

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Sally Widenmann Moore for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on June 19, 2015.

Title: Organizational Transformation and Social Construction: How Community College Faculty Make Meaning of the Completion Agenda

Abstract approved: _____
Earl P. Johnson

How do organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a mandated change in the external environment? The opportunity to address this question presented itself when President Barack Obama set forth a goal for American community colleges to increase the number of students completing certificates and degrees by 5 million by the year 2020. As an external mandate, the explicit prioritization of completion is a relatively recent phenomena. This interpretive qualitative study explored the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty, as organizational members, construct the concept of completion. Phenomenology was employed as a guiding theoretical and methodological framework. Using saturation sampling, the self-reported perceptions of community college faculty were collected via audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews. Interview transcript data was subjected to a six-step process of inductive, constant comparison analysis, which yielded ten categories, or subthemes. These categories were further subjected to constant comparison, which yielded four major themes: external dictate, legitimacy,

ownership, and enactment. External dictate confirmed member cognizance of changes in the external environment, and indicated that members are aware of the potential impact of those changes. Legitimacy and ownership confirmed the process of meaning making and provided insight into how that meaning is constructed. Enactment confirmed, as posited by Living Systems Theory, that system members act upon meaning in self-sustaining ways. The interdependent functioning of the four themes suggests that shared vision is system-generated as members, not only socially construct changes in the environment, but also socially construct the vision that ultimately constitutes the organization's transformation. These findings serve to inform our understanding of the role of shared vision in advancing organizational transformation. Leaders must acknowledge that system members socially construct the meaning of change in the external environment. Furthermore, rather than attempt to establish a vision, astute leaders will socially construct the vision in consort with system members.

©Copyright by Sally Widenmann Moore
June 19, 2015
All Rights Reserved

Organizational Transformation and Social Construction: How Community
College Faculty Make Meaning of the Completion Agenda

by
Sally Widenmann Moore

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Presented June 19, 2015
Commencement June 2016

Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Sally Widenmann Moore presented on June 19, 2015.

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Sally Widenmann Moore, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my loving family and friends for their unflagging support.

To my parents, my late mother, Margaret Lyon Widenmann, and my father, Charles Henry Widenmann: words could never begin to express the depth of my gratitude for simply having you as parents. Time and again, your love, wisdom, guidance, and example brought me through even the most difficult times. Thank you for loving me always.

To my daughters: Rebecca and Elizabeth. I am deeply grateful that God chose to bless me with you. Thank you for your love, your support, your patience, and your understanding. The joy you bring to my life, and to the world, is immeasurable. I am so very, very proud to claim you as my own.

To my siblings, extended family, and friends: thank you for supporting me, and for believing in me. Thank you for listening patiently, for reading drafts, for cheering me up and cheering me on. Each of you has done things, both small and large, that have made this journey possible.

To my committee members: thank you for graciously sharing your time, effort, and expertise. Your willingness to serve on my committee is greatly appreciated.

To Joe and Cohort 21: I can't imagine going through this doctoral journey without you. Many, many, many thanks. It was you that made the difference

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter I: Purpose and Significance	1
Purpose.....	1
Research Questions	1
Significance.....	4
Context.....	4
Significance of the Study	5
Summary of Purpose and Significance	10
Chapter II: Literature Review	11
Approach to Review of Literature	11
Organization of Review of Literature	12
Completion as National, State, and Local Mandate.....	12
The Completion Agenda at the National Level	13
The Completion Agenda at the State Level	13
The Completion Agenda at the Local Level	15
Open Systems and the External Environment	16
General Systems Theory	17
Living Systems Theory	18
Social Construction of Meaning and Organizational Change.....	20
Theories of Social Construction and Organizational Change.....	20
Higher Education, Social Construction, and Change.....	22
Faculty, Social Construction, and Institutional Change.....	25
Summary of Review of Literature	30
Conclusion	31
Chapter III: Design of the Study	33
Positionality	37
Philosophical Approach	38
Guiding Theoretical Perspectives	39
Data Sources and Description of Data	41
The Selection of a Community College that has Signed the Pledge.....	41

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
The Selection of a Community College in Oregon.....	43
The Selection of First Community College	44
Identification and Selection of Faculty Interviewees.....	44
Strategies to Protect Human Subjects	48
Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness.....	48
Analyses	50
Limitations	53
Summary of Design of the Study.....	54
Chapter IV: Results.....	55
Overview of the Results.....	55
The Data Collection Site.....	55
The Interviews	56
Steps in the Analysis.....	57
Research Question One.....	59
Research Question Two	62
Research Question Three	67
Summary of the Results	70
Chapter V: Discussion	73
Summary of the Study	73
Discussion of the Major Findings.....	74
Open Systems and the External Environment: External Dictate	75
Social Construction of Meaning and Organizational Change: Legitimacy and Ownership.....	76
Faculty, Social Construction, and Institutional Change: Enactment	79
Social Construction and Organizational Transformation: Interdependent Themes..	81
Summary of the Major Findings	82
Conclusions.....	83
Limitations, Recommendations, and Implications.....	85
Limitations	85
Recommendations for Further Research.....	86

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Implications for Practice	87
Summary of the Discussion	88
Personal Reflections and Insights	88
References.....	91
Appendices.....	106

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Process of inductive, interpretive, constant comparison analysis.....	71
2. Major themes, categories, and paraphrased examples.....	72

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. Democracy's Colleges.....	107
B. Call to Action	108
C. Consent Request for College President.....	109
D. Contact Information for Informants.....	110
E. Recruitment Letter for Faculty Participants.....	111
F. Interview Protocol.....	112

Chapter I: Purpose and Significance

In organizational transformation theory an organization, as an open system, is subject to an external environment to which it must respond. Internally, system members negotiate the organization's reality as they seek to socially construct its shared meaning. In 2009, when President Barack Obama announced the American Graduation initiative, community colleges were confronted with what came to be known as the national "completion agenda" (Obama, 2009), and scholars were given a rare opportunity to examine an organization's response to a compelling change in its external environment. Furthermore, scholars and practitioners could explore the ways in which organizational members, more specifically community college faculty, internalize and implement the "completion agenda" as articulated in the literature, in legislation, in accreditation standards, by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and by selected community college presidents. This study provides valuable insight into the ways in which organizational members create shared meaning around a compelling external mandate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. In order to fulfill this purpose three research questions were addressed. These research questions, and the rationale for each of them, are described in the following section.

Research Questions

The following three research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What is

community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? (b) How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? (c) How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? The rationale for these research questions follows.

RQ 1. What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda?

This question was guided by an open systems perspective which, in part, frames the environment as the ultimate source of information, and focuses on the sense-making activities of organizational members (Scott & Davis, 2007). Weick (1969) asserted that organizational members attend to their environments selectively and then attempt to make sense of their perceptions. Their cognizance of the selected environmental elements becomes the basis for sense making. As key organizational members in institutions of higher education, and the primary connection to students, faculty exist as one of the most potentially influential constituencies on campus (Barbalich, 1994; Thaxter & Graham, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Furthermore they determine the degree to which a given college is able to fulfill its mission or advance change (Baker, Roueche, & Gillet-Karam, 1990; Bennis, 1977; Van Ast, 1999). Given the centrality of their role, faculty were the organizational members of focus in this investigation. Thus, research question one sought to assess the environmental cognizance of institutional participants as reflected in their self-reported awareness of the completion agenda.

RQ 2. How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? The purpose of this research question was to advance our understanding of the ways in which community college faculty make meaning of the

completion agenda. As discussed earlier, the completion agenda has been established as a national mandate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012; Greene, 2009; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McPhail, 2011). However, the meaning the completion agenda holds for institutional members (i.e. their internalization of it) is created through the social construction of that meaning and is reflected in their description of it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967; Sandberg, 2001). Rooted in social construction theory, this question sought to reveal how organization members create meaning of an external mandate.

RQ 3. How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? The purpose of this research question was to discover the ways in which the meaning of the completion agenda is shared, negotiated, and acted upon with other institutional members, especially students. From a social constructionist perspective, meaning is negotiated in and through our interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Furthermore, all organizational members contribute to the organizational reality as it is socially constructed (Bess & Dee, 2008; Hatch, 1997; Krone, Kramer, & Sias, 2010). Garfinkel (1967) emphasized that the sharing of meaning is inextricably linked to the ability to share that meaning. In addition, social constructionism posits that humans act toward things based on the meaning the things have for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). This research question was rooted in the work and theorizing of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Garfinkel (1967) as it attempted to ascertain the ways in which shared meaning is made manifest in the self-reported interactions faculty have with other institutional members. Furthermore, the work of Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), and Berger and

Luckmann (1966) served to guide this question as it sought to discover how the socially constructed meaning of completion is acted upon by faculty.

Significance

The following section addresses the significance of this study by describing the context of the study, and the ways in which this study is of both scholarly and practical significance. In addition, the role of shared vision in organizational transformation, faculty perception of the challenge of completion, and the prioritization of completion, as they pertain to the practical significance of the study are addressed.

Context

Community colleges have been implicitly concerned with the completion of degrees and certificates since their inception. However, an explicit emphasis on completion emerged in 2009 when President Obama established a national mandate for completion which has since gained momentum and acceptance across the country (Greene, 2009; *The White House summit on community colleges*, 2011). In common parlance, this mandate has come to be known as the "completion agenda." Additionally, in 2010 the AACC along with five other nationally recognized community college organizations established a goal of significantly increasing the number of students attaining degrees and certificates by 2020 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2015).

The state of Oregon is no exception in the national conversation. In fact, in 2011, the Oregon legislature passed a measure containing the most ambitious completion agenda for community colleges in the nation (Oregon Education Investment Board, 2011). Known as Senate Bill 253, this bill mandates a goal of "40/40/20," which

stipulates that by 2025, 40% of adult Oregonians will have earned an associate's degree or post-secondary credential (*S. 253-A*, 2011). If community colleges are to transform themselves and answer the call of completion, the ways in which faculty, as key stakeholders, construct the concept of completion is of paramount importance.

Significance of the Study

This study is of both scholarly and practical significance. The findings enhance our understanding of the ways in which organizational members negotiate shared meaning around a major public mandate. In addition, if the completion agenda is to succeed, institutional leaders need to better understand the degree to which faculty view completion as central to the community college mission. Furthermore, although there has been robust discussion at the federal and state levels among legislators, community college leaders, and major foundations focused on the mandate to improve graduation rates, little is known about the ways in which faculty make meaning of this mandate. The scholarly and practical significance of this study are discussed in greater detail below.

Scholarly significance. This study makes a significant contribution to scholarship and theorizing in the areas of social construction and organizational transformation by furthering our understanding of the ways in which organizational members make meaning of an externally mandated change.

From a phenomenological perspective, social constructionism serves to inform our understanding of the process of creating meaning in all social systems including organizations. As a theoretical and methodological framework, the phenomenological perspective focuses on the lived experiences and shared understandings of organizational members. Viewed through this lens, “environmental changes affect organizational

change through the mediation of powerful members who perceive and enact them” (Levy & Merry, 1986, p. 234). All organizational members participate in the negotiation and construction of the organization’s reality as it is derived from and maintained through social interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bess & Dee, 2008).

Furthermore, reality is constantly being socially reproduced as parties negotiate and renegotiate their interpretations. This study enhances our scholarly understanding of, and significantly contributes to, the body of knowledge that addresses social constructionism and organizational transformation theory.

Practical significance. This study is of practical significance to stakeholders in organizational settings by informing their understanding of: (a) the role of shared meaning in creating vision and advancing organizational transformation; (b) faculty perceptions of the completion agenda; and (c) the ways in which faculty understand the prioritization of completion for community colleges.

Shared vision in organizational transformation. Community colleges have been called upon to make the completion of degrees and certificates central to their mission and, in so doing, transform themselves (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b; Greene, 2009). Unfortunately, successful organizational transformation is not easily achieved (Ayers, 2002, 2005; Barnett, 2011; Bennis, 1977; Burns, 2002; Farmer, Slater, & Wright, 1998; Ferlie, Musselin, & Andresani, 2008; Kotter, 2008; Wheatley, 2006). Numerous organizational theorists have pointed to the creation of a shared vision as the key to successful transformation (Kotter, 2007; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 2006), and Hill and Jones (2001) have argued that reinterpretation of the mission is essential to community college survival. As key members of the institution,

community college faculty play a critical role in the organization. The analysis of the ways in which faculty construct the meaning of an external mandate has practical significance for organizational stakeholders in that it serves to clarify the degree to which the shared meaning of completion reflects a shared vision and, in turn, serves to advance the transformation mandated.

Faculty perception of the completion agenda. The analysis of the ways in which community college faculty make meaning of the concept of completion is especially significant in light of recent evidence that indicates that community colleges are plagued by unacceptably low completion rates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b). This new evidence raises questions about the scope and emphasis of the community college mission.

Since their establishment, the mission of community colleges has experienced continuous expansion (Hollinshead, 1936; Levine, 1979; Levinson, 2005). This expansion has, in large part, been in response to political, social, and economic demands and has manifested itself in community colleges taking on responsibility for a very broad range of educational and societal needs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levine, 1979; Levinson, 2005; Nadolny, 2006; Ratcliff, 1994). Bolstered by federal aid and the enduring belief in the value of education for all, community colleges have continued to emphasize guaranteed access (Vaughan & MacDonald, 2005). Laudable though these efforts may be, we have come to discover that access bears little relationship to success (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). In addition to an expanding mission, today's community colleges are also faced with unacceptably low completion rates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b). Once a world leader

in educational attainment the United States now ranks 16th in the world for completion rates for 25-34 year olds (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). This ranking stands in stark contrast to projections that 63% of jobs in the United States will require a post-secondary credential by 2018 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). This new awareness brings the importance and the challenge of completion to the forefront of the community college mission. An analysis of how faculty construct completion allows scholars and practitioners to assess the degree to which community college faculty perceive completion as central to the community college mission.

The prioritization of completion. In 2009, President Obama pledged government support to reach the goal of the highest number of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Greene, 2009). Later that same year, in his address to Macomb Community College, President Obama reiterated his commitment and specifically identified the role of community colleges in achieving this national goal:

Today I'm announcing the most significant down payment yet on reaching the goal of having the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world. We're going to achieve this in the next 10 years. And it's called the American Graduation Initiative. It will reform and strengthen community colleges... Through this plan, we seek to help an additional 5 million Americans earn degrees and certificates in the next decade -- 5 million. (Obama, 2009, p. 24)

The president advanced this commitment in October of 2010 by convening the White House Summit on Community Colleges. The event highlighted the critical role community colleges play in meeting the job training and educational needs of the nation. (*The White House summit on community colleges*, 2011). The prioritization of completion continued to gain momentum such that by early 2011 numerous national and regional entities were devoting significant resources to the advancement of the

completion agenda. Counted among these were the Southern Regional Education Board, the Lumina Foundation, and the Gates Foundation (Bradley & Blanco, 2010; “Gates Foundation commits \$35 million to new community college program,” 2010; Lumina Foundation, 2010). Then, in the summer of 2011, in alignment with President Obama, the AACC launched the 21st-Century Initiative and set its own goal to educate an additional 5 million students with degrees, certificates, or other credentials by 2020 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). By the fall of 2011, the “completion agenda” and the role of community colleges in that agenda were clearly established for the nation. Since that time, the AACC, along with legislators, philanthropic organizations, education leaders, and numerous community college chancellors and presidents, have continued to champion the completion agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014b). In addition it has emerged as a focus of research and theorizing by both scholars and practitioners alike (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b, 2015; Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012; Humphreys, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McClenney, 2013; O’Banion, 2011; Russell, 2011; Tinto, 2012).

As a parallel indicator of the rising prioritization of college completion, the interest in shifting from enrollment based funding to performance based funding for colleges has also increased. In 2008, only a handful of states had any form of performance based funding, but by 2013, 39 states were exploring, transitioning to, or had already implemented some form of performance based funding as an alternative to the traditional enrollment based funding model (Friedel, Thornton, D’Amico, & Katisinas, 2013; Harnisch, 2011).

The declarations by the President of the United States, and the AACC, as well as the interests of the various entities cited above, serve as primary evidence of the practical significance of this study. If community colleges are to achieve the goals set out by President Obama, we in the academy must seek to understand the ways in which the key organizational members, especially faculty, comprehend and acknowledge the significance of that goal. This study enhances that understanding.

Summary of Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. The research questions addressed were: (a) What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? (b) How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? (c) How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom?

The analysis of the ways in which community college faculty construct the concept of completion is of both practical and scholarly significance. This investigation was both informed by, and informs, organizational transformation theory and social constructionism. In addition it serves to advance the academy's understanding of the challenge of completion for community colleges and the faculty role in responding to that challenge. An enhanced understanding of these areas through this investigation benefits practitioners and scholars alike as it informs further study and improves best practice.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to summarize current theory and research, and identify important gaps therein, as related to the ways in which organizational members make meaning of an external mandate, and as evidenced by the ways in which community college faculty construct the concept of completion. The questions that guided this literature review were: (a) What evidence is there that the completion agenda has been established as a mandate at the national, state, and local levels? (b) In what ways are organizations, as open systems, impacted by their external environments? (c) What is the role of socially constructed meaning in organizational change?

Approach to Review of Literature

The sources cited in this literature review include peer reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, speeches, and reports, in both paper and electronic form, and written in English. Both quantitative and qualitative scholarly research that addressed organizations in the United States and Canada are included. The search was further limited to studies that addressed not-for-profit community colleges, or other not-for-profit institutions of higher education or corporate organizations, if their findings pertained to community colleges, and they were published subsequent to the establishment of community colleges in the United States in 1901. Also included are research and theorizing on open systems and social constructionism as it pertains to externally mandated change and the creation of meaning. Keywords searched include community college, completion, completion agenda, faculty, institutional change, open systems, organizational environment, organizational transformation, social constructionism, systems theory, and vision. Databases searched include ERIC, EBSCO host,

ComAbstracts, and Academic Search Premier accessed via Oregon State University's online catalog and data bases.

Organization of Review of Literature

The following review presents research, theory, and evidence that address the prevalence of the completion agenda at the national, state and local levels, the influence of the external environment on an open system as articulated in General Systems Theory and Living Systems Theory, and the role of the social construction of meaning in organizational transformation in higher education. Taken together the discussion of these three areas serves to identify what we currently do, and do not, know about how a change in the external environment impacts an organization as an open system.

Completion as National, State, and Local Mandate

Although the completion agenda was formally thrust into the national spotlight in 2009 by President Obama (Greene, 2009), a growing awareness of the problem of completion emerged much earlier. As Humphreys (2012) noted, "external pressure on higher education to increase the numbers of college graduates has been building for decades" (para. 2). This pressure is associated with studies that "have indicated that the majority of jobs of the future will demand high-level knowledge and skills requiring some postsecondary education" (Russell, 2011, p. 1), and thus the need to increase the number of students who complete degree or certificate programs (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004; Peterson, 2007).

For the purpose of the current study, with its focus on community colleges, "completion" in the community college setting is defined as the earning of an associate's degree or postsecondary credential (Obama, 2009; S. 253-A, 2011). The "completion

agenda” refers to the broader reform movement and associated diverse activities focused on increasing the number of students earning degrees, certificates or other postsecondary credentials (Humphreys, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; Russell, 2011). The following section addresses the emergence of the completion agenda at the national, state, and local levels and the pertinent research and theory associated with that emergence.

The Completion Agenda at the National Level

At the national level, “the Obama administration has served as a catalyst to focus national attention on college completion, and it has explored new territory for the federal government in setting college completion goals” (Russell, 2011, p. 2). National education leaders, federal policy makers, and numerous large philanthropic organizations, have taken up President Obama’s charge to reestablish America as the world leader in college educated citizens (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b; Humphreys, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McClenney, 2013; Tinto, 2012). In 2011, just two years after President Obama’s pronouncement, there were more than 13 active, major, national college completion initiatives supported by more than 100 sponsors, collaborators, and funding partners, and billions of federal dollars pledged to support programs designed to boost completion (Russell, 2011). The interest and investment of resources at the national level were directly connected to efforts, interest, and investments at the state level.

The Completion Agenda at the State Level

“Recognizing the importance of college completion to the nation’s economic vitality, the National Governors Association (NGA) launched an initiative to help all states improve higher education performance. Through Complete to Compete, states will

work to increase college completion and improve higher education efficiency” (Reyna, 2010, p. 7).

In addition, the NGA has been encouraging states to augment or replace enrollment based funding with performance based funding. Enrollment based funding is the traditional method used to determine and distribute government appropriations to community colleges. As an access or “inputs” based model, states are provided funding based on student enrollment. Thus, increases in enrollment are directly related to increases in college revenue. The goal of enrollment based funding is to provide the opportunity for success by ensuring access. It implicitly assumes that access will lead to success. Unacceptably low graduation rates suggest otherwise (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b).

As mentioned earlier and encouraged by the NGA, 39 states are currently exploring performance based funding (PBF) as an alternative to the traditional enrollment based model (Friedel et al., 2013). PBF is based on outputs instead of inputs, though the specific details of the model vary from state to state. Tennessee, the earliest to adopt PBF, did so in 1978. Other states are in various stages of implementation or exploration.

In addition to the exploration or implementation of PBF, states are taking a variety of other steps to improve completion rates. In response to the AACC’s call to action to engage community colleges to advance the completion agenda, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges accepted the challenge on behalf of all 16 community colleges in Maryland (Maryland Association of Community Colleges, 2010). In addition, in 2011, the College Board and the National Conference of State Legislatures announced a “multistate campaign to galvanize and mobilize the nation to significantly

increase the proportion of Americans that hold a postsecondary degree” (College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, 2011, p. 1). And in 2012, Texas implemented “Texas Completes” a statewide effort to improve credential completion rates at Texas community colleges (“Texas Completes,” 2012). That same year, Illinois Lt. Governor Sheila Simon launched “Focus on the Finish” a statewide initiative designed to improve community college completion rates in Illinois (Dembicki, 2012). Although examples such as these can be found in states all over the nation, the state of Oregon enacted perhaps the most ambitious effort in the country. In 2011, the Oregon legislature signed into state statute the mandated goal that by 2025, “at least 40 percent of adult Oregonians have earned an associate’s degree or post-secondary credential as their highest level of educational attainment” (S. 253-A, 2011, sec. 3). These statewide efforts are indicative of the breadth and momentum of the completion agenda. Even in states where no unified state effort exists, individual community colleges are focusing on advancing the completion agenda (McPhail, 2011; O’Banion, 2011).

The Completion Agenda at the Local Level

State level efforts such as those above have influenced the creation and implementation of initiatives at countless individual community colleges across the United States. In the words of Terry O’Banion,

The Completion Agenda has emerged as the overarching mission of the community college. Never in the history of the community college movement has an idea so galvanized stakeholders...never has so much funding from philanthropic groups...been more generously funneled into a cause...the notion that community colleges can play a significant role in doubling the number of college completers is championed by virtually every community college leader. (O’Banion, 2011, p. 28)

As O'Banion noted, the efforts are frequently funded or otherwise supported by both public and private dollars, including various foundations such as the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation to name but a few. A partial list of initiatives includes Achieving the Dream, Complete College America, Complete to Compete, Completion by Design, Project Win-Win, and the College Completion Challenge. Each of these efforts involves a combination of strategies and best practices designed to improve the rates at which students complete some form of postsecondary credential.

The completion agenda has emerged on the national, state, and local levels as a movement championed by community college presidents, philanthropic organizations, and legislators. The AACC has played a central role in galvanizing these efforts (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

Open Systems and the External Environment

Numerous theorists have pointed to systems theory as the most fitting perspective for understanding and accurately explaining organizations (Capra, 1996; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1979; Katz & Kahn, R, 1978; Senge, 1990; von Bertalanffy, 1968; Wheatley, 2006), and in particular higher education institutions (Weick, 1969, 1995). A central concept in any discussion of organizations as systems is the concept of openness. Broadly speaking, organizations as open systems are seen as complex sets of interconnected components that are interrelated, interdependent, and interact with each other and with their environment (Hall & Fagen, 1980). Systems that can easily and readily exchange information with their environments are said to be open

systems (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1993; Kast & Rosenzweig, 1979; Katz & Kahn, R, 1978; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Both General Systems Theory and Living Systems Theory provide valuable insights which serve to enhance our understanding and explain the nature and functioning of higher education organizations as open systems. General Systems Theory and Living Systems Theory served as guiding theoretical frameworks for the current study, and are described in the following sections.

General Systems Theory

General Systems Theory stresses the importance of recognizing the dynamic interactions of the system's components, especially with regard to the organization's structure and function (von Bertalanffy, 1968). As Bertalanffy (1968) pointed out, key to understanding organizations as systems is the concept of boundary. Boundary highlights the ways in which a system is distinguished and has an identity separate from that of its environment. The ease with which a system can make exchanges with its environment is determined by the permeability of its boundaries. Highly bounded systems are said to be closed, whereas those that readily interact with their environments are said to be open. A system's environment is everything outside its boundary. In addition Bertalanffy (1968) stressed that open systems, by exchanging energy and information with their environments, can ultimately improve their structures and routines. Buckley (1967) further explicated this with the concept of morphogenesis, the processes through which systems adapt to their environments via learning, growth, and differentiation. A system's ability to change in response to its environment through growth and evolution will determine its survival. For the purposes of the current study, General Systems Theory provides an excellent starting place for understanding the need for organizations to adapt

in response to their environments; however, it is insufficient in describing the nature of successful adaptation and how it is accomplished. For this we turn to Living Systems Theory.

Living Systems Theory

As a framework for understanding the nature and function of organizations as systems, Living Systems Theory is rooted in the natural world and draws from Chaos Theory, Quantum Mechanics, and Thermodynamics (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 2006). Living Systems Theory rejects mechanistic, linear views rooted in Newtonian Physics for failing to acknowledge that systems are living, complex networks driven by relationships. The following discussion provides a brief overview of Living Systems Theory and then specifically addresses the concepts of meaning, participation, and shared vision.

Similar to General Systems Theory, in Living Systems Theory all parts of the system are viewed as interconnected and interdependent. The parts can only be understood in relation to each other and in relation to the whole. Similarly the whole can only be understood in relation to its parts. These relationships form and drive a complex network that is in essence the system. Systems change as they exchange energy and information with the environment. Systems interpret environmental demands and, in turn, assign self-sustaining meaning to those demands (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 2006).

Living Systems Theory recognizes that all change results from a change in meaning, meaning which is created through the process of self-reference. Individuals will view the new meaning as desirable to the extent to which they believe the new meaning allows them to become more of who they are.

In addition to embracing self-referential change, successful organizational transformation requires participation. As Wheatley (2006) noted, recent decades have seen a sweeping movement toward participatory leadership and management. This movement is rooted in the organizing principles of life. Life and the processes of co-adaptation and co-evolution depend on participation. All members of the organization are called to participate. Implicit in the call for participation is the assumption that participation is inherently beneficial. Among the assumptions of participatory models are that participation empowers members, and participation reinforces connectedness and interdependence (Kezar, 2001). However recent research leads us to question the assumed benefits of the participatory environment. Kezar's (2001) findings suggested that the participatory model has unintended consequences including forced assimilation, exclusion of those who fail to assimilate, and failure to acknowledge multicultural beliefs about participation. Perhaps more importantly, Kezar's work exposes a gap in the literature regarding assumptions associated with transformational change.

General Systems Theory and Living Systems Theory, with their emphasis on openness and an organization's necessary adaptive response, provide a sound theoretical framework for this study. Living Systems Theory also highlights the link between successful organizational transformation and the creation of a shared vision (Wheatley, 2006). As is described in greater depth in the following section, various theorists have stressed the importance of shared vision in successful transformation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Ferlie et al., 2008; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Kotter, 2007; Pielstick, 1998; Wheatley, 2006).

This conceptualization of vision spotlights the intersection of open systems, change, and social construction. As Scott and Davis (2007) emphasized, “the source of system maintenance, diversity, and variety is the environment” (p. 97). In addition, Weick argued that “participants selectively attend to their environments and then, in interaction, make collective sense of what is happening” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 105). Furthermore, Weick asserted that the process of sensemaking “entails not only developing a common interpretation or set of common meanings, but also developing one or more agreed-upon responses that are selected from among the many possibilities” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 105). The ways in which organizational change and social construction function together is described in more detail in the following section.

Social Construction of Meaning and Organizational Change

Social constructionism serves to inform our understanding of the ways in which humans create shared meaning, and in particular the ways faculty make meaning of the completion agenda as an externally mandated change. The articles included in this section are those that specifically address theories of social construction and organizational change; those that address higher education, social construction, and change; and those that address faculty as they socially construct meaning in institutions undergoing change.

Theories of Social Construction and Organizational Change

Shared vision is an essential component of successful transformation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978; Ferlie et al., 2008; Kezar et al., 2006; Kotter, 2007; McClenney, 2013; Pielstick, 1998; Wheatley, 2006). In creating vision, leaders create power. This power lies not in authority, however legitimate, but rather in the vision as it

permeates the entire organization (Wheatley, 2006). The role of management and leadership is to keep the organization's core values at the forefront, even as the organization engages in constant change (Burns, 2002). Success is not ensured by the plan but by sticking to the core values of the organization. The following section outlines the theorizing associated with the role of vision in organizational transformation.

Bass' (1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) work identifying the components of transformational leadership specifically noted the importance of inspirational motivation or raising followers' awareness of the vision or mission to be achieved. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner's (1987) model of transformational leadership included the importance of inspiring a shared vision of the future. Kotter's model (2007) not only identified the creation of a vision but also stressed the importance of communicating that vision, and empowering others to act on the vision.

In a somewhat narrower treatment of organizational transformation, Pielstick (1998) performed a meta-ethnographic analysis of the literature on transformational leadership in education, including those sources which specifically addressed community colleges. The analysis began with open coding and used constant comparative techniques to assess each iteration of the coding. The analysis resulted in the emergence of a transformational leadership profile consisting of seven major themes: (a) creating shared vision, (b) communicating the vision, (c) building relationships, (d) developing a supporting organizational culture, (e) guiding implementation, (f) exhibiting character, and (g) achieving results. Pielstick's findings confirmed a high level of consensus in the field regarding the critical importance of vision in transformation. While this study made an important contribution to our understanding of the centrality of vision in

organizational transformation theory, the findings do not advance our understanding of how organizational members make meaning of the vision, nor how the vision is negotiated, shared or acted upon. The method employed does not provide for empirical confirmation, nor disconfirmation, of the tenets of the theories addressed.

The theorizing in this area serves to confirm the importance of socially constructing shared meaning during organizational change. However, our understanding of the ways in which that meaning is created, negotiated, and shared among organizational members in higher education remains incomplete.

Higher Education, Social Construction, and Change

As noted above, shared vision has been clearly identified as a key driver in the change process, however establishing a shared vision or mission has proven to be a difficult undertaking. Known for their complexity and high degree of autonomy (Ferlie et al., 2008), higher education institutions are especially challenged when they attempt to move the change process forward (Barnett, 2011; McClenney, 2013). The following studies address these challenges.

Rooted in Weick's (1995) contention that humans are sense-making creatures, Hartley (2003) coded emergent themes gleaned from institutional literature, field observations, and 77 semi-structured interviews gathered at three liberal arts colleges in order to describe organizational members' search for meaning during institutional transformation. Hartley concluded "that people were able to construct a more meaningful institutional life around a common purpose" (p. 99). In addition, Hartley surmised that shared purpose mattered to an institution. However, the methodology employed for this study did not give rise to the meanings created by the organizational members, nor did it

enable causal connections between the achievement of shared vision and efforts to establish vision. In addition, the data set for this study came from four-year institutions and thus generalizability to community colleges is limited.

Over a nine-month period, Barnett (2011) engaged in a case study of a university during the implementation of a new admissions criteria framework. Specifically the study sought to categorize the tactics of change agent consultants hired to achieve system-wide shared vision in order to advance change. Observations, interviews, and document collection formed the data set for the qualitative analysis. Analysis of the data revealed that participants constructed their own divergent visions and interpretations of the change. As Barnett noted, though achieving a shared vision will facilitate the change process, in higher education systems the reality of establishing a shared vision may prove to be nearly impossible. Perhaps more importantly, Barnett concluded that attention to how meanings are created and used in organizational change are critical to the system's ability to adapt to that change. While these findings are important, they are somewhat limited. The most significant limitation is associated with the use of external consultants as change agents. As institutional outsiders, the role, function, perceived trustworthiness, and credibility of these individuals as compared to actual institutional members must be questioned. Moreover, the applicability of these findings to institutions undergoing change without the assistance of external agents is severely limited. Nevertheless, Barnett's findings are not only relevant to the present study, but serve as compelling evidence of the need for further investigation in order to more fully understand the process of meaning making during organizational transformation.

Ayers (2005) also examined how system members made meaning in an institution undergoing transformation, however the setting for this study was the community college. Ayers hypothesized that institution members would assign different meanings to the organizational change. Data collection consisted of observations, document review, and semi-structured interviews with 19 faculty members at a small, rural community college. Four climate variables emerged from the analysis: power, collaboration, technology, and shared vision. While different system members assigned different meanings to the first three variables, the fourth variable of vision showed high consensus. The generalizability of these findings is limited due to the fact that the data were gathered at a single, small, rural community college. The degree to which the findings can be assumed to hold true for all community colleges, especially those with a distinctly different profile (e.g. large, urban) is in question. Despite this limitation, the results of this study serve as empirical confirmation of theoretical claims regarding vision as a primary component in the change process. However, they are contrary to Barnett's (2011) finding on the limited ability of higher education institutions to achieve high agreement among organizational members regarding shared vision. The lack of resolution of this contradiction exposes a gap in the literature regarding the ways in which, and the degree to which, organizational members create shared meaning.

Stout-Stewart (2005) used Kouzes and Posner's (1987) Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to assess the leadership patterns and behaviors of 126 female community college presidents throughout the United States during transformation. As mentioned earlier, Kouzes and Posner's model included inspirational vision as an essential component in transformational leadership. In Stout-Stewart's study the 30-item LPI was

used to assess the impact of the demographic setting of the institutions, the race/ethnicity of the female presidents, the education level of the presidents, and the experience of the presidents on leadership behavior. Leadership pattern differences associated with Inspiring Shared Vision emerged for race/ethnicity and education level of the president. While these findings serve to confirm the use of vision as a change strategy in the community college setting, the methodology employed does not permit conclusions regarding the ways in which organizational members made meaning of the vision. In addition, the generalizability of the findings beyond female community college presidents is extremely limited.

The preceding studies help form a basis for our understanding of the ways in which organization members make meaning of shared vision during institutional change. They did not however specifically address the role of faculty during the change process. Faculty are the focus of the studies discussed in the following section.

Faculty, Social Construction, and Institutional Change

As key organizational members, faculty play a primary role in negotiating, and disseminating the perceived shared meaning, or vision, to which transformational theorists refer (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Kotter, 2007, 2008; Pielstick, 1998; Wheatley, 2006). The research articles included in this section are those that specifically address the role of faculty, their perceptions, and the negotiation of shared meaning.

Sokugawa's (1996) dissertation examined faculty perceptions of mission and organizational culture and the factors that influenced them. This quantitative study was based on data gathered in surveys completed by 364 instructional faculty at seven community colleges comprising a single statewide system. The findings indicated that,

contrary to the assumption that community colleges when viewed collectively are thought to hold similar values and beliefs, different culture types emerged for each of the seven colleges. The colleges differed with regard to faculty perceptions of decision-making processes, leadership style, and institutional mission. The findings from this study are particularly important in that they highlight the flawed assumption that faculty construct meaning of the community college mission similarly. Here we see that faculty at different campuses, within the same system, constructed meaning differently. While this finding is important, the method employed in this study restricts the interpretation of the findings to the existence of different categories. Nonetheless, the findings are of particular importance to the current study in that they help to establish a baseline awareness that faculty construct the meaning of an institution's mission differently. These findings expose a gap in the literature and speak to the importance of not only acknowledging that differences may exist, but the need to determine what those differences are.

Community college faculty's perception of their involvement in decision-making at their institutions was examined by Thaxter and Graham (1999). In this study, 100 community college faculty in six states used a 20-item survey to rate their level of involvement in five categories: finance, instruction, personnel, institutional mission, and students. In addition to the survey, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide descriptive examples of their ratings. The researchers found that faculty felt little sense of meaningful involvement in decision-making at their institutions. The findings of this study are important in that they provide some insight regarding faculty perceptions, and they inform our understanding of the level of faculty perceived involvement in

institutional life. However the methodology employed did not yield data which could be used to assess whether faculty value, desire, or believe there is an optimal level of involvement. Nor did the data indicate the ways in which faculty understand or make meaning of institutional life.

Levin (2006) sought to identify the ways in which community college faculty values and behaviors were connected to the overall functioning of the institution. Levin gathered faculty member perceptions by conducting individual and focus-group interviews with 171 faculty in seven community colleges in the United States and Canada. Based on his qualitative analysis of the data, Levin concluded that faculty perceived themselves as central to the functioning and purpose of the college, and that they held values and attitudes that were shaped and contextualized by their institutions. Nevertheless, faculty perceived the values they held as most often in opposition to their institutions' administration. What makes this study of particular importance are its limitations and what its findings do not tell us. Ultimately it serves to expose the complex nature of faculty perceptions and the faculty-institution relationship. The revelation that faculty believe they are central to the functioning of the college, yet hold values in opposition to their own institution's administration, reveals the need for a deeper, more complete understanding of the faculty perspective. As such, the findings expose an important gap in the literature that warrants further attention.

While Sokugawa (1996), Thaxter and Graham(1999), and Levin (2006) provided important insights on faculty perceptions in community college settings, and helped form a baseline understanding of the role, function, and impact of those perceptions, the studies were not conducted in institutions undergoing change. Jenkins (2011) asserted

that community colleges will need to involve faculty if reform efforts designed to increase student completion rates are to be successful. Studies which specifically address faculty and institutional change are discussed below.

In a case study analysis of two Texas community colleges, Peterson (2007) analyzed the perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff involved in establishing a culture of evidence at those colleges, and the degree to which those perceptions were disseminated throughout the two institutions. Peterson conducted eight focus groups at each of the two colleges and found both similarities and differences in the perceptions of the study group participants. When compared to a large sample of college employees, similarities emerged. Overall, the majority of the participants believed that the efforts to establish a culture of evidence had only been partially successful. Findings revealed a lack of strategic inclusion of key stakeholders (i.e., faculty) in attempts to transform the institutions' cultures. These findings hold particular importance for the current study in that they highlight the crucial nature of the faculty role in meaningful institutional change. We are once again reminded that institutional transformation requires faculty engagement and endorsement, which begins with understanding how faculty understand the transformation itself. As important as these results are, the generalizability of the findings are limited due to the extremely small sample size (two institutions in a single state). In addition, the focus of the investigation was limited to perceptions of the shift to a culture of evidence, rather than an understanding of how members made meaning of the cultural change itself. As a result, the gap in the literature regarding how faculty make meaning of mandated change remains.

Mitchell (2009) examined the ways in which the response to an increasing demand for online education affected an institution's culture. The institution's response consisted of the implementation of online education offerings. This single-case study conducted at one, large, urban community college included on-site observations, document analysis, and individual interviews. The participants were 8 full-time faculty, and 13 administrators. The data were analyzed for common themes. The findings suggested that the change had an impact on structures, procedures, faculty roles, administrator roles, teaching and learning, and the students. Perhaps most importantly, as Mitchell stated "the result was a new perception of the organization itself" (p. 1). The generalizability of the findings are limited by the study's method and focus. First, the extremely small sample (8 faculty, 13 administrators, single institution) raises concerns regarding applicability beyond this institution. Second, generalizability to institutions addressing various other types of change is limited as well. The findings may be unique to the issues associated with online education. However, despite these limitations this study's findings highlight the impact of a change in one part of the system on the perceptions of the system as a whole.

Community college faculty perceptions of educational change were assessed by Zmetana (2002). This qualitative study used in-depth dialogue with 16 community college faculty at a single institution to gather data on faculty perceptions of change. Zmetana concluded that faculty perceived change as constant, but adapted to it incrementally. In addition, faculty perceived that mandated changes lacked clarity and were motivated by hidden agendas. Furthermore, faculty perceived mandated changes as often not in alignment with higher education values. Finally, faculty had clear ideas on

how to make change successful and more meaningful, perceived themselves as responsible for the implementation and consequences of the change initiatives, and wanted the opportunity and resources to collaboratively develop solutions for responding to mandated change. These findings speak to the importance of understanding faculty perceptions and construction of meaning, as well as the faculty role in advancing change. While this study provides valuable insights that serve to inform the current study, the limitations of the findings reside in the methodology with its focus on a single institution. Although the findings may serve to assist the institution in better understanding itself, their generalizability beyond the institution is extremely limited.

The preceding review on social construction of meaning and organizational change deepens our understanding of the role of meaning creation in organization transformation. However, as discussed above, it simultaneously exposes a gap in the literature regarding the examination of this phenomenon. This study, with its specific exploration and analysis of the ways in which community college faculty make meaning of this newly emphasized mission component (i.e., completion), helps fill this gap.

Summary of Review of Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to synthesize, critique, and identify gaps in the extant research and theorizing pertaining to the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment. Research and theory that addressed completion at the national, state, and local levels, open systems theory, and the social construction of meaning during externally mandated change were reviewed. For each of these areas, significant gaps in the literature were identified. The literature on the completion agenda indicated that at the national, state,

and local levels, this movement is both led and supported by a variety of stakeholders including legislators, philanthropic organizations, national education experts, and community college leaders. The AACC has played a particularly significant role in this movement. Informed by data indicating that the jobs of the future will require at least some postsecondary education, stakeholder support for the completion agenda has been made manifest in policy, philosophy, and resource allocation.

The literature reviewed on open systems theory, (the theoretical framework for this study), indicated that the successful organization's response to environmental change requires organizational transformation through the creation and establishment of shared vision. The research reviewed on the social construction of meaning, as it related to this institutional change, indicated that a system's ability to adapt to a change in its environment is in large part determined by the ways in which system members make meaning of the change. However, how shared vision as socially constructed meaning, is created, negotiated and established within the organization remains unclear. The most significant gap in the literature is the lack of research on the ways in which faculty, as organizational members, make meaning of an externally mandated change such as the completion agenda. This gap is in part filled by this study.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion lays the ground work for an investigation of the ways in which community college faculty make meaning of the completion agenda, and by extension the ways in which organizational members make meaning of an external mandate. A dramatic increase in the number of students who complete college has been nationally set forth as a goal for American community colleges. As mentioned earlier, a

three-part political event significantly affecting the mission of community colleges occurred in 2009 and 2010 when President Obama: (a) pledged government support to help America produce the highest number of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Greene, 2009), (b) set a goal to increase the number of community college students earning degrees and certificates by 5 million, and (c) convened the White House Summit on Community Colleges (*The White House summit on community colleges*, 2011). In essence, community colleges have been called upon to shift their emphasis from simply “access” to “access and success” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). This success is to be evidenced by improved completion rates.

Theorizing and research indicate that the completion agenda has been clearly established as a national mandate, that organizations as open systems respond to changes in their environment, and that organizational members seek to make meaning of those changes. However, the way in which faculty, as key stakeholders, make meaning of an external mandate such as the completion agenda is not clear. If community colleges are to advance the completion agenda, they must clearly understand the ways in which the key stakeholders in the institution make meaning of this national mandate.

Chapter III: Design of the Study

Since their establishment community colleges have been implicitly concerned with the completion of degrees and certificates. However, the concern for completion became more explicit in 2009 when President Obama called for a significant increase in college completion rates (Greene, 2009; *The White House summit on community colleges*, 2011). In so doing, the President established a national mandate for completion. The “completion agenda” has since become a primary concern of colleges throughout the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a; Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Bragg & Durham, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McPhail, 2011; O’Banion, 2011; Russell, 2011). Consistent with the national conversation, the Oregon legislature passed Senate Bill 253 stipulating that by 2025, 40% of adult Oregonians will have earned an associate’s degree or post-secondary credential (Oregon Education Investment Board, 2011; S. 253-A, 2011).

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study is to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. As an interpretivist study, the qualitative approach is most appropriate in that the aim of qualitative research “is to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants” (Pole, 2007, p. 1). It is especially appropriate in those cases “where improved understanding of complex human issues is more important than generalizability of results” (Marshall, 1996, p. 524).

This study is of both scholarly and practical significance for four reasons. First, the findings of this study enhance our understanding of the ways in which organizational

members negotiate the shared meaning of an external mandate, which furthers the research and theorizing in social constructionism and organizational transformation. Second, if the completion agenda or any other major mandate is to succeed, organizational leaders need to better understand the functioning of shared meaning or vision in transformational change. Third, institutional leaders need to better understand the ways in which faculty, as primary stakeholders with powerful spheres of influence, are aware of, understand, and act upon the concept of completion. And fourth, although there has been robust discussion at the federal and state levels among legislators, community college leaders, and major foundations focused on the mandate to improve graduation rates, little is known about the ways in which faculty comprehend and acknowledge this new prioritization of completion.

This interpretive qualitative study focused on self-reported faculty perceptions. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews of selected community college faculty were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed. In the following paragraphs, the research questions, positionality, philosophical approach, guiding theoretical perspectives, data sources, analyses, and limitations are presented.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions: RQ 1. What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? RQ 2. How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? RQ 3. How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? An indepth discussion of each of these research questions follows.

As presented earlier, for the purposes of this study the completion agenda is

defined as the reform movement associated with the diverse activities focused on increasing the number of students earning degrees, certificates, or other postsecondary credentials (Humphreys, 2012; Russell, 2011). With this in mind, the purpose of RQ 1 was to assess the degree to which key institutional stakeholders are cognizant of the changes in their external environment by examining faculty self-reported awareness of the completion agenda. This question was guided by both open systems theory and social constructionism. A key concept in open systems theory is the environment's influence on the system (Scott & Davis, 2007). Open systems have highly permeable boundaries that enhance the ease of exchange with the environment. However, system members attend to their environments selectively (Weick, 1969, 1995). This selective attention then becomes the basis of attempted sensemaking or social construction of meaning. This question sought to describe that selective attention as it was manifested in the self-reported awareness of organizational members.

As indicated in RQ 1, faculty were the focus of this investigation. The focus on faculty is associated with their role as key stakeholders and highly influential members of higher education institutions. Numerous studies have indicated that faculty play a powerful role in the success or failure of transformational change efforts and in mission fulfillment (Baker et al., 1990; Bennis, 1977; Van Ast, 1999). In addition, past research has confirmed that faculty have a profound impact on student retention, persistence, and completion (Barbalich, 1994; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Jaramillo, 1992; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1992; Thaxter & Graham, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). The centrality and influence of the faculty role was the basis for the focus on faculty in this study.

RQ 2: How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? The purpose of this research question was to advance our understanding of the ways in which community college faculty make meaning of the completion agenda. As discussed earlier, the completion agenda has been established as a national mandate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2014b; Greene, 2009; McPhail, 2011). However, the meaning the completion agenda holds for institutional members, i.e. their internalization of it, is created through the social construction of that meaning and is reflected in their description of it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967; Sandberg, 2001). Rooted in social construction theory, this question sought to reveal how organization members make meaning of an external mandate.

From a social constructionist perspective, meaning is negotiated in and through our interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Furthermore, all organizational members contribute to the organizational reality as it is socially constructed (Bess & Dee, 2008; Hatch, 1997). Garfinkel (1967) emphasized that the sharing of meaning is inextricably linked to the ability to share that meaning. This research question was rooted in the work and theorizing of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Garfinkel (1967) as it attempted to ascertain the ways in which shared meaning is made manifest in faculty perceptions, descriptions, and self-reported understandings of the completion agenda.

RQ 3: How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? The purpose of this research question was to discover the ways in which community college faculty act upon the socially constructed meaning of the completion agenda. Social constructionism posits that

humans act toward things based on the meaning the things have for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) served to guide this question as it sought to discover how the socially constructed meaning of completion is acted upon by faculty.

Of the various institutional stakeholders this study might have focused upon, faculty were of particular significance (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014b; Tinto, 2012). Prior research indicated that faculty have a profound influence on student outcomes. Students have reported that their interaction with faculty played a key role in their persistence (Jaramillo, 1992; Laden, 1999), in their success (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004), and in their decision-making (Laden, 1999). Faculty also acknowledged their highest level of contact was with students (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), and their greatest zone of influence at their institution was in the area of student-oriented issues (Thaxter & Graham, 1999). Given the opportunity and ability of faculty to influence students, a better understanding of how faculty act upon the meaning of the completion is warranted.

Positionality

As a community college administrator I am acutely aware of the mandate to improve completion rates. My familiarity with the social, political, and economic forces at play in this reform movement increases my sensitivity to the urgency of this issue and to the importance of engaging faculty in advancing it. In addition, in my administrative role I work directly with faculty from several different disciplines. On a daily basis I am confronted with the impact of the completion agenda on faculty work. For example, my institution has been informed that our funding may soon be determined by student

outcomes such as completion. Furthermore we have been encouraged to examine our institution's completion data and to seek ways to improve our completion rates.

Opportunities to improve completion rates come in a wide variety of forms, most of which involve faculty. Many are associated with issues such as curriculum, course design, prerequisites, and program requirements. Other issues relate to direct student contact. My professional familiarity with the completion agenda and my daily interaction with faculty has the potential to shape my interpretations of the findings. Efforts were made to guard against this potential bias in order to protect the integrity of the data. The specific steps that were taken to ensure validity and reliability are discussed in greater depth in a later section of this chapter.

Philosophical Approach

The philosophical approach to this study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist approach is based on a subjective view of reality and posits that persons approach reality through an ongoing process of interpretation (Bess & Dee, 2008; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982). Interpretive research acknowledges humans' propensity to make sense of the world around them as they selectively perceive and attempt to understand it (Pole, 2007). This subjectivity gives rise to the existence of multiple realities. Inquiry rooted in interpretivism acknowledges the impossibility of separating the "knower" from the "known" and emphasizes the participant perspective as the means to understanding social phenomena (Pole, 2007). This study addressed the subjective interpretations of system members as they respond to their external environment.

Guiding Theoretical Perspectives

Two theoretical perspectives guided this study. The first is the open systems perspective, which assumes that an external environment, to which an open system must respond, exists outside the organization (Bess & Dee, 2008). As open systems, the goals, interests, structure, activities, and outcomes of organizations are strongly influenced by their environments (Boulding, 1956; W Buckley, 1968; Katz & Kahn, R, 1978; Scott & Davis, 2007; Weick, 1995). The environment is defined as everything that exists outside the system's boundaries. The more permeable the boundaries, the greater the ease with which the organization can exchange information with its environment. As open systems, organizations are also characterized as loosely coupled (Heath, 1994; Orton & Weick, 1990; Weick, 1995). Orton and Weick (1990) depicted loosely coupled systems as more adaptive, more flexible, as having more independent components, and as being more responsive than tightly coupled systems. The loose coupling associated with openness also leads to greater variability, and heightened uncertainty, as the organization deals with a greater volume and wider diversity of information from the environment. Openness and loose coupling increase the necessity for sensemaking as organizational members respond to environmental ambiguities (Weick, 1995). The organization's response is limited by the members' ability to manage the volume and variety of inputs from the environment. As Weick (1969, 1995) pointed out, system members' perception of their environment is based on those aspects of the environment to which they selectively attend. Weick (1976) asserted that educational systems are loosely coupled. Community colleges, as loosely coupled, open systems, are most appropriately viewed from an open systems perspective. Therefore, an open systems perspective served to

guide the research questions and methods employed in this study with regard to the influence of the organization's external environment.

A second theoretical perspective, social constructionism, also served to guide the research questions and methods employed in this study. As a form of interpretivism, social constructionism seeks to understand the ways in which humans create shared meaning, and the ways in which that meaning is manifested, in all social systems including organizations (Delia et al., 1982; Schwandt, 1994). As mentioned above, not only do organizational members selectively attend to their environments, they also seek to make meaning of those perceptions (Weick, 1969, 1995). “Meaning is negotiated among organizational members, and all members of an organization play a role in the social construction of organizational reality” (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 61). From the social constructionist perspective, reality is derived from and maintained through our social interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Swanson, 2005). Knowledge is created through communication as meaning and purpose are negotiated.

As Weick (1995) indicated, sensemaking is “a central activity in the construction of both the organization and the environment it confronts” (p. 276). Furthermore, as Berger and Luckmann (1979) noted, socially constructed knowledge is structured with regard to relevance. Organization members attend to that which they deem relevant. In addition, an individual’s “relevance structures intersect with the relevance structures of others” (Berger & Luckmann, 1979, p. 100) at various points. These intersections are the basis for common interest. As organizational members of loosely coupled, open systems, faculty socially construct their selectively perceived, personally relevant environmental input which serves to shape their goals, interests, and activities. This investigation sought

to discover faculty awareness of the completion agenda, how faculty understand the completion agenda, and how faculty act upon that understanding.

Data Sources and Description of Data

The data source for this study was semi-structured interviews with community college faculty members. The purpose of the qualitative interview was to understand how others make meaning (Warren, 2001). From a constructionist perspective, interview data provides an account of the interviewee's sense making of matters outside the interview (Roulston, 2010). "The type of knowledge we are concerned with here is concerned with how interview participants actively create meaning" (Silverman, 2006, p. 129). As Creswell (2012) noted, interviewing is "a way to capture best the experiences of participants in their own words" (p. 433). Thus, the qualitative interview was the most appropriate data gathering method for this study as it sought to understand how organizational members make meaning of the world outside the interview.

The unit of analysis for this study was the faculty member. The faculty members were selected from a community college in Oregon whose college leaders have made a formal, public declaration of their "...pledge to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices, and institutional cultures that will produce 50% more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020" by participating in the College Completion Challenge (McPhail, 2011, p. 2).

The Selection of a Community College that has Signed the Pledge

At the AACC national convention in April 2010, "leaders of the Association of Community College Trustees, League for Innovation, Center for Community College Student Engagement, National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and

Phi Theta Kappa joined AACC President Emeritus George Boggs in signing the Democracy's Colleges: Call to Action statement" (see Appendix A; American Association of Community Colleges, 2014, "College Completion," para. 2). In addition, "AACC and five other national organizations representing the nation's 1,200 community colleges, their governing boards, their faculty and their 11.8 million students have pledged in a statement of commitment to increase student completion rates by 50 percent" by 2020 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014, "College Completion," para. 1). Furthermore, the AACC invited the 1200 community colleges in the U.S. to sign the pledge. As of May 2014 more than 70 community colleges had made the commitment, as had the State of Maryland.

The College Completion Challenge pledge (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a) came in the form of a formal, highly public, written declaration signed by various college stakeholders, such as the board of directors, the president, high level administrators, and in some cases faculty and students, at each participating community college. The colleges were provided with editable pledge templates that could be customized for their campus (see Appendix B). The pledge included such declarations as "We believe the student success and completion agenda is the future of (blank) Community College;" "We believe that completion matters and that every student counts;" and "We believe talented and committed people working 'heart and soul' at (blank) Community College are ready to take on leadership roles to increase student success and college completion" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). The closing line of the pledge read: "This signed Call to Action commits (blank) Community College to promote the development and implementation of policies,

practices, and institutional cultures that will produce 50% more students with high quality degree and certificates by 2020. We call upon every sector and constituency of our college and community to join us in this work” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). In addition, each college was provided with a customizable news release template that could be used as the basis for a news article or op-ed. Thus the decision to select a community college which had signed the AACC pledge was based on the scope, magnitude, formalness, and public nature of these pledges. The AACC exists as part of any given community college’s environment. As such, any decision or action by the AACC, and directed at individual community colleges, becomes a form of environmental pressure to which community colleges, as open systems, respond.

The Selection of a Community College in Oregon

As mentioned above, more than 70 colleges had signed the College Completion Challenge pledge as of May 2014. These colleges represented 24 states. Oregon stands out among these because, as mentioned earlier, in 2011 the Oregon legislature passed Senate Bill 253 stating “the Legislative Assembly declares that the mission of all higher education beyond high school in Oregon includes achievement of the following by 2025... Ensure that at least 40 percent of adult Oregonians have earned an associate’s degree or post-secondary credential as their highest level of educational attainment” (S. 253-A, 2011). The bill was subsequently signed by the governor and passed into law. This legislation raises the profile and urgency of completion to a new level in Oregon, and makes community colleges in Oregon well-suited for this study. These colleges are, as open systems, faced with an external mandate that has been codified into State law.

The Selection of First Community College

As of May 2014, two community colleges in Oregon had signed the College Completion Challenge. For the purpose of this study, these two colleges are referred to as First Community College (FCC) and Second Community College (SCC). Of the two, FCC was chosen on the basis of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves the selection of participants who are accessible, willing, and available to be interviewed (Creswell, 2012; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). A convenience sample can provide information useful for answering the research questions, however it weakens any claim of generalizability. Due to the physical location of FCC, potential subjects were readily accessible to me for this study.

Identification and Selection of Faculty Interviewees

The individuals interviewed were full-time, contracted, regular status faculty in programs with degree seeking students, who were willing and available to be interviewed. A combination of convenience sampling and saturation was used to identify and select the specific faculty members interviewed. As mentioned above, convenience sampling is based on accessibility, willingness, and availability. The decision to use saturation is discussed in greater detail below.

In accordance with the Oregon State University Institution Review Board (IRB), a consent request was submitted to the President of the data collection site (see Appendix C). Upon receipt of consent, lead academic administrators and faculty leaders were contacted for assistance with the identification of appropriate faculty members for participation in interviews (see Appendix D). The request for assistance consisted of describing the purpose of the study, and asking for recommended potential interviewees.

The purpose of contacting these campus leaders was to increase the likelihood of a balance of perspectives. In addition, these campus leaders were likely to be able to identify those faculty who were more actively involved in the broader concerns of the institution and had some awareness of the completion reform movement. In response to my request, the campus leaders provided names and contact information of potential faculty interviewees. I then contacted the faculty member by email (see Appendix E), explained the nature of the study, and requested an interview. If the faculty member contacted was willing and available, an interview was scheduled. The first interview was conducted at the earliest possible date. Subsequent to the preliminary analysis of the first interview, the second participant was contacted and an interview arranged. Interviews continued to be arranged and conducted until, based on constant comparison, saturation had been reached. Determination of saturation is described below. A total of 10 interviews were conducted.

Data collection. The data was collected via audio recorded interviews. All interviewees agreed to be recorded. Immediately following each interview, I transcribed the audio recording. The decision to transcribe the interviews myself, rather than use a professional transcription service, is described in the analyses section below.

Transcription was done in clean verbatim format, i.e., speech errors and filler words such as “ah,” “um,” and “ya know” were removed. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code, and any information with the potential to breach confidentiality, or to identify participants, was removed. The transcripts were reviewed and compared to the audio recordings multiple times to assure accuracy. The transcripts constitute the raw data set.

Saturation. Saturation was used to determine the total number of participants interviewed. In this approach, the researcher begins analyzing the data immediately for preliminary concepts, categories, and themes, and then returns to the field to gather more interview data (Bowen, 2008; Creswell, 2012). As Bowen (2008) noted, saturation relies on the process of constant comparison. Data collection and analysis move forward concurrently as new data is compared to emergent concepts, categories, and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The categories continue to be developed, clarified, and refined as the interviewer moves back and forth between data collection and analysis. “Data saturation entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by replication or redundancy” (Bowen, 2008, p. 140). Saturation is said to occur when no new themes, insights, or categories of data are identified (Bowen, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Thus, interview data ceases to be collected when “the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories” (Creswell, 2012, p. 433).

The interviews took place over a period of two months. The interview protocol was developed based on the modification of Creswell (2012) and Asmussen and Creswell’s (1995) sample interview protocol (see Appendix F). Broadly speaking, the protocol consisted of introducing myself to the interviewee, noting essential information about the interview, describing the purpose of the study, and asking the interviewee to sign the consent form. I then provided a definition of the completion agenda and asked four central questions which are listed and discussed below. On average, the interviews lasted 41 minutes.

Definitions. Participants were provided with the following definition at the beginning of the interview. Completion agenda: the reform movement associated with the diverse activities focused on increasing the number of students earning degrees, certificates or other postsecondary credentials. (Humphreys, 2012; Russell, 2011).

Central interview questions. Four central interview questions were posed: (1) What is your level of awareness of the completion agenda, as I have described it? (2) As a faculty member here at this college, how would you describe your understanding of the completion agenda? (3) In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda had an impact on your work inside the classroom? (4) In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda has an impact on your work outside the classroom? Additional probing questions were employed as needed for the purpose of clarifying the participants' responses.

The design of these four interview questions was guided by social constructionism and open systems theory. The purpose of Interview Question 1 was to assess the ways in which members of an open system were aware of a mandate from their external environment. As Weick (1969, 1995) indicated, organizational members selectively attend to their environments. This question attempted to assess that selectivity. By specifically asking about awareness, the participant was provided the opportunity to state in his/her own words the ways in which, and the degree to which, s/he had become aware of changes in the external environment.

The purpose of Interview Question 2 was to examine how system members' understood or had made meaning of an external mandate. As discussed earlier, organizational members seek to make sense of selectively perceived information from the system's environment. This question allowed participants to describe the meaning they

had constructed of the completion agenda as an external mandate by describing their understanding of it.

Social constructionism and open systems theory also guided the formulation of Interview Questions 3 and 4. These questions sought to assess the ways in which system members acted upon socially constructed meanings. As previously established, the activities of open systems are strongly influenced by their environments. These activities are shaped by the socially constructed meanings, or sensemaking, that organizational members have created. Once again, in line with phenomenology, participants were able to describe their experience in their own words. In this particular instance they were given the opportunity to describe how they acted upon the meaning they had created.

Strategies to Protect Human Subjects

I am familiar with the Oregon State University Human Resource Handbook and have completed the Course in the Protection of Human Subjects (CITI) online tutorial. I secured approval from the Oregon State University IRB before any data collection began. The process for IRB approval at the selected institution was followed as well.

Strategies to Ensure Trustworthiness

As Maxwell (2005) pointed out, validity “has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research” (p. 105). As noted earlier, the purpose of this study was to explore how organization members socially construct the meaning of a change in their external environment. Qualitative research seeks to investigate people’s constructions of reality, such that “human beings are the primary instruments of data collection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 214). Their interpretations of reality can be directly accessed through interviews. This direct access is itself is a form of rigor that strengthens

the internal validity of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). However, the researcher must carefully monitor data collection processes and data analysis processes to assure that themes identified are a valid reflection of the raw data (C. E. Hill, Thompson, & Nutt Williams, 1997). I took deliberate steps to establish the trustworthiness of the data and ensure the credibility of the findings (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). These steps included securing the interviewees' permission to have the interview audio recorded, assuring the respondents of confidentiality, providing respondents the opportunity to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, reminding the interviewee that the data would be used for the purposes of the study and possible research publications or presentations, putting the respondent at ease during the interview by using a nonjudgmental, non-evaluative approach, offering the interviewee the opportunity to review the transcribed interview, and employing two forms of respondent validation.

Respondent validation. Respondent validation, also known as member checking, has been identified as one of the most important means of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). This is particularly true in studies that seek to ascertain participants' perspectives. For the purposes of this study, two forms of respondent validation were employed: transcript review and verification of emergent themes (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shenton, 2004). At the close of the interview, participants were offered the opportunity to review interview transcripts for accuracy. Participants were also offered the opportunity to review core ideas, and emergent concepts, categories, and themes. The intent of these reviews was to confirm that participant perspective and intent had been appropriately captured (Guba & Lincoln,

1989; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Based on participant feedback only minor adjustments to the transcripts were, deemed necessary. These adjustments consisted of the removal of potentially identifying information such as subject discipline or job title. In addition to respondent validation, participants were also encouraged to contact me by email or phone in the event that they wished to add additional information or comments. Two of the participants chose to do so, and their contributions were incorporated into the data set.

To ensure reliability, I created an audit trail that describes how the data was collected, how decisions were made, how categories were constructed, and problems or issues that arose during data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Padgett, 1998; Shenton, 2004). In addition, the audio recordings and transcripts were retained, and are available for review.

Analyses

The analysis of the interview data gathered in this interpretive qualitative study is rooted in phenomenology. As such this inductive, constant comparative analysis sought to identify the properties and structure of the phenomena as reflected in emergent concepts, categories, and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). The goal of identifying these concepts, categories, and themes was to answer the research questions posed.

Analysis of the data began immediately following the first interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When the interview was complete it was transcribed and analyzed for emergent concepts, and categories. The second interview was then conducted and analyzed. This pattern of interview followed by analysis was repeated until, based on my

subjective determination, saturation had been reached, and additional interview data provided no new insights (Creswell, 2012). Concept construction was based on coding which involved an inductive process of making sense out of the data by identifying segments of the text, assigning a label or code to the segment, and then reviewing the codes for overlaps or redundancies that then gave rise to the categories (Creswell, 2012). Categories were further subjected to constant comparison analysis for evidence of overarching themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Concepts, categories, and themes were responsive to the purpose of the study, exhaustive, as exacting as possible in reflecting the data, and at similar levels of abstraction (Merriam, 2009). Nvivo computer software was used to store, organize, and track the data as it was collected and coded.

Based on Creswell's (2012) recommendations regarding qualitative data analysis, the analysis process consisted of carefully following the six-steps described below:

1. Transcription of the audio recordings. As a means of early familiarization with the data set, I intentionally chose to transcribe all of the audio recorded interviews myself. The process of transcribing participant interviews functions as a form of data immersion, and has been identified as a key component of data analysis in interpretative qualitative studies (Bird, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Riessman, 1993). As Bowen (2008) noted, analysis begins with transcribing the audio recordings. Though admittedly laborious, the benefits of this immersion strategy far outweighed the efforts.

2. Repeated reading of transcript data. Familiarization with the data set through multiple close readings of each transcript is essential in the earliest phase of transcript data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003;

Tuckett, 2005). In addition to transcribing each interview myself, I read each interview a minimum of three times. Initial observations were noted, tracked, and became part of the constant comparison record.

3. Constructing core ideas. Following the C. E. Hill et al. (1997) guidelines, transcript data was broken into manageable segments, and summarized into core ideas in order “to capture the essence of what the interviewee has said” (C. E. Hill et al., 1997, p. 546). The goal is to “make as few inferences as possible about the meaning of the data in this stage and to remain as close as possible to the participant’s perspective” (C. E. Hill et al., 1997, p. 546). The construction of core ideas was used as an additional emersion strategy to help me further familiarize myself with the data set. These core ideas were not used as a basis for coding.

4. Open coding of concepts. Using open coding, transcript data were analyzed for low-level concepts. Open coding consists of identifying concepts evident in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Corbin and Strauss (2008) define concepts as “words that stand for ideas contained in the data” (p. 159). The concepts identified were given code labels. “The use of concepts provides a way of grouping/organizing the data that a researcher is working with” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 51). Following the constant comparison method, subsequently collected interview data were “continually compared with previously collected data and their coding” (Bowen, 2008, p. 139). If new data suggested new concepts, then the previously analyzed transcripts were reanalyzed for evidence of the new concepts.

5. Identification of categories. Through the constant comparison method, concepts were classified into categories. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define categories as

“higher-level concepts under which analysts group lower-level concepts according to shared properties... They represent relevant phenomena and enable the analyst to reduce and combine data” (p. 159). A “classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61).

As concepts were grouped into categories, the categories were compared across transcripts and analyzed for similarities and differences. If new data suggested new concepts that lead to new categories, then the previously analyzed transcripts were reanalyzed for evidence of the new concepts and categories.

6. Determination of overarching themes. Categories were reviewed, sorted, and collated, into higher level, overarching themes. Constant comparison, as described above, was used to identify themes. Categories were systematically compared for similarities and differences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Categories that reflected similarities at a higher level of abstraction were grouped together, and identified as a major theme.

Limitations

Although the proposed study promises to shed light on our understanding and knowledge of the ways in which organizational members make meaning of an external mandate, several limitations exist. As is often the case with qualitative studies, the generalizability of the study is limited due to the small sample size. Furthermore, gathering the data within a state that has adopted legislation governing the completion

agenda limits generalizability in states without such legislation. In addition, with an interpretivist approach comes the risk of researcher bias.

Summary of Design of the Study

The method employed in this study provided sound data collection, analysis, and interpretation in order to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. The study's design sought to answer three research questions: (a) What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? (b) How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? (c) How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? The design of this interpretive qualitative study was guided by open systems theory and social constructionism. The data collection site was a community college in Oregon which had signed the AACC "College Completion Challenge" pledge. Oregon was chosen for the study due to state enacted legislation, Senate Bill 253, stipulating that 40% of adult Oregonians will have completed an associate's degree or postsecondary credential by the year 2025. The data collection consisted of self-reported perceptions of faculty gathered during semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed. Following a carefully employed step-by-step process, the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed for emergent concepts, categories, and themes. The findings are reported in a narrative discussion in the next section. Guided by past research and theorizing, my interpretation of the findings then follows.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative study was to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. This study addressed three research questions: (1) What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? (2) How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? (3) How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom?

Overview of the Results

In answer to these three questions, this section presents the results of the inductive, constant comparative analysis of transcript data collected via ten audio-recorded, semi-structured, interviews with community college faculty. The findings reveal four overarching themes: external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment. Each of these themes reflects a clustering of associated categories that captured participants' self-reported accounts contained in the transcript data. The following sections address the data collection site, the interviews, the steps in the analysis, and the results of the analysis.

The Data Collection Site

The data collection site was a community college in Oregon. Oregon was selected because in 2011 the Oregon state legislature passed Senate Bill 253, (commonly referred to as 40-40-20), stipulating that by 2025, 40% of adult Oregonians will have earned an associate's degree or post-secondary credential (S. 253-A, 2011). The specific

Oregon community college selected as the data collection site, (herein referred to by the pseudonym First Community College), was one that had signed the College Completion Challenge pledge (Appendix B), a formal, highly public, written declaration of the institution's commitment to completion.

The Interviews

Permission to collect data at the interview site was obtained from the President of First Community College. Campus leaders were then contacted via email and asked to identify appropriate faculty members for participation in the study. Four campus leaders responded with faculty names and contact information. Of their own volition, these campus leaders alerted the identified faculty that their contact information had been given to me. My initial contact with potential interviewees occurred via email. For those who agreed to be interviewed, a time and meeting location were arranged. In some instances, a follow-up phone call was made to establish the meeting time and place. A total of 15 possible participants received an email request to be interviewed. Of these, 10 agreed to participate. All participants completed the interviews.

Audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Four central interview questions were asked: (1) What is your level of awareness of the completion agenda? (2) As a faculty member here at this college, how would you describe your understanding of the completion agenda? (3) In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda had an impact on your work inside the classroom? (4) In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda had an impact on your work outside the classroom? For the purposes of clarification, follow-up probes were employed.

The interviews took place over a period of two months. The average interview lasted 41 minutes, the longest was 52 minutes and the shortest was 31 minutes. At the end of the interview, participants were encouraged to contact me if they had additional thoughts they would like to share at a later time. Two of the participants chose to do so, and their contributions were added to the data set.

All ten interviewees were contracted, regular status faculty whose primary assignment was teaching. Faculty disciplines included the arts, social science, science, and career and technical education.

Steps in the Analysis

As depicted in Figure 1, the analysis process was based on Creswell's (2012) recommendations for qualitative investigations. Six steps were carefully followed: (1) Transcription of the audio-recordings; (2) Repeated readings of the transcript data; (3) Construction of core ideas; (4) Open coding of concepts; (5) Identification of categories; (6) Determination of major themes. A description of how each of the steps was followed is provided below.

Transcription of the audio-recordings. Analysis began immediately following the first interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As the first step in the analysis (Bowen, 2008), and as a data immersion strategy, I chose to transcribe the audio-recorded interviews myself. The clean, verbatim format (i.e., removal of speech error and filler words such as "ah," "um," and "ya know") was utilized in the production of the transcripts.

Repeated readings of the transcript data. In order to further familiarize myself with the data, each transcript was closely read at least three times (Braun & Clarke, 2006;

Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Tuckett, 2005). During each reading I made notes and tracked my impressions and observations. These notes became part of the constant comparison record.

Construction of core ideas. As an additional immersion strategy, and to assist with later recall, the transcript data was broken into manageable segments and summarized into core ideas

(C. E. Hill et al., 1997). However, these core ideas were used only as a familiarization device, and were not used as basis for coding.

Open coding of concepts. Using an inductive, interpretative, constant comparative analysis, concepts were constructed by identifying segments of the interview transcript, and then assigning a code to the segment (Creswell, 2012). Nvivo computer software was used to organize, store and track the codes that were assigned to the transcript data. Examples of codes include: pressure from the legislature, outsiders don't understand, measuring the wrong thing, faculty's job is to teach, it will pass away, refer students to resources, and students have personal challenges.

When the coding of the first interview transcript was complete, I returned to the field to conduct the second interview (Bowen, 2008; Creswell, 2012). The second interview was transcribed, read, and coded. Constant comparison was then employed to further analyze the coded concepts. This pattern was repeated until saturation was reached and additional data collection yielded no new insights (Bowen, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Identification of categories. The constant comparative method was again used to analyze the coded concepts for overlaps or redundancies that gave rise to categories

(Creswell, 2012). Ten categories, or subthemes, were identified: outside the institution, pressure, impact on funding, authenticity, misguided assumptions, invalid metric, responsibility of others, stay the course, and make referrals.

Determination of themes. The ten categories were further subjected to constant comparative analysis for evidence of overarching themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Four overarching themes were identified: external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment. The four themes, their associated categories, and abbreviated examples of transcript excerpts are shown in Figure 2.

The results of the analysis, and the answers to each of the three research questions are provided in the following sections. The themes associated with each research question, the categories that gave rise to the themes, and examples of transcript data excerpts are presented. To protect confidentiality of the participants, quotes are identified by an alphanumeric code only.

Research Question One

The first research question addressed in this study was: What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? Rooted in an open systems perspective, which identifies the environment as the ultimate source of information (Scott & Davis, 2007), this question sought to assess the environmental cognizance of organizational members as reflected in their self-described awareness of the completion agenda. The overarching theme of external dictate characterizes faculty awareness of the completion agenda and provides the answer to this question.

External dictate. For the first research question, responses from faculty interviewees are reflected in the over-arching theme of external dictate. Participants'

self-described awareness reveals the sense that outside forces were placing an unavoidable demand on the institution. A cluster of three categories, or subthemes, gives rise to the theme of external dictate. The three categories consist of: outside the institution, pressure, and funding. All ten interviewees noted that the pressure originated outside the institution, and manifested itself in the potential impact on institutional funding. A description of each of the categories, and examples of transcript data indicative of them, are provided in the following sections.

Outside the institution. All ten interviewees referenced an entity, or entities, external to the institution, in their self-described awareness of the completion agenda. Externality then is evidenced by the mentioning of entities outside the organization. Although participants described one or more entities external to the institution, specificity of the entities varied. Some interviewees named multiple possibilities, while others described a somewhat vague sense of sources, or forces, from the outside. The following excerpts provide representative examples of transcript data that constitute this category:

R1: It's coming from outside the institution...

R10: ...these policy decisions are being made by state officials...

R2: ...but it feels like it's mainly coming from the legislature and people involved with the high schools...

R7: The governor certainly wants this, it's on his agenda. Certainly the legislature does as well. The fact that certain things have been passed.

R4: I think it's coming from the top, the governor, the legislature, the higher education board, all of those people...

R3: ...the governor of the state of Oregon is trying to improve completion rates.

Pressure. In addition to being viewed as existing outside the institution, these entities were perceived as a source of pressure on the institution and its members. All ten interview participants described a sense of compulsion emanating from these outside entities, and directed at the institution. Some participants talked about feeling pushed, or even forced, while others included magnitude descriptors such as “intense” or “enormous”:

R5: At our institution we feel under an enormous amount of pressure by the 40-40-20 model.

R6: We're under pressure to assess how effective we are.

R3: A fear that a lot of people have is that we have to improve completion rates, that we'll be forced by the legislature to have these completion rates to get money.

R2: So, there is pressure on us.

R4: ...we're being pushed...

R1: ...there's also this intense pressure...

Impact on Funding. The third category associated with the theme of external dictate is impact on funding. All ten of the interview participants mentioned the potential impact on the institution's funding in association with the perceived pressure. Eight of them mentioned it four or more times:

R2: There's a push toward having funding associated with it so that funding is better for schools that have better completion rates and worse for schools that don't.

R3: If your completion rates are good you're going to get more money and if they're bad you're not.

R1: ...the thing it is setting up is that we try to measure it and tie funding to these outcomes

R7: The idea is that how much money we get is tied to...the percentages of those that graduate.

R5: The concern, is the funding...absolutely worried about losing the funding.

R6: I'd like to say we're not concerned about budget, that is has no impact on us but it does.

In answer to RQ 1, the inductive, constant comparative analysis of the data yields three categories, (outside the institution, pressure, and funding). These clustered together to reveal the theme of external dictate. The analysis as it pertained to RQ 2 is addressed in the next section.

Research Question Two

The second research question that this study sought to address was: How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? Although, as discussed earlier, the completion agenda has been established as a national mandate (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012, 2015; Greene, 2009; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McPhail, 2011), the meaning it holds for institutional members is created through social construction, and is reflected in their description of it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967; Sandberg, 2001). Therefore, this research question sought to reveal how organizational members create meaning of the completion agenda. Two themes, legitimacy and ownership, characterize the meaning community college faculty have created of this mandate, and provide the answer to this question. A description of each of these themes, the clusters of categories that give rise to them, and specific evidentiary examples from the transcript data are provided below.

Legitimacy. As mentioned above, the second overarching theme to emerge was legitimacy. The term legitimacy is used to refer to the degree to which organizational

members constructed the meaning of input from the external environment as credible, valid, and indicative of a sound understanding of the internal workings of the organization. As such, this theme provides insight into the ways the institutional member socially constructed the meaning of the completion agenda. A clustering of three categories, or subthemes, provide evidence of the theme of legitimacy: authenticity, misguided assumptions, and invalid metric.

Authenticity. All of the interviewees referenced personal doubts about the genuineness, or authenticity, of the completion agenda. Interviewees constructed the movement as something other than a genuine concern for student welfare as evidenced by completion rates. The completion agenda as inauthentic is reflected in statements indicating that participants believed it was little more than meaningless statistics, that it disregarded quality, that it was transitory, that it was an attempt to exploit public dollars, that it was a hollow goal, or that it was political rhetoric:

R6: It's a numbers game and it seems silly to me.

R7: The only thing that would increase completion is to lower our standard.

R3: Completion is just one more of those kind of things that come and go in education.

R10: I think new things get implemented because there are federal dollars that get tied to these things. ...people are making a living on education tax dollars. There are so many self-interested groups, trying to grab their handful of dollars.

R5: Most of them (faculty)...feel like it's a very arbitrary, artificial, very unattainable goal. So they're very quietly waiting for it to go away when our legislators realize it's arbitrary and artificial and unattainable. We will do our worker bee stuff while we wait for it to go away.

R8: ...is this just a political thing that politicians use to have something to

say to get on the pulpit and get people to support their campaigns? ...It feels like an invented problem, like it just came out of the political agenda.

Misguided assumptions. In addition to the issue of authenticity, all ten participants characterized the completion movement as rooted in misguided assumptions about community colleges, which provides further evidence that the interviewees questioned the overall legitimacy of the movement. Participant responses reflect the belief that outsiders misunderstood the community college mission, community college students, and the inner workings of community colleges in general.

R5: We see our mission as different, or at least more complicated than what state legislators would see it as.

R3: I don't like legislators telling us things because I think they are the least knowledgeable about what's going on.

R2: So I think it's misguided. I think it's people who don't understand what we're really doing here with these students.

R8: I think this often happens when government starts to intervene in education. It's a one issue thing and then everything else gets thrown to the wayside. Obama likes to talk about community college a lot. But I really wonder if he really understands what happens at a community college.

R10: The people in government aren't aware of what happens here.

R9: The downside is you miss out on what's important sometimes. Sometimes the degree is not the most important thing for us at a junior college. There's a more important mission than someone getting a transfer degree or certificate.

Invalid metric. Invalid metric is the third category in the legitimacy cluster. All ten participants questioned the validity of the metric they believed was being used to measure completion. Faculty questioned how completion was being counted, insisted that completion was only one indicator of success, that success should be counted, and that many forms of completion were not being captured. This questioning serves as

further evidence of faculty skepticism regarding the legitimacy of the movement itself.

Examples from the transcript data include:

R9: The numbers don't necessarily mean anything.

R3: They're many success stories that come from people who don't get that degree. I don't think we quantify that.

R2: Our completion rates aren't fair. They're not fair. The data doesn't reflect what's going on. If there was a way we could track these students and see did we meet your needs. The student who came into my class last year and said I'm working in the industry and I need to strengthen my...background. He got what he wanted.

R7: The completion rate is just one measure of success. I measure success for us as more than just graduation...A lot of our students will start the program and then go somewhere else and get a degree...That's where the numbers can get a little weird. That student graduated, they were a successful student, but they count against us.

R6: Success and completion are two different things. We should be counting success...All of my students would be counted as failures, every one of them. I'm not unhappy that they come out without a degree, because they will go on to a four-year degree. I am meeting their needs. I am satisfied in that. I am frustrated that I am not recognized for that and that they are counted as failures. And that we're being told we need more successes, but they are successful.

R10: I don't like that a student who takes some credits here...won't be counted as a success. I think if that's the judgment of how successful we have been as instructors, or as an institution, in preparing our students to be successful in whatever they do, that doesn't accurately reflect what we did or what the student did and how successful they're going to be.

The theme of legitimacy provided a partial answer to RQ 2. It is composed of three categories: authenticity, misguided assumptions, and invalid metric. A second theme, ownership, also provides the answer to RQ 2.

Ownership. In addition to legitimacy, a second overarching theme, ownership, provides insight regarding the second research question (How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda?) The term ownership is

used to refer to the degree to which faculty constructed the locus of the issue as within their purview. The theme of ownership is composed of a cluster of two categories: outside faculty control and responsibility of others.

Outside faculty control. All ten interviewees constructed the opportunity to advance the completion agenda as outside of faculty control. Participants described issues that stood in the way of completion as arising from events, attributes, and antecedent conditions. All of these were viewed as outside the scope of faculty control:

R4: It's things we don't have any control over. Life events. A job loss, a health problem, you had to move because your spouse got a job somewhere else. We deal with a lot of students that have complicated lives and they're on the edge of falling apart.

R5: We, they, have a lot of problems that are outside the scope of our ability to fix.

R8: A lot of students have a lot of factors in their lives and unfortunately at a community college you have a lot of people who...have family issues, they have health issues, a myriad number of things, work issues, time issues. They just can't finish a degree in two years, they just find it impossible.

R2: I hesitate to say this, because I don't want to pass the buck, but I think we are getting students who are less and less prepared coming into college and the problem starts way before we get them...I'm thinking...you're not ready for this...What do we do? This is the students we've got.

R7: A lot of our students too at a community college they come to us out of a poverty that's literal or they come to us out of joblessness.

R6: I can't effect it when a student has a child that gets sick and can't take classes anymore or another student who loses a job and can't afford to come here anymore. There are so many things that are so out of our hands

Responsibility of Others. In addition to constructing the ability to advance the completion agenda as outside of their control, all ten of the participants constructed responsibility for the completion agenda as belonging to others. In particular,

participants identified the administration, special programs, and student support services as key. Examples of excerpts from the transcript data include:

R4: It's more the higher level people, the politicians, the administrators...that's their job...my job is to teach. It's their job to be thinking about how many people are in these classes, how much are we going to charge them, every single big picture thing. It's what they get paid to do. They should be thinking about that.

R5: I have papers to grade, I have students knocking on my door and not a great deal of brain capacity to worry about where our funding is coming from...let our administrators worry about these goals.

R9: There's a department (on campus), their essential role is student success....That department is really focused on that. They collect the data on what's working and what's not.

R2: We have programs set up to help students.

R6: We have things like a robust writing center, a robust study skills center, where people can get the help they need, when they need it...and we have first-year experience. All those things that are on that list of how to help students become better students.

R10: Management should be designing the college in a way that students have all the resources they need to succeed.

The theme of ownership also provides insight into the answer to RQ2. A clustering of two categories, outside faculty control and responsibility of others, form the theme of ownership. The two themes of legitimacy and ownership address the answer to RQ 2. The answer to RQ 3 is presented in the next section.

Research Question Three

The third research question addressed in this study was: How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom? As discussed earlier, social construction theory posits that humans act toward things based on the meaning the things have for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966;

Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). With this in mind, research question three sought to reveal how faculty practice was impacted by faculty's socially constructed meaning of the completion agenda. The theme of enactment serves to characterize this impact and to answer this question. In the following paragraphs, the theme of enactment, the categories associated with it, and examples from the transcript data are provided and discussed.

Enactment. The term enactment is used to describe the ways in which faculty act upon their awareness and social construction of the completion agenda. Self-reported descriptions of faculty practice serve as the manifestation of the impact of this socially constructed meaning. Two categories, or subthemes, form the cluster which gave rise to enactment: stay the course and make referrals.

Stay the course. The primary way in which faculty described the completion agenda as having an impact on their practice was reinforcement of existing practices. Eight respondents indicated that the most effective way they could help students was to remain good teachers. Participant self-reports reflect the belief that their role in the completion agenda was to continue to be effective instructors.

R8: We're all already working really hard here teaching our curriculum. There's nothing we need do differently. We're experts in our field. We've been trained. We're doing our job. I can't see what I'm going to do that's going to make more of a difference than what I'm already doing.

R9: Absolutely none. This is what I would do anyway. Whether I'm trying to help someone complete a degree or just be successful, it doesn't change how I teach. As far as I know in the conversations I've had no one is changing anything they do as far as the individual strategies they use in the classroom.

R4: My role is to teach. If everybody who signs up for my class completes the class having learned the material and gotten a good grade, I figure at the end of the day I've done my part of that bigger picture. I think my role for the completion movement is to just do a good job. That's 99% of it.

R5: For me personally I think if there's been a change it's feeling saddened enough by our completion rate that I might make a slightly more extraordinary effort to get a student to the finish line. By the finish line I mean passing my individual class, not completing a degree because I don't have a great deal of power over that. But finishing my particular class.

R1: ...we're all already doing as much as we can for our students.

Make referrals. The second category in the cluster that gives rise to enactment is make referrals. Beyond being effective instructors, eight participants described their role in the completion agenda as helping students connect to campus resources designed to support student success. Faculty identified resources specifically dedicated to student learning, as well as more broadly focused student success programs:

R1: I try to make my students aware of those kind of services...I let people come and speak or pass out a brochure that shows when things are open. I think it's important. Those services are there, let's use them. I want students to be aware of them. I've made a point of letting them know about tutors.

R6: If you see that the student doesn't have the skills, if you can figure out a way to connect them with those resources, I think those things are clearly an instructor's job.

R5: I'm probably a little more diligent about pointing them to the resources they do need. The tutoring services and what not.

R10: We have on-campus programs...that I see as being a positive contributor to adding additional support services for students, especially those that are first generation, to complete. I think that's great. I try to make my students aware that those kind of services.

R7: I preach early on in the term to go see an advisor...

The answer to RQ3 is reflected in the theme of enactment. Enactment is made up of a cluster of two categories: stay the course and make referrals. In all, four major themes, (external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment), provide the answer to the three research questions.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results of the analysis of the interview transcript data collected for this study. An inductive, constant comparative analysis was employed. It followed a six-step process. This analysis process led to four major themes that provide the answer to the three research questions posed. The process entailed transcription of the audio-recordings, repeated reading of the transcripts, construction of core ideas, open coding of concepts, identification of categories, and determination of themes. RQ1 asked: What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? The theme of external dictate captures faculty cognizance of their external environment. A cluster of three categories, or sub-themes, gives rise to the theme of external dictate: outside the institution, pressure, and impact on funding. Two themes provide the answer to RQ2 (How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda?) These two themes are legitimacy and ownership. Legitimacy is made up of three categories: authenticity, misguided assumptions, and invalid metric. Ownership is made up of two categories, outside faculty control and responsibility of others. Enactment, the fourth theme identified, provides the answer to RQ 3 (How has the completion agenda impacted faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom?). Enactment is made up of two categories: stay the course and make referrals. The implications of these findings are addressed in the following chapter.

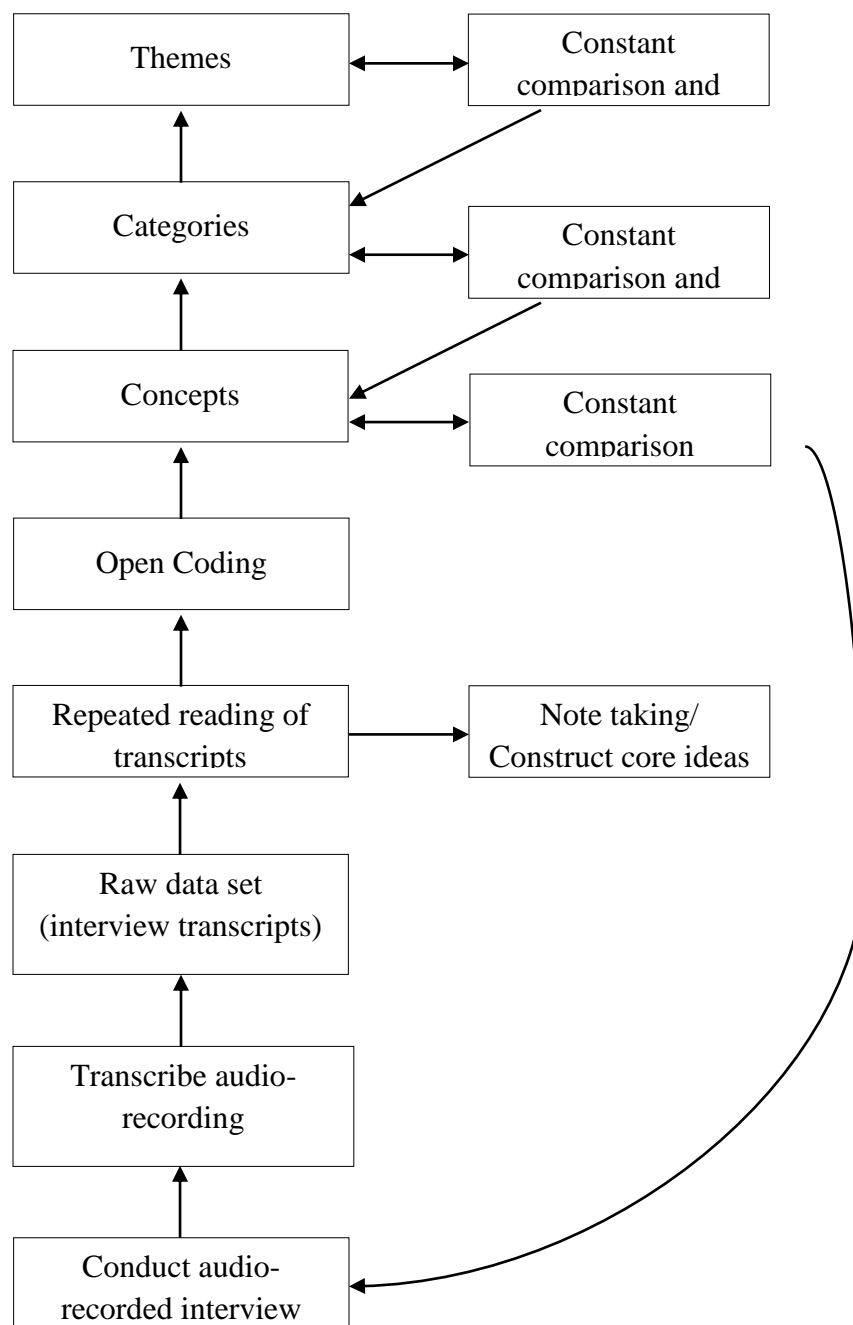


Figure 1: Process of inductive, interpretive, constant comparison analysis (Creswell, 2012)



Figure 2: Major themes, categories, and paraphrased examples.

Chapter V: Discussion

The preceding chapters presented the purpose and significance of the study, the literature review, the design of the study, and the results of the analysis. This chapter presents a brief summary of the study, a discussion of the major findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future scholarly investigations, and implications for practice.

Summary of the Study

In organizational transformation theory, an organization, as an open system, is subject to an external environment to which it must respond (Bess & Dee, 2008). Internally, system members negotiate the organization's reality as they seek to socially construct its shared meaning. Social constructionism, as a phenomenological perspective, serves to inform our understanding of the process of creating meaning in all social systems including organizations. In addition, organizational transformation theory, as it is informed by living systems theory, provides a guiding theoretical framework for our understanding of how organizational systems transform themselves.

In 2009, scholars were presented with an unusual investigative opportunity when President Obama announced the American Graduation initiative (Greene, 2009; Obama, 2009). Community colleges found themselves confronted with what came to be known as the national "completion agenda" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a; Humphreys, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012; McPhail, 2011; O'Banion, 2011; Russell, 2011; *The White House summit on community colleges*, 2011), and the academy witnessed an organization's response to a compelling change in its external environment. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which organizational members

socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. Three research questions were addressed: (a) What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? (b) How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? (c) How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom?

This interpretive qualitative study focused on self-reported faculty perceptions. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews of selected community college faculty, at a community college that had signed the College Completion Pledge (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a), were conducted and transcribed. Saturation sampling was used to determine the population size. Data collection ceased when saturation had been reached. A total of ten community college faculty were interviewed. The transcript data was subjected to a carefully designed six-step process of inductive, constant comparison analysis. Respondent validation was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Analysis of the data revealed four major themes: external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment. A discussion of these findings as they relate to the current literature and theorizing is presented in the following sections.

Discussion of the Major Findings

In the following section the findings for each of the research questions is presented and discussed. The discussion is based on the current literature and theorizing presented in the preceding sections. As such, the discussion serves to deepen and advance the current body of knowledge regarding organizational transformation and social construction.

Open Systems and the External Environment: External Dictate

Rooted in an open systems perspective, Research Question 1 sought to assess the degree to which key institutional stakeholders, as system members, are cognizant of a change in their external environment. Research Question 1 asked: What is community college faculty awareness of the completion agenda? While open systems theory, and the current literature in the field, served to guide this question, the findings from this investigation serve to answer it. The findings demonstrate that organizational members are highly cognizant of changes in their external environment.

As posited by open systems theory, a system has an identity separate from that of its environment. Distinguished from the system by its boundaries, the environment is the ultimate source of information for system members (Scott & Davis, 2007). A system's environment then, is everything that exists outside its boundaries (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The system's ease of interaction with its environment is determined by the permeability of those boundaries. In addition, system members' perception of changes in the environment is determined by those aspects of the environment to which the system members attend (Weick, 1969, 1995). As a finding of this study, the theme of external dictate, confirms that system members are not only cognizant of the external environment, they are aware of changes in that environment, and of the potential influence of those changes on the system.

External Dictate. As presented in the literature review, there is ample evidence that the completion agenda exists as a mandate at the national, state, and local levels. Championed by the President of the United States, by governors, by legislators, by philanthropic organizations, and by the AACC (2012, 2014a, 2014b), the completion

movement has galvanized stakeholders (O'Banion, 2011). Billions in public and private dollars have been dedicated to advancing the completion agenda, and more than a dozen national initiatives have been launched to further the movement (O'Banion, 2011; Russell, 2011). In addition, Oregon has written college completion into state statute (*S. 253-A*, 2011), and more than 70 community colleges (including the data collection site for this study) have signed the College Completion Pledge (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014a). In accordance with open systems theory, the mandate exists as a change in the environment.

Stakeholder cognizance of the above described change in the environment is evidenced by the theme of external dictate. Findings suggest that systems members were highly cognizant of the existence of the completion agenda, in that all participants knew about it. They were acutely aware of its externality as they attributed its origin to entities outside the institution. In addition, participants viewed the completion agenda as a dictate in that they felt pressure associated with it. The perceived pressure was manifested in concerns about potential impact on institutional funding. Perhaps most importantly, system members' cognizance of the externality of the mandate served to shape their construction of its meaning. How system members socially construct the meaning of a change in the environment is addressed in the next section.

Social Construction of Meaning and Organizational Change: Legitimacy and Ownership

Research Question 2 asked: How do community college faculty socially construct the meaning of the completion agenda? This question was guided by social construction theory, and sought to reveal how organization members make meaning of a change in the

environment. Tandem themes of legitimacy and ownership characterize the ways in which organizational members socially construct the meaning of a change in their external environment. As such, these two themes provide the answer to Research Question 2.

The literature reviewed in chapter 2 indicated that the successful organization's response to a change in its environment requires organizational transformation through the creation and establishment of shared vision. The ways in which system members make meaning of the change, in large part, determines the system's ability to adapt to that change (Barnett, 2011). The work of Bass (1985; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), Kotter (2007), Kouzes and Posner (1987), and Pielstick (1998) confirms the importance of socially constructing shared meaning during organizational change.

While shared vision is a key driver in organizational change, the process of establishing shared vision in institutions of higher education is an especially difficult undertaking (Ayers, 2005; Barnett, 2011; Hartley, 2003; Stout-Stewart, 2005). Known for complexity and autonomy (Ferlie et al., 2008), institutions of higher education may find the establishment of shared vision nearly impossible, and thus attention must be paid to how meanings are created (Barnett, 2011). Prior to the current study, our understanding of the ways in which that meaning is created, negotiated, and shared among organizational members was incomplete. The findings of this investigation provide a more complete picture. The findings indicate that the themes of legitimacy and ownership together are critical components in the construction of meaning. These themes are addressed in the following sections.

Legitimacy. The findings from this investigation underscore Barnett's (2011) advisement that we should pay attention to how meanings are created. Moreover, the findings indicate that the difficulties associated with establishing shared vision are rooted in system members' construction of the change as legitimate.

The construction of legitimacy is reflected in system member assessment of the change as credible, valid, and rooted in sound assumptions of the internal workings of the system. The findings of this study indicate that the system members did not construct the meaning of the change as legitimate. Members delegitimized the change in part due to perceived inauthenticity of the efforts of the external entities to whom the change is ascribed. The construction of legitimacy was further shaped by system members' discrediting of the external entities' understanding of the internal workings of the organization, and of its mission. Hence, system members constructed the change as not legitimate. In conjunction with the construction of legitimacy, system members also construct ownership of the change.

Ownership. As mentioned above, the findings from this study indicate that system members construct legitimacy in tandem with ownership. Thus, the theme of ownership also provides the answer to Research Question 2. The construction of ownership is reflected in the system members' placement of the locus of control for affecting the change, as well as their placement of responsibility for acting upon that change. In the current study, system members constructed ownership as that of others, rather than themselves. Similarly, the ability to affect change was seen as outside of their control, and responsibility for acting upon it belonged to others.

The themes of legitimacy and ownership, when taken together help explain the near impossibility of establishing shared vision as referenced by Barnett (2011). If system members construct the change as neither legitimate, nor owned by them, they are unlikely to accept a vision created to transform the institution in response to that change. Under these conditions, the establishment of shared vision may indeed be impossible.

Social constructionism posits that human beings act toward things based on the meaning the things have for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Therefore, these two constructions, legitimacy and ownership, become the basis for determining how organizational members act upon the external change. How system members act upon created meaning is addressed in the next section.

Faculty, Social Construction, and Institutional Change: Enactment

As key institutional stakeholders, faculty play a primary role in student persistence, success, and decision making (Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Jaramillo, 1992; Laden, 1999). In addition faculty acknowledge that their highest level of contact and greatest zone of influence is with students (Thaxter & Graham, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Moreover, individuals act upon things based on the meaning things have for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Given the profound influence faculty have on student outcomes and guided by the work of Garfinkel (1967), Berger and Luckman (1966), Mead (1934), and Blumer (1969), Research Question 3 sought to discover how the socially constructed meaning of the completion agenda is acted upon by faculty. Research Question 3 asked: How has the completion agenda impacted community college faculty practice both in and outside of the classroom?

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated that faculty constructed the meaning of an institution's mission differently (Sokugawa, 1996), felt little sense of meaningful involvement in decision-making at their institutions (Thaxter & Graham, 1999), and perceived their values as often in opposition to their institution's administration. In addition, the literature revealed that institutional transformation efforts often lacked the inclusion of key stakeholders such as faculty (Peterson, 2007), and that faculty perceived mandated changes as out of alignment with higher education values (Zmetana, 2002). The literature thus speaks to the importance of system members' construction of meaning, and their role in advancing change.

In addition to social constructionism, Living Systems Theory was also a guiding theoretical framework for this study. Living Systems Theory posits that systems interpret environmental demands, and respond to those demands, in self-sustaining ways (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 2006). Wheatley told us that living systems will change in order to stay the same. If change is seen as the means of self-preservation, any living thing will change. Furthermore, it will change "in such a way that it remains consistent with itself...it will choose a path to the future that is consistent with who it has been" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 85). Healthy living systems do not simply react to new information from the environment but instead, through self-reference, assign meaning to those demands, and act upon that meaning in self-sustaining ways. Taken together the literature in this area deepens our understanding of the meaning created of the change, and the ways in which system members act upon that meaning. However, it simultaneously exposes a gap in our understanding of the ways in which the acted upon meaning is manifested. The theme of enactment serves to answer Research Question 3,

and to advance our understanding of how system members act upon the socially constructed meaning of a change in the environment.

Enactment. The theme of enactment captures the ways in which system members carry out, or act upon, their socially constructed meaning of environmental demands. Enactment was reflected in system members reinforcing their current practices, (staying the course), and making referrals to others who might affect the change. This finding is consistent with the concept of self-referential transformation presented in Living Systems Theory and organizational transformation. By staying the course, and making referrals, systems members are able to act upon the meaning assigned to the environmental change in a way that is self-sustaining. This response permits system members to remain consistent with the past, and to refrain from acting upon an illegitimate change, while simultaneously allowing others to advance the change.

The above discussion addressed the four themes independently, however their true significance lies in their interdependence. The ways in which the four themes come together to advance our understanding of social construction and organizational transformation is addressed in the next section.

Social Construction and Organizational Transformation: Interdependent Themes

Although the preceding discussion addressed the four major themes separately, it is in their interdependent functioning that the convergence of social construction and organizational transformation becomes clear. Each of the themes can be seen as components in what is in essence, socially constructed organizational transformation.

External Dictate, Legitimacy, Ownership, and Enactment. When confronted with a change in the external environment, systems' respond through socially constructed

organizational transformation. This response is comprised of four interdependent components: external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment. The four components function together such that the social construction of each gives rise to the social construction of all.

As discussed earlier, the construction of legitimacy is shaped by the system members' assessment of the change in the environment as credible, valid, and sound. It is in this context that the artificiality of the separation of legitimacy and externality becomes apparent. In as much as system members delegitimize the change due to its lack of credibility and validity, the entity from which the change emanates is, by extension, neither credible nor legitimate. External entities are constructed as incapable of genuinely understanding the system, and therefore any recommendation emanating from the outside is suspect. This delegitimization is further exacerbated by the construction of the change as a dictate.

Additionally, the construction of ownership is shaped by the externality of the perceived dictate. If system members construct the change as lacking legitimacy and rooted in externality, they will place the locus of ownership elsewhere. Having constructed the change as emanating from misguided external entities, lacking in legitimacy, and owned by others, systems members then view enactment as superfluous.

Summary of the Major Findings

The analysis of the transcript data collected for this investigation revealed four major themes: external dictate, legitimacy, ownership, and enactment. These four themes provide the answers to the three research questions posed. Consistent with open systems theory, the theme of external dictate confirms that system members are cognizant of the

changes in their external environment. In addition, this theme indicates that system members are aware of the potential impact of those changes. The tandem themes of legitimacy and ownership, not only confirm the process of meaning making posited by social constructionism, they also extend our understanding of this process by providing insight into how that meaning is constructed. When making meaning of change, system members construct the legitimacy of the change, as well as assign its ownership. The theme of enactment confirms the organizational transformation response posited by Living Systems Theory that members act upon the socially constructed meaning of environmental changes in self-sustaining ways. Finally, the four themes taken together provide insight into their interdependent functioning. From this perspective, the four themes become components in the social construction of organizational transformation. Moreover, they serve to identify the flawed assumption that shared vision can be established apart from the socially constructed change. Rather than being established, shared vision is system-generated, as members not only socially construct changes in the environment, but also socially construct the vision that ultimately constitutes the organization's transformation.

Conclusions

Although community colleges were the focus of this investigation, the findings advance our understanding of social construction, organizational transformation, and the ways in which organizational members make meaning of an external mandate. As noted in earlier chapters, organizational transformation theorists have identified shared vision as a key driver in the change process (Kotter, 2007; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 2006). Indeed, Wheatley (2006) told us that shared vision is more than a strategy for facilitating

the change process, it is an essential component of successful transformation. As also noted earlier, establishing shared vision has proven to be a difficult undertaking (Ayers, 2005; Barnett, 2011; Ferlie et al., 2008; Kotter, 2007). The findings of this study shed light on this challenge. The difficulty lies not in the establishment of shared vision, but in the failure to acknowledge system members' social construction of the change, and in the assumption that shared vision can be established as a state or condition that then drives the transformation.

Approaches that promote shared vision typically depict shared vision as an achievable end state where the shared vision exists as a fixed entity which constituents will either accept or reject. Terms like agreement, engagement, and buy-in are frequently associated with organizational member acceptance (Kotter, 2007; Senge, 1990). This linear view creates the illusion that vision can be presented, broadcasted or otherwise delivered to organizational members. "Vision" is in essence a static entity with a singular meaning to be delivered to all stakeholders. "Shared vision" is achieved when the singular meaning exists as an established end state. Moreover, the "shared vision" does not take into account the system members' construction of the change. However, if the role of change and shared vision are viewed through the lens of social constructionism, the creation of shared vision becomes an active, dynamic, ongoing process of negotiated meaning. Perhaps most importantly, the shared vision is generated from within the system, by the system. Imposed visions, movements, and agendas will be re-envisioned, as system members socially construct the change and the vision. Organizational transformation is then constituted in and through this system-generated, socially constructed vision.

Limitations, Recommendations, and Implications

In the following section the limitations of the current investigation, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice are presented.

Limitations

The intent of this study was to explore the ways in which organizational members socially construct the shared meaning of a change in the external environment by examining how community college faculty construct the concept of completion. The literature was reviewed, community college faculty were interviewed, an inductive, constant comparison analysis of the interview transcript data was performed, and the results were reported using standard research practices. However, as with all scholarly investigations, this research study is limited in several ways. These limitations are addressed in the following sections.

Limited Sample. Although the conclusions speak to our broader understanding of social construction and organizational transformation, the data was collected via ten faculty interviews, at a single community college, in a state where college completion had been written into statute. Each of these conditions is associated with a limitation.

Sample Size. For this interpretivist study, a qualitative approach was appropriate in that qualitative research seeks a detailed understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the participant (Creswell, 2012; Pole, 2007). The goal of qualitative research is depth of understanding, rather than generalizability. Saturation sampling provided this depth, but generated a relatively small sample. While the detailed analysis provides a richness to the findings, a sample of only ten participants limits its generalizability.

Single Community College. This study is specific to a single community college in Oregon. The findings might be different if the data were collected at other Oregon community colleges, or other institutions of higher education in Oregon.

Single State. Oregon is unique in that, at the time the data was collected, it was the only state that had written the 40-40-20 college completion goal into state statute. The findings might have been different if the data were collected in another state that did not have such a statute.

Limitations of the Instrument. The data for this study was collected via semi-structured interviews. Four primary questions were asked. Follow-up questions were used for clarification. It is possible the instrument itself limited the data set. A different set of questions, or different question types, may have revealed different information.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study revealed four major themes associated with the social construction of a change in the external environment. Many of the limitations of the investigation are associated with the sample, and could be overcome through additional studies. Replicating the study at other community colleges will serve to verify the conclusions regarding the four themes.

To overcome the possible limitation that the findings are reflective of institutions of higher education only, the study should be replicated at an organization, other than an institution of higher education, which is also facing an external mandate. Such an investigation would give credence to the assumption that the findings of the community college study are indicative of all organizational systems.

Finally, the study should be conducted using an alternative data collection instrument. Based on the findings of the current study, a structured survey instrument should be developed perhaps using a Likert Scale response. Such an instrument would allow for the collection of a much larger data sample. Using this data collection method, multiple collection sites could be included. Such an approach would allow for verification of the findings from the current study, as well as greater generalizability of the subsequent findings.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this investigation hold practical significance for stakeholders in organizational settings. Their immediate value lies in our enhanced understanding of faculty perceptions of the completion agenda, and of the ways in which faculty understand the prioritization of completion for community colleges. In addition, these findings inform our understanding of the role of shared vision in advancing organizational transformation.

The powerful role of shared vision in organizational transformation cannot be underestimated. However, in order to realize the full potential of shared vision as an essential component in successful transformation, change agents must shift away from approaches that call for the establishment of that vision. Instead, leaders must first acknowledge that system members socially construct the meaning of the change in the environment. With this in mind, rather than attempt to establish shared vision, astute leaders will socially construct the vision in consort with system members. In so doing, threats to legitimacy, ownership, and enactment are addressed as externality is replaced with internality. An internally constructed vision derives its legitimacy from the system

itself. Legitimization gives rise to ownership, and enactment follows. The system-generated vision becomes the organization's transformation.

If higher education leaders are to successfully move the change process forward, they must expand their understanding of the social construction of change, and of shared vision. Most importantly, they must accept that genuine shared vision is system-generated, such that the members themselves negotiate its meaning. In so doing, system members construct the organization's transformation.

Summary of the Discussion

This chapter presented a discussion of the major findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future investigations, and implications for practice. The major findings were addressed in light of current research and theorizing. Limitation of the study included the sampling method and instrument employed. Recommendations for future research suggested replication at alternate collection sites, and the development of an alternative instrument. Implications for practice focused on stakeholders adopting a new understanding of the role of shared vision in organizational transformation. In this new understanding, vision is socially constructed by the system, rather than created and established by system leaders. From this perspective, the system-generated vision constitutes organizational transformation.

Personal Reflections and Insights

The following section describes my personal reflections and insights regarding this investigation. I have three insights that stand-out in particular: (1) This inquiry is, in essence, a horizontal study of an organization in that its central focus was faculty. Even though they are the largest, and most influential group in an institution of higher

education, I am now curious if the findings would have been different if I had examined the organization vertically. That is, if transcript data had been gathered from the President, Deans, support staff, and/or students, would the findings be different? Furthermore, how would the findings from these various groups compare and contrast with the findings from my study? These groups were beyond the scope of this investigation, yet a complete understanding of organizational transformation must ultimately include all members of the system. Although these groups play significantly different roles in the organization, they are parts of the system and, by definition, influence the organization's transformation. (2) The findings of this investigation have heightened my awareness and sensitivity concerning the implementation of any mandate, and the importance of transparency. Mandated changes, regardless of their source, are likely to be rejected by system members because mandates fail to include the system members' social construction of the change. In my own work, this new awareness has led to me seek opportunities to make meaning of any mandate together with system members. These opportunities must include the consideration of both collaboration and consultation. Knowing this, it is incumbent upon me to bring system members into the conversation as early as possible, so that we together can socially construct the mandate's meaning, and shape those aspects of its implementation over which we have control. (3) As an extension of this second insight, and as a reflection of my role as an administrator, I now realize that it is the responsibility of organizational leaders to find those areas of latitude that allow for the greatest opportunities to co-create meaning. This realization aligns with other findings regarding the information access, active engagement, and clearly defined decision space that stakeholders value. This responsibility is not easily

undertaken for it requires leaders to not only embrace system-generated vision and direction, it also requires leaders to intentionally seek out opportunities for collaboration, and to expose those spaces where decisions can be shaped by system members.

Perhaps most importantly, I realize upon reflection that this investigation, both its process and its findings, have influenced the ways in which I now enact my role as a higher education leader.

References

- American Association of Community Colleges. (2012). *Reclaiming the American dream: A report from the 21st century commission on the future of community colleges*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/aboutcc/21stcenturyreport/21stCenturyReport.pdf>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2014a). College completion challenge: A call to action [Education]. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/completionchallenge/Pages/default.aspx>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2014b). *Empowering community colleges to build the nation's future: An implementation guide*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from www.aacc21stcenturycenter.org
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2015). *Community college completion: Progress toward goal of 50% increase*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Trends/Documents/completion_report_05212015.pdf
- Asmussen, K. J., & Creswell, J. W. (1995). Campus response to a student gunman. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66, 575–591.
- Ayers, D. F. (2002). Developing climates for renewal in the community college: A case study of dissipative self-organization. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(2), 165–185. <http://doi.org/10.1080/106689202753385492>
- Ayers, D. F. (2005). Organizational climate in its semiotic aspect: A postmodern community college undergoes renewal. *Community College Review*, 33(1), 1–21. <http://doi.org/10.1177/009155210503300101>

- Baker, G. A., Roueche, J. E., & Gillet-Karam, R. (1990). *Teaching as leading: Profiles of excellence in the open-door college*. Alexandria, VA: Community College Press.
- Barbalich, A. (1994). A philosophy of teaching. *Currents*, 20, 2.
- Barnett, K. (2011). System members at odds: Managing divergent perspectives in the higher education change process. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(2), 131–140. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2011.550086>
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10(2), 181–217. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(99\)00016-8](http://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(99)00016-8)
- Bennis, W. (1977). Who sank the yellow submarine? In G. Riley & V. Baldrige (Eds.), *Governing academic organizations* (pp. 110–122). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. New York, NY: Anchor.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1979). Social interaction in everyday life. In C. D. Mortensen (Ed.), *Basic readings in communication theory* (2nd ed., pp. 86–101). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Bers, T., & Schuetz, P. (2014). Nearbies: A missing piece of the college completion conundrum. *Community College Review*, 42(3), 167–183. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0091552114525834>
- Bess, J. L., & Dee, J. R. (2008). *Understanding college and university organization: Theories for effective policy and practice* (Vol. 1). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

- Bird, M. C. (2005). How I stopped dreading and learned to love transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry, 11*(2), 226–248. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1077800404273413>
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Boulding, K. (1956). General systems theory: The skeleton of science. *Management Science, 2*(3), 197–208. <http://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2.3.197>
- Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137–152. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107085301>
- Bradley, A. P., & Blanco, C. D. (2010). *Promoting a culture of student success: How colleges and universities are improving degree completion*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from http://publications.sreb.org/2010/10E02_Promoting_Culture.pdf
- Bragg, D. D., & Durham, B. (2012). Perspectives on access and equity in the era of (community) college completion. *Community College Review, 40*(2), 106–125. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0091552112444724>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <http://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Buckley, W. (1967). *Sociology and modern systems theory*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Buckley, W. (1968). Society as a complex adoptive system. In W. Buckley (Ed.), *Modern systems research for the behavioral scientist: A sourcebook* (pp. 490–513). Chicago, IL: Aldine.

- Burns, J. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Burns, J. (2002). Chaos theory and leadership studies: Exploring uncharted seas. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 42+.
<http://doi.org/10.1177/107179190200900204>
- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. New York, NY: Anchor.
- Carnevale, A. P., & Desrochers, D. M. (2004). *Why learning? The value of higher education to society and individual*. (A joint publication of Education Commission of the States and League for Innovation in the Community College). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from <http://www.league.org/league/projects/promise/files/promise.pdf>
- Carnevale, A. P., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2010). *Help wanted: Projections of jobs and education requirements through 2018*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University. Retrieved from <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf>
- Cejda, B. D., & Rhodes, J. H. (2004). Through the pipeline: The role of faculty in promoting associate degree completion among Hispanic students. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 28(3), 249–262.
<http://doi.org/10.1080/10668920490256435>
- Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. (2008). *The American community college* (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

- College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. (2011). The college board and national conference of state legislatures launch the college completion agenda: State capitals campaign. *Business Wire (English)*.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Delia, J. G., O'Keefe, B. J., & O'Keefe, D. J. (1982). The constructivist approach to communication. In F. E. X. Dance (Ed.), *Human communication theory* (pp. 147–191). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Dembicki, M. (2012, January 20). In Illinois, the focus is now on the finish. *Community College Daily*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.ccdaily.com/Pages/Campus-Issues/In-Illinois-the-focus-is-now-in-finishing.aspx>
- Eisenberg, E. M., & Goodall, H. L. (1993). *Organizational communication*. New York, NY: St. Martin's.
- Evenbeck, S., & Johnson, K. E. (2012). Students must not become victims of the completion agenda. *Liberal Education*, 98(1), 26–33.
- Farmer, B. A., Slater, J. W., & Wright, K. S. (1998). The role of communication in achieving shared vision under new organizational leadership. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 10(4), 219. http://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1004_01

- Ferlie, E., Musselin, C., & Andresani, G. (2008). The steering of higher education systems: A public management perspective. *Higher Education*, 56(3), 325–348.
<http://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9125-5>
- Friedel, J., Thornton, Z., D'Amico, M., & Katisinas, S. (2013). *Performance -based funding: The national landscape* (Brief) (pp. 1–20). Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gates Foundation commits \$35 million to new community college program. (2010, October 4). *Philanthropy News Digest*. New York, NY. Retrieved from
<http://www.philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/gates-foundation-commits-35-million-to-new-community-college-program>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine.
- Greene, R. (2009, February 25). Obama urges U.S. to regain world lead in college graduates [Commercial]. Retrieved from
http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=ao_WPhFqAhzM
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Hall, A. D., & Fagen, R. E. (1980). Definition of system. In G. Chen, J. Jamieson, L. Schkade, & C. H. Smith (Eds.), *The general theory of systems applied to management and organization* (Vol. 1, pp. 73–85). Seaside, CA: Intersystems.
- Harnisch, T. (2011). *Performance-based funding: A re-emerging strategy in public higher education financing* (Policy Brief). American Association of State

Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from

http://www.aascu.org/uploadedFiles/AASCU/Content/Root/PolicyAndAdvocacy/PolicyPublications/Performance_Funding_AASCU_June2011.pdf

Hartley, M. (2003). "There is no way without a because": Revitalization of purpose at three liberal arts colleges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(1), 75–102.

<http://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2003.0038>

Hatch, M. (1997). *Organizational theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Heath, R. (1994). *Management of corporate communication: From interpersonal contacts to external affairs*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Nutt Williams, E. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 25(4), 517–572.

Hill, C. W., & Jones, G. R. (2001). *Strategic management: An integrated approach* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Hollinshead, B. S. (1936). The community college program. *Junior College Journal*, 7, 111–116.

Humphreys, D. (2012). What's wrong with the completion agenda and what we can do about it. *Liberal Education*, 98(1).

Jaramillo, J. A. (1992). *A multi-methodological evaluation of Hispanic student recruitment and retention effectiveness at the University of Colorado, Boulder: A qualitative study of recruitment and retention by agency* (Research Report No.

ED374739). University of Colorado. Retrieved from

<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED374739>

- Jenkins, P. D. (2011). *Redesigning community colleges for completion: Lessons from research on high-performance organizations* (No. 48). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.
- Kast, F., & Rosenzweig, J. (1979). *Organization and management: A systems and contingency approach* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Kelly, A. P., & Schneider, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Getting to graduation: The completion agenda in higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins.
- Kezar, A. (2001). Investigating organizational fit in a participatory leadership environment. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 23(1), 85–101.
- Kezar, A., Carducci, R., & Contreras-McGavin, M. (2006). *Rethinking the “L” word in higher education: The revolution of research on leadership* (ASHE Higher Education Report No. Vol. 31, No. 6). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kotter, J. P. (2007). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(1), 96–103.
- Kotter, J. P. (2008). *A sense of urgency*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (1987). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Krone, K. J., Kramer, M. W., & Sias, P. M. (2010). Theoretical developments in organizational communication research. In C. R. Berger, M. E. Roloff, & D. R.

- Roskos-Ewoldsen (Eds.), *The handbook of communication science* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Laden, B. V. (1999). Socializing and mentoring college students of color: The Puente Project as an exemplary celebratory socialization model. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 74(2), 55–74. http://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje7402_6
- Levine, A. (1979). *Handbook on undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Levin, J. S. (2006). Faculty work: Tensions between educational and economic values. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(1), 62–68. <http://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2006.0004>
- Levinson, D. (2005). *Community colleges: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Levy, A., & Merry, U. (1986). *Organizational transformation: Approaches, strategies, theories*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lumina Foundation. (2010). Raising the bar on college completion [Organization]. Retrieved from <http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/newsletter/archives/2010-10.html>
- Marshall, M. N. (1996). Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice*, 13(6), 522–526. <http://doi.org/10.1093/fampra/13.6.522>
- Maryland Association of Community Colleges. (2010, December 3). A promise to act. Retrieved from https://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/completionchallenge/Documents/MD_Promiset oActposter.pdf

- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McClenney, B. N. (2013). Leadership matters: Addressing the student success and completion agenda. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2013(164), 7–16. <http://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20076>
- McPhail, C. J. (2011). *The completion agenda: A call to action* (pp. 1–11). Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges. Retrieved from www.aacc.nche.edu
- Mead, H. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mitchell, R. (2009). Online education and organizational change. *Community College Review*, 37(1), 81–101. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0091552109338731>
- Nadolny, R. A. (2006). *The wonderful missions of the community college: A hermeneutic analysis of the first hundred years of the colleges' community engagement* (Dissertation). Oregon State University. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1957/1935>
- Obama, B. (2009, July). *Remarks by the President on the American Graduation Initiative in Warren, MI | The White House*. Warren, MI. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-american-graduation-initiative-warren-mi>

- O'Banion, T. (2011). Pathways to completion. *Community College Journal*, 82(1), 28–34.
- Oregon Education Investment Board. (2011). *Oregon learns: Executive summary*. Salem, OR. Retrieved from <http://www.oregon.gov/gov/oeib/docs/oregonlearnsexecsumwithlink.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2013). *Education at a glance 2013: OECD Indicators*. Paris, France: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>
- Orton, J., & Weick, K. E. (1990). Loosely coupled systems: A reconceptualization. *The Academy of Management Review*, 15(2), 203–223. <http://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1990.4308154>
- Padgett, D. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: challenges and rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peterson, G. D. (2007). *A case study of the perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff regarding the development of a "culture of evidence" at two Texas community colleges* (Dissertation). University of Texas, Austin, TX. Retrieved from <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/23463/petersong73057%20%281%29.pdf?sequence=4>
- Pielstick, C. D. (1998). The transforming leader: A meta-ethnographic analysis. *Community College Review*, 26(3), 15. <http://doi.org/10.1177/009155219802600302>

- Pole, K. (2007). Mixed method designs: A review of strategies for blending quantitative and qualitative methodologies. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 20(4), 35–38.
- Ratcliff, J. L. (1994). Seven streams in the historical development of the modern American community college. In G. A. Baker (Ed.), *A handbook on the community college in America: Its history, mission and management* (pp. 3–16). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Reyna, R. (2010). *Complete to compete: Common college completion metrics*. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 200–228. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739>
- Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2009). *Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change*. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Russell, A. (2011). *A guide to major U.S. college completion initiatives* (Policy Brief). Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities.
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1), 85–109. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X02239569>
- S. 253-A, Pub. L. No. 351.009 (2011). Retrieved from <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2011R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB0253/Enrolled>

- Sandberg, J. (2001). The constructions of social constructionism. In *Invisible management: The social construction of leadership* (pp. 28–48). London, UK: Thomson Learning, Berkshire House.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118–137). Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Scott, W. R., & Davis, G. F. (2007). *Organizations and organizing: Rational, natural, and open system perspectives*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sokugawa, H. (1996). *Faculty perceptions of organizational culture in community colleges* (Dissertation). University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED430609.pdf>
- Stout-Stewart, S. (2005). Female community college presidents: Effective leadership patterns and behaviors. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 29(4), 303–315. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10668920590911887>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Swanson, R. A. (2005). The process of framing research in organizations. In R. A. Swanson & E. F. Holton (Eds.), *Research in organizations* (pp. 3–26). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

- Texas Completes ready for next phase of completion plan. (2012, August 6). *Community College Daily*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www.ccdaily.com/Pages/Campus-Issues/Texas-Completes-prepares-for-second-phase-of-student-success-plan.aspx>
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (1992). *Assessing minority opportunities in vocational education: A research report* (Research Report No. ED341447). Austin, TX: El Paso Community College.
- Thaxter, L. P., & Graham, S. W. (1999). Community college faculty involvement in decision making. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 23(7), 655–674. <http://doi.org/10.1080/106689299264521>
- The White House summit on community colleges*. (2011). (Summit Report) (pp. 1–36). Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/community_college_summit_report.pdf
- Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Townsend, B. K., & Twombly, S. B. (2007). *Community college faculty: Overlooked and undervalued*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: a researcher's experience. *Contemporary Nurse*, 19(1-2), 75+.
- Van Ast, J. (1999). Community college faculty: Making the paradigm shift. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 23(6), 559–579. <http://doi.org/10.1080/106689299264585>

- Vaughan, G. B., & MacDonald, J. (2005). (Over)selling the community college: What price access? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52(10), B12–B14.
- Von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General systems theory*. New York, NY: Braziller.
- Warren, C. (2001). Qualitative interviewing. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 83–102). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Weick, K. E. (1969). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd ed.). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Weick, K. E. (1976). Education organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–19. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2391875>
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wheatley, M. J. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Zmetana, K. (2002). *Reflections on change: A community-college faculty perspective* (Dissertation). Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR. Retrieved from <http://scholarsarchive.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/handle/1957/32411>

APPENDICES

Appendix A

DEMOCRACY'S COLLEGES

Call To Action

We, the leaders of national organizations that represent and serve America's 1,200 community colleges, recognize and celebrate the colleges' central role in ensuring an educated U.S. citizenry and a globally competitive workforce. We affirm the need for a dramatic increase in the number of Americans with postsecondary degrees and certifications to fulfill critical state and national goals. With the "completion agenda" as a national imperative, community colleges have an obligation to meet the challenge while holding firmly to traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality.

WE BELIEVE

- ▶ We believe the student success and completion agenda is the future of community colleges.
- ▶ We believe that completion matters and that every student counts.
- ▶ We believe in every student's potential and responsibility to succeed, and that an engaged student is more likely to persist in college.
- ▶ We believe the open door must not be a revolving door, and that institutions must take responsibility for student success.
- ▶ We believe that community colleges are gateways to the middle class and beyond for millions of Americans.
- ▶ We believe that community colleges are an invaluable economic engine driving the nation toward renewed and sustained economic prosperity.
- ▶ We believe there are thousands of talented and committed people working "heart and soul" in community colleges who are ready to take on leadership roles.

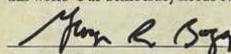
WE COMMIT

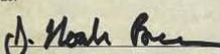
- ▶ We commit to a change in institutional culture, from emphasis on access only to emphasis on access and success.
- ▶ We commit to courageous conversations and openness regarding diversity, equity, and evidence reflecting student success and institutional performance.
- ▶ We commit, while increasing success rates for all students, to eliminating the attainment gaps that separate student groups on the basis of race, ethnicity and family income.
- ▶ We commit to acting on facts to make positive changes in the interest of student success and college completion.
- ▶ We commit to promoting faculty and staff development focused on evidence-based educational practice.
- ▶ We commit to providing development opportunities, for college CEOs, trustees and future college leaders, to build leadership for student success.

WE ASK

- ▶ We ask every community college president, trustee, administrator, faculty member, counselor, advisor, financial aid officer, staff member, and stakeholder to examine their current practices, to identify ways to help students understand the added value of degrees and certifications, and to help them progress toward their goals.
- ▶ We ask every student to help one other student succeed.
- ▶ We ask community members to support and work with their local colleges to help more students succeed.
- ▶ We ask elected officials to create the policy conditions that enable, support and reward community colleges in their work to strengthen student success.
- ▶ We ask every community college and community college stakeholder to join us by signing and sharing this commitment and call to action.

As organizations representing America's community colleges, we mutually commit and pledge to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices, and institutional cultures that will produce 50 percent more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020, while increasing access and quality. We call for leaders from every sector and constituency of every college to join us in this work. **Our democracy needs every one of us.**

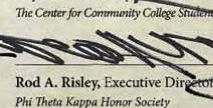

George R. Boggs, President and CEO
American Association of Community Colleges


J. Noah Brown, President and CEO
Association of Community College Trustees


Kay M. McClenney, Director
The Center for Community College Student Engagement


Gerardo de los Santos, President and CEO
League for Innovation in the Community College


Evelyn Waiwai, Director
National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development


Rod A. Risley, Executive Director
Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society



Appendix B



In recognition of the central role that [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION] has in meeting the educational and training needs in our community and, more broadly, in contributing to an educated U.S. citizenry and a competitive workforce, we pledge to do our part to increase in the number of Americans with high quality postsecondary degrees and certifications to fulfill critical local, state, and national goals. With the “completion agenda” as a national imperative, [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION] has an obligation to meet the challenge while holding firmly to traditional values of access, opportunity, and quality.

- We believe the student success and completion agenda is the future of [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION].
- We believe that completion matters and that every student counts.
- We believe in every student’s potential and responsibility to succeed—and that an engaged student is more likely to persist in college.
- We believe the “open door” must not be a “revolving door,” and that [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION] must take responsibility for student success.
- We believe that community colleges are the gateways to the middle class and beyond for millions of Americans.
- We believe that community colleges are an invaluable economic engine driving the nation toward renewed and sustained economic prosperity.
- We believe that talented and committed people working “heart and soul” at [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION] are ready to take on leadership roles to increase student success and college completion.
- We believe to change in institutional culture, from emphasis on access only to emphasis on access and success.
- We commit to courageous conversations about diversity, equity, and evidence reflecting student success and institutional performance.
- We commit, while increasing success rates for all students, to eliminating the attainment gaps that separate student groups on the basis of race, ethnicity and family income.
- We commit to acting on facts to make positive changes in the interest of student success and college completion.
- We commit to promoting faculty and staff development focused on evidence based educational practice.
- We commit to providing development opportunities, for college administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, and students to build and sustain leadership for student success.
- We ask every trustee, administrator, faculty member, counselor, advisor financial aid officer, staff member, and student organization to examine current practices, to identify ways to help students understand the added value of degrees and certifications, and to help them progress toward their goals.
- We ask every student to help one other student succeed.
- We ask community members to support and work with us to help more students succeed.
- We ask elected officials to create the policy conditions that enable, support and reward our work to strengthen student success.
- We ask other community colleges to join us by signing and sharing this commitment and call to action.

This signed Call to Action commits [INSERT NAME OF YOUR INSTITUTION] to promote the development and implementation of policies, practices, and institutional cultures that will produce 50% more students with high quality degrees and certificates by 2020. We call upon every sector and constituency of our college and community to join us in this work. **Our democracy needs every one of us.**

Chair, Board of Trustees

College President/Chancellor

Date



ACCT

Appendix C

Consent Request for College President

Dear President _____:

I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the Community College Leadership Program. My dissertation focuses on how community college faculty perceive the completion movement. The study will take place at a community college in Oregon; your college has been identified as an appropriate site for this research.

With your approval, I will conduct interviews with 15 to 30 faculty members. The interviews will focus on faculty members' perceptions of the completion movement. It is anticipated that each interview will last approximately an hour. I am seeking full-time, contracted, regular status faculty members in programs with degree seeking students whose primary work assignment is classroom teaching. I am asking your permission to approach administrators and faculty members on your campus in order to identify appropriate participants for these interviews.

I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Earl "Joe" Johnson, my major professor at Oregon State University. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. Participants will be informed that their participation is entirely voluntary, and that they may discontinue their participation in the process at any time. The name of the college and of the participants will remain confidential.

If you have any questions with regard to this research, I would be happy to answer them. Please let me know either by email or telephone if you are willing to have your college participate in this study.

Thank you for your time and for considering this request.

Sally Widenmann Moore

emailaddress@oregonstate.edu

(###)###-###

Organization Transformation and Social Construction: How Community College Faculty Make Meaning of the Completion Agenda.

Appendix D

Contact Information for Local Informants

Dear (*insert name*):

I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the Community College Leadership Program. My dissertation focuses on how community college faculty perceive the completion movement. The study takes place at a community college in Oregon; your college has been identified as an appropriate site for this research.

I am currently trying to identify appropriate faculty members to participate in interviews. I am seeking full-time, contracted, regular status faculty members in programs with degree seeking students whose primary work assignment is classroom teaching. President (*insert name*) has agreed to let me recruit participants at your institution. I am contacting you to see whether you can help me identify faculty members who fit the criteria for this study. The interviews will focus on faculty perceptions of the completion movement.

I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Earl “Joe” Johnson, my major professor at Oregon State University. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. Participants will be informed that their participation is entirely voluntary, and that they may discontinue their participation in the process at any time. The name of the college and of the participants will remain confidential.

If you have suggestions about which faculty members I might contact with regard to participation in this study, I would appreciate your letting me know. I am hoping you can provide me with contact information for ten faculty members. If you have any questions with regard to this research, I would be happy to answer them. You can contact me either by email or phone. My contact information is shown below.

Thank you for your time and for considering this request,

Sally Widenmann Moore

emailaddress@oregonstate.edu

(###) ###-####

Organization Transformation and Social Construction: How Community College Faculty Make Meaning of the Completion Agenda.

Appendix E

Recruitment Letter for Faculty Participants

Dear (*insert faculty member name*):

I am a doctoral student at Oregon State University in the Community College Leadership Program. My dissertation focuses on how community college faculty perceive the completion reform movement. President (*insert name*) has consented to allow me to recruit faculty members to participate in this research on your campus. I am seeking to conduct confidential interview with faculty members about the completion reform movement. You have been identified as a good source of information for this research and I am hoping you will agree to participate.

To participate in this research, you should be a full-time, contracted, regular status faculty member, whose primary work assignment is classroom instruction. If these criteria apply to you, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview.

The interviews will be face-to-face, on your campus, and should last about an hour depending on the length of your answers. The interview questions will focus on your perceptions of the completion movement. I will be making audio recordings of the interviews, which will then be transcribed. The names of the college and participants will be kept confidential.

I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Earl “Joe” Johnson, my major professor at Oregon State University. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the process at any time.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have about the study or the interview process. Please email me or call me if you are willing to participate in an interview. An Informed Consent Form is attached for your convenience.

Thank you for your time and for considering this request.

Best regards,

Sally Widenmann Moore

emailaddress@oregonstate.edu

(###)###-####

Organization Transformation and Social Construction: How Community College Faculty Make Meaning of the Completion Agenda.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Project: Community College Faculty and the Completion Agenda

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

“The purpose of this study is to gather information focused on community college faculty perceptions of the completion agenda. I will be interviewing a number of community college faculty, such as yourself, and asking them a series of questions related to the completion agenda. The interview will be audio-recorded. Interview responses will be analyzed for the purposes of the study. Your identity and responses to the interview questions will be kept confidential. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Before we can begin, you are required to read and sign a consent form. I’d like you to do that now.”

“Now that you’ve signed the consent form, I will turn on the tape recorder, and we can begin.”

Questions:

For the purposes of this interview, the completion agenda will be defined as the reform movement associated with the diverse activities focused on increasing the number of students earning degrees, certificates or other postsecondary credentials.

1. What is your level of awareness of the completion agenda, as I have described it?
2. As a faculty member here at this college, how would you describe your understanding of the completion agenda?
3. In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda had an impact on your work inside the classroom?
4. In what ways, if any, has the completion agenda has an impact on your work outside the classroom?

“Thank you for cooperation and participation in this interview. I want to reassure you that your responses will be kept confidential. If I have additional questions at a later time may I contact you again?”

Adapted from: (Asmussen & Creswell, 1995; Creswell, 2012)

