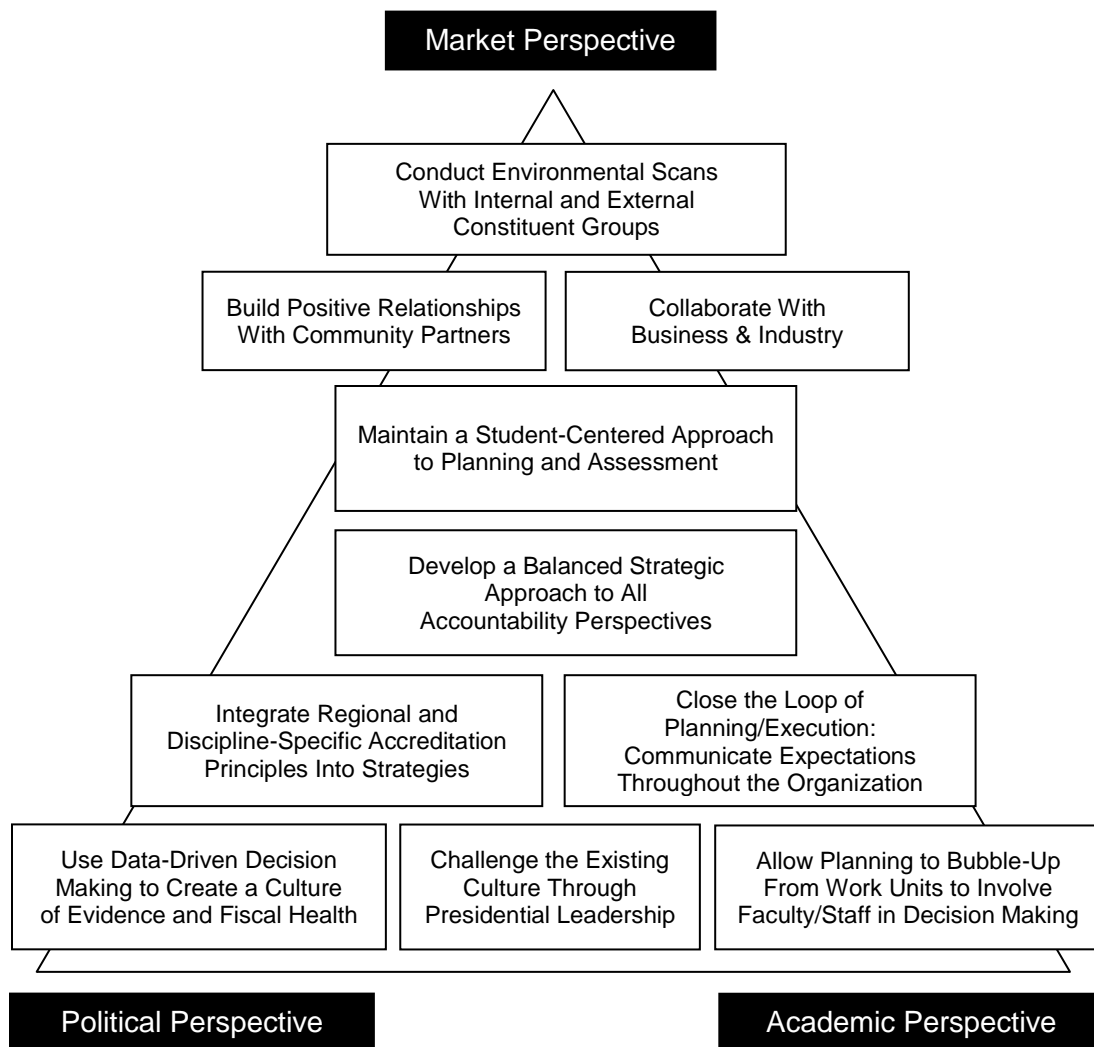
In conducting this study, I did not know whether formal strategic planning was being done in exemplary North Carolina community colleges or if the colleges were responding to budgetary limitations and building programs from available funding. The results clearly showed that successful colleges have in-depth planning mechanisms and take the planning process very seriously. They plan for successful compliance with state, program, and regional accreditation requirements. They work with constituents to determine what is needed and work with internal constituents to assess their needs to meet the college's mission. All three have a culture of working to continuously improve the existing processes. Any of the participating colleges could justify an in-depth study of effective college management.

#### 5.5 Implications of Convergent Themes as Strategic Responses to Accountability Factors: Recommendations for Community College Leaders

This study has shown that the colleges have at least 10 common themes they share in EIP status. These themes are approached through the lens of Burke's accountability

triangle and impact one or more of the market, political, and academic perspectives. Figure 8 shows how the exemplary community colleges in this study strategically planned so there appears to be a balanced approach to all three points of Burke's accountability triangle. Burke (2005) cautioned against overemphasizing one point at the expense of the other two. Theoretically, the response of the college to accountability demands should be toward the center of the triangle.

Figure 8 shows a balanced approach to the market, political, and academic perspectives. The colleges in this study appear to be well balanced. Each corner has a specific accountability measure that needs to be taken into account. For the market perspectives' need for input into the strategic planning process, environmental scans and SWOT analysis provided the starting point for the plan. The political perspective needs evidence of sound management of resources along with meeting societal needs. The exemplary colleges responded with a data-driven management process consisting of environmental needs, planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating, which come into a closed loop that repeats on an ever-improving cycle. The academic perspective perhaps would prefer the hands-off social compact of the pre-1990s (Burke, 2005), but the use of the bubble-up system of strategic management required engagement of faculty and staff in rational prioritization of the use of the college's resources; this engagement helped overcome some reticence of faculty to align their efforts with the greater strategic plan.



*Figure 8.* Strategic responses to accountability factors using Burke's accountability triangle. Adapted from *Achieving Accountability in Higher Education*, by J. Burke and Associates, 2005, pp. 296–324.

The following sections identify the convergent themes and show rationale for the recommendation of the 10 themes as best practices for community college planning and leadership. These practices may be generalizable to other community colleges and are supported by the literature on accountability and strategic planning in higher education.

### 5.5.1 Conduct Environmental Scans With Internal and External Constituent Groups

The environmental scan is a primary step of the strategic plan. Ensuring that the institution is aware of what is going on in the environment is critical to planning and implementing a strategy that fits into what needs to be done. Understanding the SWOT analysis enables the college to prepare students who are equipped to deal with a rapidly changing world. “At the institutional level, the mission is established and periodically reviewed based on an assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses, and an assessment of opportunities and threats within the external environment” (Baker & Smith, 1998, p. 745).

Oak, Maple, and Pine all conducted environmental scans to find out what is going on outside the college. This scan enabled input from diverse groups by allowing government, business, education, displaced workers, and students to give their views of the current environment, as was done particularly well at Pine Community College. The absence of an environmental scan may have left the college in a reactive mode to events that could have been handled more effectively had contingency plans been in place.

### 5.5.2 Build Positive Relationships With Community Partners

Meet community needs. This involves the community at large. All three colleges went out into the service area and provided curriculum and continuing education services at the point of need. Examples of this include the use of the Golden Leaf Foundation’s funding for Pine Community College to open a satellite service center in a remote section of its service area. This service center has knowledgeable staff who can direct local citizens to the program that will help them most. Maple Community College’s president made regular contact with the community to ensure that the college is providing needed

service and has a satellite campus. Oak Community College partnered with a regional hospital to offer programs to meet the needs of future health care professionals.

The needs of displaced workers and underprepared students have been met through (a) Minority Male Mentoring programs at Oak and Maple, (b) a transitional team approach to bridge the gap between high school and college at Pine, and (c) strong developmental programs at both Pine and Oak. This approach is supported in the literature review of the accountability demands on higher education to help underprepared students succeed. Cross' (1976) new student, Zeidenburg's (2008) nontraditional student, and Dowd's (2003) concern for access to a degree over job training provide descriptions of the underprepared student's needs. It is interesting that none of the community colleges in this study participate in Achieving the Dream (ATD): Community Colleges Count, a national initiative intended to improve successful outcomes of low-income students and students of color in community colleges (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009; Roska et al., 2009; Rothkopf, 2009; Rutschow et al., 2011), but all are working to ensure that students are appropriately placed and all three employ one of ATD's principles of developing a culture of evidence, as manifested by the recurring theme of requiring data-driven decision making present at all three colleges.

### 5.5.3. Collaborate With Business and Industry

In a properly balanced relationship, a community college and its business and industry constituents form a mutually beneficial partnership. The college needs the input of business into the development and quality enhancement of programs. Colleges need modern equipment to teach their students so that they are familiar with the latest technology when they go to work. Oak provides a good example of this mutual

beneficence in the academic administrator's relating of the sonography machine that was sold to the college's radiography program at a reasonable price.

Business and industry's need is stated in the Wingspread Group's report and in the need for a strategic plan to meet the need of business and industry. In light of the changing global environment, the Wingspread Group (1993) called for more people to be educated to higher standards as "quickly and efficiently as possible" (p. 4). Writers such as Shaw and Rab (2003) and Dowd (2003) criticized community colleges for reducing the priority of access to a well-rounded education in favor of training or retraining for jobs. The community college's mission contains economic development, so if the college is successful, it will produce well-educated graduates who are indeed ready for a challenging career. This way, both the college and business/industry sectors have accomplished their mission.

#### 5.5.4 Maintain a Student-Centered Approach to Planning and Assessment

The mission statements of the colleges in this study have a common theme of promoting student growth and workforce development. These successful colleges put the needs of their students at the forefront of planning. SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation and the NCCCS CSFs mirror many of the elements of successful outcomes.

The colleges in this study integrate strategies of student success into academic planning and assessment. By creating interventions for the assimilation of basic skills and developmental students into curriculum programs, the colleges demonstrate their student-centeredness. Program reviews and individual evaluations reflect the importance that the colleges place on assessing academic performance and student success. Reluctance of faculty at Pine to commit time for student advisement and at Maple for keeping office

hours throughout the week was challenged by senior administration when that attitude created conflict with student centeredness. The best example of this concept was seen at Maple, whose president required the values of staff civility and radical hospitality in order to remove barriers to (a) relationship building and (b) students entering and persisting in college.

McClenney (2004) made the case for the strategic engagement of students in a client-centered environment. To seek active engagement for students means that instructors have plans to do more than lecture; the focus needs to be on challenging, interacting, and supporting learning, and the student outcomes need to be the primary concern. Nemetz and Cameron (2006) called this a transaction between the college and the instructor in that bureaucratic controls regulate the role of the instructor—in this case, the role of the instructor to design and develop learning opportunities that place the student or client in the center of the educational plan. The emphasis that SACSCOC places on quality improvement means that student outcomes must be a goal of the institution in its QEP (Commission on Colleges, 2008; Mattis & Sinn, 2009; McMurtrie, 2000; Smith & Finney, 2008).

#### 5.5.5 Develop a Balanced Strategic Approach to All Accountability Perspectives

By balancing the pressures of the market, political, and academic perspectives, the colleges in this study were able to meet the accountability factors associated with each perspective. By requiring developmental prerequisites, Oak was able to meet the needs of the market by providing classes for the local fire department that were based on academic integrity and on the preparation of underprepared students, without denying them access to the courses. Maple was able to go into the community and listen to needs, and provide

the professional development that was needed to go from “Good to Great.” Pine balanced the need for better transfer student advisement with the need of faculty to have input into how their departments were operated to meet strategic goals in an efficient manner.

Burke (2005) noted that the institute should pay attention to all three points of the accountability triangle, but should be subservient to none. Overemphasis to the market perspective may cause incrementalism, in that there is no clear direction for the college to take. Gumport (2003) and Senge (1990) cited this overemphasis on the current market conditions as resulting in a fragmented approach that does not have the element of vision and lacks the power of corporate efforts to be able to solve problems.

#### 5.5.6 Integrate Regional and Discipline-Specific Accreditation Principles Into Strategies

The data gathered from interviews at the three colleges dissuaded me from a working theme that the colleges had strategically planned to meet the NCCCS CSFs. The interviews led in the direction that the primary academic, political, and market forces may indeed be accreditation reaffirmation and discipline-specific accreditation. Without accreditation, students who transfer to another institution have their academic accomplishments rejected, Pell Grants from the Department of Education dry up, and the college is in “deep trouble.” The reaffirmation by SACSCOC requires a QEP (Commission on Colleges, 2008) that forces the institution to plan for improvement. At the three colleges, continuous improvement appeared to be embedded in the strategic plans. At Maple, the president fired the nursing chair because of failure to respond to accreditation issues. At Oak, the driver of all continuous improvement efforts was accreditation, and there the nurses led the way. The benefits to a college of imbedding



external standards apply not just to the academic perspective. A SACSCOC document is a benefit as it provides evidence and detail of being a highly functional school.

#### 5.5.7 Close the Loop of Planning/Execution: Communicate Expectations Throughout the Organization

Creating campus systems that go from broad strategic planning to department-level assessment and forward-looking planning, the colleges in this study have put sophisticated systems in place. The involvement of college trustees in the planning process at all three colleges permitted the assimilation of trustee strategies that bring the market and political perspectives into alignment with the goals of the academic perspective. This approach gave the colleges a unified plan to ascertain and prioritize goals, establish metrics to meet those goals, and provide means of reporting progress toward goal attainment.

The concept of *hoshin kanri* (Assan & Tanyai, 2007), or the alignment of strategic objectives, is effectively implemented in this best practice. Alignment of departments with the college mission creates what the Oak president referred to as a “closed loop” of planning, implementation, assessment, and correction throughout the organization. With a macro view of broad strategic initiatives being boiled down to the department level, the mechanisms in place at all three colleges enabled the faculty to assess program effectiveness and make suggestions for improvement. The suggestions were based on data, which may or may not have supported the need for additional faculty, updated equipment and facilities, or other resource allocation. The approach bubbled up the organizational structure at all three colleges and forced priority setting at all levels for competing requests for limited resources. By ensuring that all departments have input in a culture of continuous improvement, the college leadership teams were able to replace

some of the autonomy that the academic perspective lost when external constituencies exerted pressure for college accountability (Burke, 2005; Burke & Minassians, 2004).

Israel and Kihl (2005) emphasized the need to move from a culture of incrementalism to solid planning to avoid disruption during economic shortfalls. This mindset of the culture can be helpful. Barker and Smith (1998) cited the appropriateness of the closed-loop system to ensure a standard process between accreditation reaffirmations in order to meet stated goals and to incorporate accreditation principles into daily operations.

#### 5.5.8 Use of Data-Driven Decision Making to Create a Culture of Evidence and Fiscal Health

At Maple, the “Good to Great” program review encompassed the measures of an effective institution of higher education. Such measures as program success rates, completion rates, cost analysis, transfer success, and FTE generation gave the college a fair picture of internal trends and the health of the college. The WE Tracker Form at Oak and the SAW at Pine provided front-line perspectives of how the colleges were meeting their respective strategic goals and unit objectives.

The rationale for data-driven decision making comes from a variety of sources. The literature on *Achieving the Dream* emphasized a culture of evidence in decision making. Using student outcome data for setting goals, as well as measuring outcomes to create institutional plans, is a process that colleges use to create a culture of evidence that supports the mission and vision of the community college (Jenkins & Kerrigan, 2009).

Literature emphasizing the business side of college operations calls attention to the need for data-driven decision making. Beard (2009) noted the success of universities that have used the MBNQA measure, the BSC, to integrate planning with budgetary

allocations to strategically important factors. Beard (2009) observed that colleges must respond to the following accountability questions: (a) Are schools meeting their mission? (b) Can schools improve their processes and create value without incurring excessive costs? (c) Are schools using scarce resources of intellectual capital, state tax monies, and other revenue sources (including federal funding) effectively? Collins (2001) stated that organizations must “face the brutal facts” and move forward to improve the current situation. It is difficult to recall an organization that made progress without having data with which to formulate strategies and make decisions.

#### 5.5.9 Challenge the Existing Culture Through Presidential Leadership

It is not incidental that each of the colleges in this study met the exemplary standards shortly after the arrival of a new president. All three community college presidents in this study were at their respective colleges for only a few years when their colleges first attained exceptional status. Prior to the current presidents, their colleges’ faculties and staffs were comfortable to the point of complacency and, with the exception of Maple, were not in any accreditation or financial trouble. The arrival of a new president, as the Oak president stated, is the time to reengage the community and faculty in efforts to improve the status quo. The Maple president forced his college to move out of an environment of complacency and addressed some issues of grant noncompliance, using the unifying theme of Collins’ transformation model, *Good to Great* (2001). Pine’s president recognized that communication was lacking and instituted renewed vigor in communicating the need to align programs for student success. All three colleges had a culture in which faculty and staff felt that they were adequately fulfilling their mission,

but the presidents instilled a sense of urgency to perform at higher levels and provided tools from outside the college to improve performance.

Smart (2003) and Kotter (1996) view the organization's culture as a critical factor of success or failure. To be open to change is necessary for the academic perspective to respond to the needs of the market and the political perspectives (Burke, 2005; Smart, 2003). The refusal to be open or the choice to stall change sometimes necessitates changing personnel, as the president of Maple did to make sure that the "Good to Great" model was aligned with department goals. Changing the nursing director was a step consistent with Kotter's (1996) change process in that transformation often starts only when a new person is appointed to an existing position.

Concerns about the demands of the market making the college subservient to the whims of the market make it necessary for a strong president to establish a constant culture, with the culture being adaptable to change but not becoming a service entity to the market (Burke, 2005; Gumpert, 2003). The need to develop a culture runs counter to Birnbaum's (1988) collegial model. In that version of college organization, the president is primarily a figurehead whose primary duty is to prevent the present culture from atrophying.

#### 5.5.10 Allow Planning to Bubble-Up From Work Units to Involve Faculty/Staff in Decision Making

At Oak, the strategic plan was developed by a cross-functional committee with the input of constituents. The key objectives helped define the strategic goals. Each work unit was then responsible for working on a specific objective that supported the strategic goal and the overall mission of the college. How that was to be accomplished was left to the work unit. If more faculty or staff was needed, a SAW was completed by the work

unit's members. They had the opportunity to promote their needs to the next level—and if successful, the resource request was made at the next level, the dean's level by the department manager. The dean then selected the requests that were approved to be sent to the vice president. The vice president promoted it to the president's leadership team and a decision was made there.

Similar processes worked at Maple and Pine. Faculty had the ability to self-assess its results and to request additional inputs if it could be justified by the process just described. This input into decision making at the three colleges appears to be a way to engage faculty in the management process and to overcome resistance that may have developed as a result of what could be seen as a loss of the social compact. In terms of strategic planning, engaging faculty and staff in the process can make them excited about new possibilities and encourage them to adopt attitudes of rediscovery and reevaluation, thus enhancing the college's ability to respond to political and market demands (Swenk, 1999).

In summary, the implications of the convergent themes become a set of recommendations to other community college leaders and planners. The exemplary colleges cover gaps that a more incremental approach leaves open, such as budgeting, resource procurement, alignment of goals, employee input, and an overriding desire to serve the community at large and improve student outcomes. Figure 7 shows the accountability factors that the colleges in this study faced, while Figure 8 and the accompanying narrative show that a balanced approach can provide exceptional results.

Senge (1990) spoke of a shared vision throughout the organization. The role of leaders is to capture that vision and communicate it to current and new members. The

exemplary colleges' practices can apply to any organization, but have a particular value to the community college. Simply stated, a process of understanding the environment, collaborating with constituents, and maintaining a balanced approach with a communication system that follows through with environmental change leads to strategic plans, budget allocations, plan implementation, and evaluation/assessment. The quality process comes in when the process is started again. As the president of Pine Community College liked to say, "There is no finish line to perfection."

### 5.6 Prospective Studies

The role of the community college president in North Carolina is a very interesting topic for future studies. The president is elected independently of the central community college system and reports to a local board. As chief executive officer of the community college, the president has enormous responsibility and considerable power. This study demonstrates the power of the president at each of the colleges in establishing a system of strategic planning and determining how the plan will be carried out. The leadership style(s) of the successful community college president would make for an interesting follow-up study.

The use of assessment was touched upon briefly in this study. While colleges are bound by their accrediting agency to conduct quality improvement, the topic of assessing the effectiveness of student outcomes across disciplines and through embedded final exam questions is an area in which research could prove beneficial to many college administrators.

Conducting a multi-site case study was very interesting, but any of the three colleges could have provided a single best practices case study on collegiate

management. The efficiency of Oak, the relationship building at Maple, and the accountability efforts at Pine easily could have stood alone as topics. The outstanding individual cooperation from presidents and administrators at each college yielded hours of taped interviews that were not used for this research. With administrative support and snowball interviewing (Glesne, 2006), a researcher could easily plumb the depths of strategic and program planning to provide a blueprint for successful collegiate planning methods.

Another topic for a future study is the effectiveness of programs such as Minority Male Mentoring and other programs designed for increasing access and improving success of underrepresented populations. The anecdotal evidence seems to support the program at two of the colleges in this study. An in-depth exploratory study could yield valuable information about what works and what does not work in improving access, retention, graduation, and transfer.

### 5.7 Conclusions and Summary

The study of three North Carolina Community Colleges that met EIP standards between the 2007–08 and 2008–09 academic years provides evidence of the existence of detailed strategic planning in the years leading up to the colleges' exceptional performance. In addition, the accountability requirements as noted in Burke's accountability triangle play a role in instigating change in the colleges, which made them responsive to their markets, accountable for fiscal resources, and active in improving the quality and accessibility of instruction.

Burke (2005) noted the changes in the higher education environment that occurred in the 1990s as public campuses gained more control over their internal

operations while acceding to accountability demands. These demands manifested themselves in the form of the market elements. Political aspects through regional accreditation pushed institutions to pursue quality improvement through the academic perspective. The academic perspective created demands in the form of resistance to accommodating underprepared or underrepresented students, greater requirements for advisement, and, in many cases, the placement of students in a provider-client model. Figure 7 shows the relationship of the accountability demands on Burke's accountability triangle, including placement of the CSFs.

Responding to the challenges posed by the accountability demands requires the college to have a plan. Strategic planning enables the college to leverage technology, as Pine used a Web-based system and Oak used a multipurpose planning/assessment tool to align the mission and the operations of the institution with the external environment that it serves. Rowley et al. (1997) made the case for strategic planning in the academy as it applies to both teaching and the collective culture:

Knowledge is less a matter of dependence on personal brilliance and more a matter of the collective talent of minds and disciplines pursuing problems and sorting out intersubjective understandings. In this world, traditional disciplines are confining. The wisdom of the many is as significant as the brilliance of the few. Teachers are becoming less the expert fonts of wisdom and are more the guides and coaches who stimulate rather than dominate learning (p. 24)

This type of guided support for organization members was evident in the three colleges in this study.

In responding to the challenge posed by the accountability factors, Burke (2005) stated the necessity of serving all three points of the triangle while being subservient to none. It is important to have a balance. In Figure 7, the ideal location for the accountability pressure is in the center. Failure to stay centered may create problems of



disequilibrium. Focusing on the political perspective may subject the institution to the prevailing political winds without a moderating influence of market forces or academic concerns. An emphasis toward the academic perspective may reduce responsiveness to public needs and market trends. Impulsive reaction to markets leads to chasing consumer whims while missing public needs and academic necessities. In placing the accountability forces in the triangle in 2011, it would appear that the market–political perspective dominates the market–academic and the political–academic sides of the triangle. The pressure for both access to higher education and the demands for more successful outcomes is a theme that may create future issues as more high school graduates and displaced workers see the need for higher education. As discussed, not all are ready for the rigor of college, and the challenge is to meet the demands of these populations without decreasing the integrity of programs so that students who transfer are on an equivalent knowledge level as native university students.

The three colleges in this study, Oak, Maple, and Pine, have common themes that converge to provide a list of recommendations to college leaders in times of heightened accountability and necessitated strategic planning. The colleges in the study demonstrate that improving processes and programs is an ongoing process. Oak Community College emphasized the need to efficiently meet the needs of constituents and downplayed the complexity of the college’s complicated process by emphasizing the constant message of improvement and by establishing a closed-loop system. The president summarized the Oak approach by saying, “The key is collecting data, getting team members to address things, and not let them slide.”

The concept of continuous improvement is exemplified at Pine where the college's strategies are aligned with every department's program review and strategy. Good practices of institutional leadership, as illustrated by the three colleges, support the achievement of exemplary status, not only in the critical success factors but also in improving in the face of all accountability factors. As the president of Maple Community College noted, "[Instead of] looking for that home-run idea, you just keep doing the right things over and over and over and over and suddenly you realize what a different place it is to work."

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*Author's Note: The following references are attributed to or mention in detail the community colleges that participated in this study. These colleges were promised confidentiality; as such, specific indentifying information has been omitted to preserve anonymity.*

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT  
AND IRB APPROVAL FORM



Educational Leadership  
9201 University City Blvd.  
Charlotte, NC 28223

Informed Consent for  
*Doctoral Dissertation:*

Project Title and Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Exceptional Institutional Performance: Strategies for Meeting State Accountability Standards in North Carolina Community Colleges, 2007–08.” This is a study to explore the types of strategic planning used by a selection of three community colleges that met all of the requirements of Exceptional Institutional Performance according to the state-mandated Critical Success Factors in 2007–09 after having failed to meet them in 2003–04 through 2006–07.

Investigator(s):

This study is being conducted by the UNCC Department of Educational Leadership. John Lattimore, candidate for doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, Community Track. Dr. Dawson R. Hancock, Chair of the Educational Leadership Department is the chair of the dissertation committee.

Description of Participation:

You will be asked to participate in interviews, allow the researcher to observe planning committee meetings, and/or review planning documents related to the planning process of your college. Audio taping of interviews and meetings will be transcribed to create data to be accumulated in the aggregate for the participating colleges. There are three community colleges that are asked to participate in this study.

Length of Participation

Your participation in this project will take a total of approximately two hours. The sessions will consist of a one-on-one interview or participation in a group interview, my observation of planning committee meeting(s) my review of planning documents and telephone or email follow-up for clarification of for questions that may have arisen from other interviews or data collection. Three institutions will participate, with approximately ten administrators or faculty from each institution will be invited to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you will be one of approximately 30 subjects in this study.



Risks and Benefits of Participation:

There are no anticipated risks to participants in this study. However, there may be risks which are currently unforeseeable. The benefits of participation in this study are the increased knowledge base of how community colleges conduct strategic planning that may be used to benefit other community colleges.

Alternatives:

There is no need for an alternative to participate in this study. If requested participants decline participation, they may do so at any time.

Possible Injury Statement:

If you are hurt during this study, we will make sure you get the medical treatment you need for your injuries. However, the University will not pay for the medical treatment or repay you for those expenses.

Volunteer Statement:

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality Versus Anonymity:

Any information about your participation, including your identity, is confidential. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality:

Participating colleges will be given pseudonyms. Responses will be coded thematically and reported in the aggregate to protect the confidentiality of the individual and the institution.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office (704.687.3309) if you have any questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact John Lattimore, doctoral candidate, Principal Investigator, phone 704-484-4020. Dr. Dawson Hancock, chair of dissertation committee, is the Responsible Faculty; phone 704-687-8863.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age or am an emancipated minor,\* and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the Principal Investigator.

---

 Participant Name (PLEASE PRINT)

---

 Participant Signature

---

 DATE

---

 Investigator Signature

---

 DATE

\*Emancipated Minor (as defined by NC General Statute 7B-101.14) is a person who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and meets at least one of the following criteria: 1) has legally terminated custodial rights of his/her parents and been declared 'emancipated' by a court, 2) is married, or 3) is serving in the Armed Forces of the United States.

## IRB Approval Form



## UNC CHARLOTTE

## Compliance Office / Office of Research Services

9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001  
t/ 704.687.3311 f/ 704.687.2292 www.research.uncc.edu/comp/complian.cfm

## Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects

*Certificate of Approval*

|                            |   |                  |                               |
|----------------------------|---|------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Protocol #</b>          | <b>10-09-01</b>   |                  |                               |
| <b>Protocol Type:</b>      | <b>Expedited</b>  | <b>7</b>         |                               |
| <b>Title:</b>              | <b>Exceptional Institutional Performance: Strategies for Meeting State Accountability Standards in North Carolina Community Colleges, 2007-09</b> |                  |                               |
| <b>Initial Approval:</b>   | <b>9/28/2010</b>  |                  |                               |
| <b>Responsible Faculty</b> | <b>Dr. Dawson</b>   | <b>Hancock</b>   | <b>Educational Leadership</b> |
| <b>Investigator</b>        | <b>Mr. John</b>   | <b>Lattimore</b> | <b>Educational Leadership</b> |

After careful review, the protocol listed above was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects. This approval will expire one year from the date of this letter. In order to continue conducting research under this protocol after one year, the "Annual Protocol Renewal Form" must be submitted to the IRB. This form can be obtained from the Office of Research Services web page. ([www.research.uncc.edu/comp/human.cfm](http://www.research.uncc.edu/comp/human.cfm)).

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to promptly inform the committee of any changes in the proposed research prior to implementing the changes, and of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to subjects or others. Amendment and Event Reporting forms are available on our web page at <http://www.research.uncc.edu/Comp/human.cfm>.

  
Dr. M. Lyn Exum, IRB Chair

10-1-10  
Date



## APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview protocol is tied to individual research questions that correspond to the market, political, and academic sides of Burke's accountability triangle. The research questions are listed as Exhibit A, while the interview protocol is listed as Exhibit B, with notation as to which research question and which perspective of Burke (2005) supports the interview question.

### *Research Questions*

1. What pressures did the college face from an accountability standpoint in the years 2003 to 2007
  - a. from students?
  - b. from business and industry?
  - c. from foundations?
  - d. from state and federal governments?
  - e. from accrediting agencies?
  - f. from other avenues of demand?
2. What was the role of strategic planning in the prior years, from 2003 to 2007, that led to the college's meeting EIP standards in 2007–08 or 2008–09?
  - a. Which description of strategic planning best describes the method used by the colleges in the study?
  - b. How is planning structured?
3. What have the colleges learned about planning through the implementation of the planning process and the execution of the plan?

*Interview Protocol: Individual Interview Questions for President and Academic, Student Services, and Continuing Education Administrators*

| Interview Questions  | Research Question | Burke's Triangle Perspective    |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. <i>(Primary question)</i> Please take a minute to think about your planning process. Then, please give me an overview of how your planning processes works.   | 2                 | Academic                        |
| <i>(Secondary question)</i> Which people or positions are involved in planning, and why are they included?   | 2                 |                                 |
| <i>(Tertiary question)</i> How does your planning process affect your fiscal budget?   | 2                 |                                 |
| 2. <i>(Primary question)</i> How has the planning process that you described changed since the mid-2000s?  | 2                 | Market, Political, and Academic |
| <i>(Secondary question)</i> Why did it change?   | 2                 |                                 |
| <i>(Tertiary question)</i> What did you do differently in 2007–08 or in recent years than you had been doing?  |                   |                                 |
| 3. <i>(Primary question)</i> How have changes mandated by outside agencies, such as the Critical Success Factors from the legislature, published Student Right-to-Know data, and quality enhancement emphasis from SACS, led to changes in your colleges planning process? | 1                 | Market and Political            |
| <i>(Secondary question)</i> What other outside entities, including your college's foundation, have influenced your planning?   |                   |                                 |
| <i>(Tertiary question)</i> Can you give me a specific instance where specific planning was instrumental in meeting one of the eight Critical Success Factors?  |                   |                                 |
| 4. What is the role of faculty and non-administrative staff in your college's planning process?  | 2                 | Academic                        |
| 5. <i>(Primary question)</i> How does your college plan its work to help business and industry?  | 1                 | Market                          |
| <i>(Secondary question)</i> How can the needs of business for a trained workforce and the mission of the college to provide a well-educated citizenry both be served in the planning process?  |                   |                                 |

*Interview Protocol* (continued)

| Interview Questions  | Research Question | Burke's Triangle Perspective    |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| <p>6. <i>(Primary question)</i> Most NC community colleges have experienced phenomenal growth in the past few years. How has your college been able to sustain your academic standards (as shown by attaining EIP) while experiencing this enrollment growth?</p> <p><i>(Secondary question)</i> If growth has brought in many more underprepared students (both recent high school graduates and laid off adults), how have you planned to help them develop college level academic skills?</p> | 1                 | Market                          |
| 7. Even with your success, what would you do differently in the planning process if you were to redesign it?   | 3                 | Market, Political, and Academic |

## APPENDIX C: WORKUNIT EFFECTIVENESS TRACKER, OAK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**OCC Workunit Effectiveness (WE) Tracker Form**

This form is used to organize Assessment Planning (Operational Goals & Comprehensive Program/Services Review) and Strategic Planning  
Click here for User's Guide.

Workunit: \_\_\_\_\_

Workunit Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Leaders Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Planning Phase

Implementation Phase

Evaluation Phase

Workunit Mission: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment Planning: Workunit Operational Goals & Assessment Method for Comprehensive Review

Workunit Goals and subsequent Assessment Method updated Fall of 2010

| Workunit Goal/Objective  | Goal Type      | Assessment Method for Comprehensive Review<br>(See [a], [b], and [c] in Users Guide)  |   | Institutional Linkage   |   | Phase X in years to be evaluated  | PCC Strategic Goals   | Strategic Planning  | Implementation  | Strategic Activity  | Outcome Assessment  | Workunit Operational Goal Evaluation Outcome  |   | Comprehensive Review  |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |                | How will you measure your success in meeting goal/objectives?<br>(Through performance indicators & standards, <u>Table I Indicators</u> to measure student learning) are created/written primarily within the academic workunit. All workunits, academic or non-academic, must have a Performance Indicator, or Measure | Performance Standard  | Responsible Person  | Director/Department Goals (if applicable)   |   |   |   |   |   |   | JCCC Mission & Operational Goals  | Results or Outcome  |   |
| What is it that you want to be doing currently? What do you want to do? What services do you think or do? What services do you provide or deliver? | Type I Type II | [a] [b] [c]   | [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] | [a] [b] [c] [d] [e] [f] [g] [h] [i] [j] [k] [l] [m] [n] [o] [p] [q] [r] [s] [t] [u] [v] [w] [x] [y] [z] |

How can the effectiveness of the Workunit be improved? Design Strategic Activities to improve or enhance the workunit. Use SAW Form when budget requests are necessary.

During the Implementation Phase, the Workunit implements its Strategic Activities AND pursues its Operational Goals through "standard operating processes & procedures."

Compare the actual outcome of strategic activity to the expected outcome.

The Workunit Leader and his/her supervisor conduct the Comprehensive Program or Services Review & finalize the Summative Report. Click here for template.

APPENDIX D: STRATEGIC ACTIVITY WORKSHEET:  
OAK COMMUNITY COLLEGE

| <b>Oak Community College Strategic Activity Worksheet (SAW)</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| <small>2007</small>  |   |
| <p>A strategic activity is a <b>short-term, focused</b> action designed to <b>correct</b> an identified <b>weakness</b> or <b>prepare for</b> real or anticipated <b>changes</b> in the community. Any strategic activity will impact a variety of institutional services and workunits. An activity can also be created in response to a strategy team recommendation.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please consult with the appropriate review teams prior to submitting this worksheet to Planning &amp; Research.</p> |   |
| <b>I. General Information:</b>   |   |
| Person Submitting Strategic Activity:  | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Please Select Your Name"/><br><small>(85 Character Limit 0 Used)</small>         |
| SAW Title:   | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>   |
| Description of this Strategic Activity:  | <input style="width: 100%; height: 100%;" type="text"/><br><small>(630 Character Limit 0 Used)</small>                          |
| Desired Outcome:   | <input style="width: 100%; height: 100%;" type="text"/><br><small>(630 Character Limit 0 Used)</small>                          |
| Contact person for this activity:  | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Who should be contacted for follow-up?"/>  |
| <b>II. Strategic Connection:</b>   |   |
| An activity <b>must</b> support at least one <b>operational</b> goal.  | <a href="#">View Operational Goals</a><br><input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Select Appropriate Operational Goal"/> |
| An activity <b>may</b> support a current <b>strategic</b> goal/objective.  | <a href="#">View Strategic Goals</a><br><input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Select Appropriate Strategic Goal"/>     |
| An activity <b>may</b> also support a <b>secondary</b> current <b>strategic</b> goal/objective.  | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Select Appropriate Strategic Goal"/>   |
| Was this activity developed in response to a Strategy Team recommendation?   | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text" value="Yes/No"/>  |
| An activity <b>must</b> support a workunit operational goal. Enter title.  | <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/><br><small>(85 Character Limit 0 Used)</small>   |

Oak Community College Strategic Activity Worksheet (SAW) (continued)

**III. Funding Information:**

Will this activity require money beyond the existing Workunit allocation?

(A response of "Yes" to this question indicates that this activity will be included in this year's budget planning process. If it is not answered, or "No" is selected, it is assumed that this activity will not compete for institutional funds.)

**A. First Year Budget Requirements (complete all that apply):**

Hire new faculty (Contact the Business Manager for cost estimates.)  
Estimated annual total of salary & benefits:

Hire new staff (Contact the Business Manager for cost estimates.)  
Estimated annual total of salary & benefits:

Equipment Costs: (For new positions include \$1000 to equip workstation)

Other Cost Money: (Supplies, Software, Printing, Travel, Maintenance etc)

County Funds:

Miscellaneous: (Grants, Special Funds, Fees)   
(35 Character Limit 0 Used)

Please Describe:

Notes:   
(75 Character Limit 0 Used)

**B. Subsequent Year Budget Requirements:**

If this activity is approved, will it require funding in subsequent years?   
(35 Character Limit 0 Used)

Please Describe:



## APPENDIX E: VALUES OF MAPLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The following values from Maple Community College's (2010b) "Writing Across the Curriculum: Overview" are listed as follows:

### *Community*

- To add degree programs that reflect the changing needs of Maple County citizens and the changing global economy, including more collaborative programs with 4-year colleges and universities
- To effectively utilize advisory committees in the program planning and evaluation process
- To effectively market programs so that the community knows what is available at Maple Community College

### *Employees*

- To provide quality professional development programs to meet the needs of employees
- To provide numerous and effective means of communication with employees

### *Quality Education*

- To increase the number and improve the quality of distance education courses
- To utilize program reviews to improve the quality of all courses and programs
- To increase the quality of student written communication skills for academic and career endeavors

### *Radical Hospitality*

- To go beyond customer service and provide radical hospitality to those we serve
- To provide more customer-friendly parking

- To provide comfortable classrooms and support facilities to enhance the student experience
- To provide more locations in the community

*Student Success*

- To increase graduation rates
- To increase the transfer rates of our graduates to 4-year schools and universities
- To provide technology equivalent to what students will use in the workplace
- To collaborate more effectively with employers and high schools to meet the needs of students
- To increase written communication skills that extend well outside the classroom and serve to increase students' employability

APPENDIX F: MAPLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM REVIEW  
(ABRIDGED)

---

## Good to Great Report 2010–2011

---

Planning Unit: \_\_\_\_\_ Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Review

#### Staffing:

|                  | Number of Faculty | Experience (Average Years on Staff) | Average Teaching Load per Term (Credit Hours) | Percent of Classes Taught by |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Full-time</b> |                   |                                     |   |                              |
| <b>Part-time</b> |                   |                                     |   |                              |

\*Source: Program Head

|                  | Gender |      | Race  |           |
|------------------|--------|------|-------|-----------|
|                  | Female | Male | White | Non-White |
| <b>Full-time</b> |        |      |       |           |
| <b>Part-time</b> |        |      |       |           |

\*Source: Program Head

- A. Are vacancies expected due to retirements?  Yes  No  
*If yes, please explain:*
- B. Do all faculty meet SACS Credential Guidelines?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain why and what is being done to meet the guidelines:*
- C. Are faculty current in their teaching field?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain:*
- D. List the latest professional development activities for faculty teaching in the program. Please include recognitions, achievements, and awards received by faculty.

**Facilities:**

- A. Are facilities adequate?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain:*

**Curriculum:**

- A. When were the curriculum and/or courses last revised?
- B. Is the curriculum in accordance with NCCCS standard?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain:*
- C. Is the curriculum current and relevant?  Yes  No  
*Please explain:*
- D. Has the curriculum undergone any recent innovations?  Yes  No  
*If so, please explain:*
- E. Is any portion of this curriculum offered online?  Yes  No  
*If so, what proportion (%)?*

**Collaborative/Articulation Agreements:**

- A. Does the program have a collaborative or articulation agreement with a 2- or 4-year college?  Yes  No
- B. How many students took advantage of the agreement this year?
- C. Should the agreement be continued?  Yes  No  
*Please explain:*

**Accreditation:**

- A. Is the program accredited by an outside agency/ board?  Yes  No  
*If so, when did the program receive its last accreditation review?*
- B. What were the major outcomes of that review?
- C. When is the next accreditation review?

[Click here to enter a date.](#)

**Advisory Committee:**

| Advisor Name | Agency Represented | Gender | Race |
|--------------|--------------------|--------|------|
|              |                    |        |      |

\*Source: Program Head

- A. How often does the advisory committee meet?  
 B. Please summarize any significant discussions of the advisory committee and the recommendations that came from those.

**Equipment Costs:**

| Year      | Description of Items Purchased | Cost |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------|
| 2008–2009 |                                |      |
| 2007–2008 |                                |      |
| 2006–2007 |                                |      |

\*Description Source: Program Head

- A. Is equipment adequate to meet the instructional needs?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain:*

**Operating Cost Analysis:**

| Year      | Expenditures | FTE Earned | Cost/FTE | State Allocated | Profit/Loss |
|-----------|--------------|------------|----------|-----------------|-------------|
| 2008–2009 |              |            |          |                 |             |
| 2007–2008 |              |            |          |                 |             |

\*Source: Administrative Services and Planning and Assessment

- A. Are operating funds adequate to meet the instructional needs?  Yes  No  
*If no, please explain:*

**Enrollment Data:**

| Term        | Number of Applications | # Registered for Courses | Yield (Reg/Applied) |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Spring 2010 |                        |                          |                     |
| Fall 2009   |                        |                          |                     |
| Spring 2009 |                        |                          |                     |
| Summer 2009 |                        |                          |                     |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Department FTE (FTE earned for courses taught by faculty in the department):**

| Year             | Fall | Spring | Summer<br>(non-funded) | Annual FTE<br>(funded) |
|------------------|------|--------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>2008–2009</b> |      |        |                        |                        |
| <b>2007–2008</b> |      |        |                        |                        |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Program FTE (FTE earned for students in the program):**

| Year             | Fall | Spring | Summer<br>(non-funded) | Annual FTE<br>(funded) |
|------------------|------|--------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>2008–2009</b> |      |        |                        |                        |
| <b>2007–2008</b> |      |        |                        |                        |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Demographics:**

| Term               | FT/PT | New/Ret | F/M | W/Non-W | Total |
|--------------------|-------|---------|-----|---------|-------|
| <b>Fall 2009</b>   |       |         |     |         |       |
| <b>Spring 2009</b> |       |         |     |         |       |

\*Note: Enrollment includes all Degree, Diploma, and Certificate Majors

Source: Planning and Assessment

**Course Statistics (Courses taught by faculty in the program):**

| Term               | Seats at 10% | # Withdrew | % Withdrew | # Successful<br>(A,B,C,S) | % Successful<br>(A,B,C,S) |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Fall 2009</b>   |              |            |            |                           |                           |
| <b>Spring 2009</b> |              |            |            |                           |                           |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Program Statistics (All courses taken by students in the program):**

| Term               | Seats at 10% | # Withdrew | % Withdrew | # Successful<br>(A,B,C,S) | % Successful<br>(A,B,C,S) |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Fall 2009</b>   |              |            |            |                           |                           |
| <b>Spring 2009</b> |              |            |            |                           |                           |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Persistence for New Students:**

| Cohort    | # in Cohort | 1 <sup>st</sup> Term Persistence |   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Fall Persistence |   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Fall Persistence |   |
|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
|           |             | #                                | % | #                                | % | #                                | % |
| Fall 2009 |             |                                  |   |                                  |   |                                  |   |
| Fall 2008 |             |                                  |   |                                  |   |                                  |   |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Graduates:**

| Year      | Associate | Diploma | Certificate | Total |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-------------|-------|
| 2008–2009 |           |         |             |       |
| 2007–2008 |           |         |             |       |
| 2006–2007 |           |         |             |       |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Graduation and Persistence:**

| Cohort    | # in Cohort | Graduating after 2 Years |   | Graduating after 3 Years |      | Graduating after 4 Years |      | Total Persistence |      |
|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|           |             | #                        | % | Cum#                     | Cum% | Cum#                     | Cum% | Cum#              | Cum% |
| Fall 2006 |             |                          |   |                          |      |                          |      |                   |      |
| Fall 2005 |             |                          |   |                          |      |                          |      |                   |      |

\*Source: Planning and Assessment

**Certification/Licensure (if applicable):**

| Year | # Sitting for Exam | # Passing Exam 1 <sup>st</sup> Attempt | % Passing Exam 1 <sup>st</sup> Attempt |
|------|--------------------|--|--|
| 2009 |                    |  |  |
| 2008 |                    |  |  |

\*Source: Program Head

**Transfer Out:**

| Year      | # Transferring to 2 year college | # Transferring to 4-year college | Total Transfers |
|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 2008–2009 |                                  |                                  |                 |

\*Transfer out includes those who completed credential and those who did not.

\*Source: NSC and Planning and Assessment

**Employment Outlook (if applicable):**

- A. Describe the employment outlook for graduates of this program.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

- B. Describe any trends in this field of work or other factors that are affecting or will affect the job market for graduates. Please state your source (i.e. Employment Security Commission, etc.)

**Student Satisfaction:**

- A. Describe student's level of satisfaction with courses/program. (Use survey results and/or other information you have available.)

**Job Placement:**

- A. Of your most recent graduates, what percentage is working in the field?
- B. Name the top 3 employer of graduates in your program?

**Program Competencies:**

- A. Please submit a copy of your most current Competency Assessment Report with this document.

**II. Analysis of Current Status and Future Opportunities:**

**Trends** (Things going on in your field/environment that should be taken into account):

**Strengths** (Describe recent accomplishments, the good stuff, things that you are proud of):

**Ideal** (If your area "gets it right", what would people be doing, saying, or feeling?, what would that look like?):

**Gaps/Changes** (Describe things you wish you could change, any gaps you see between offerings and customer needs, or differences between your current situations compared to the ideal):

**Future Opportunities** (Restate the Gaps/Changes needed as if they were opportunities and determine what significant actions must be taken for each to become reality):

**Obstacles/Challenges** (Describe obstacles and/or challenges you may face while creating the opportunities mentioned above):



### **III. Continuous Improvement Plan Evaluation (Year End)**

#### **Evaluation of Previous Year's CIP:**

- A. **Objective Accomplishments** (Did you meet your objectives: completely, partially, or not at all? Please determine each objective's level of accomplishment and describe how you reached that level):
- B. **Objective Measurement Tools Used** (Please describe the data/reports or other evidence used to determine the level of accomplishments determined above):
- C. **Objective Future Status** (Will you continue/abandon objectives for next year? Please identify the future status for each objective and describe why you've made this decision):
- D. **Documented Improvements/Changes** (Please summarize improvements and/or changes made as a result of your plan. Be robust here as this section will be used to provide updates to Senior Leadership and the Board of Trustees):

### **IV. Continuous Improvement Plans (Future Opportunity Your Unit Plans to Address this Upcoming Budget Year):**

**Unit Purpose/Mission:**

**Unit Goal:**

**Objective (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timeframe):**

**Strategic Plan Link (What institutional goal does this goal and objective support?):**

**Justification (Summarize how your review and evaluation led to the decision to include this objective in your plan):**

**Impact (How will this move you from Good to Great?):**

**Action Plan (Strategies to cross the 'bridge'):**

**Resources Needed (Be sure to include these resources on your Budget Request Form as well.):**

## APPENDIX G: PINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM REVIEW FORM

|   |   |   |                                      |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Unit Code:</b><br>60000  | <b>Planning Unit:</b><br>Curriculum Instruction   | <b>Unit Manager</b><br>[REDACTED]                     |                                      |
| <b>Obj ID</b><br>289  | <b>Objective</b><br>Student Learning  | <b>Objective Purpose</b><br>Student Learning Outcomes | <b>Objective Status</b><br>No Status |
| <b>Objective Description</b><br>Demonstrate students' achievement of intended student learning outcomes.  |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Institutional Goals</b>  | <b>Objective Types</b>  | <b>Planning Priorities</b>                            |                                      |
| Academic Rigor & Student Focus<br>Continuous Improvement  | QEP – Learning Outcomes   | No Planning Priorities to Display                     |                                      |
| <b>Unit Purpose</b><br>To support student learning through the creation of the course schedule and the delivery of instruction, and to support the professional development of faculty. |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Tasks</b><br>There are no Tasks to Display   |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Assessment Measures</b>  |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Assessment Measure</b>   |   |                                      |
| 07/01/2009  | 80% of student artifacts in the areas of CT, reading, and writing will receive a score of 3 or higher. There will be a 50% increase in the number of students attempting licensure in Career Technical programs.  |   |                                      |
| <b>Intended Results</b><br>There are no Intended Results to Display   |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Status Reports</b><br>There are no Status Reports to Display   |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Actual Results</b>   |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Actual Results</b>   |   |                                      |
| 07/08/2010  | No increase in students attempting licensure was noted in Career and Technical programs. Eighty-percent of student artifacts in CT, reading, and writing did not earn a 3 or better.  |   |                                      |
| <b>Use of Results</b>   |   |   |                                      |
| <b>Date</b>   | <b>Use of Results</b>   |   |                                      |
| 07/08/2010  | While the academic division did not meet its student learning goals, the artifacts have been showing modest gains in scores. The QEP Director, deans, and VP for Curriculum Programs will reconsider the 80% benchmark after a review of five years of data. The academic division will continue to use |   |                                      |
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