

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Reine M. Thomas for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on April 1, 2013.

Title: Community Leaders' Perspectives of a Rural Community College's Impact on Community Development

Abstract approved: _____
Darlene F. Russ-Eft

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the role a rural community college plays in the development of its community, using a holistic, community-based lens that considered college and community context, interactions and results to answer the question: *How does the rural community college impact the development of the rural community?* While the community college's connection to the local community is largely inherent, a full understanding of community college-community interaction and the impact of those interactions on the community as a whole is often difficult to articulate. Given the context of today's education accountability requirements, it is advantageous to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the community college with regard to community impact and public benefit – for community college practitioners, the public, and state and local policy-makers.

A social constructivist research perspective, a case study research strategy, and a single case design were employed in this study. The case for this study was a rural Northwest community and the community college within it. The community college was

classified as a *small, rural-serving* college by the Carnegie Classification of Colleges and Universities.

A logic model design guided the study. Study participants included: elected officials; business and industry executives; and health, education and human services leaders. A combination of document review, participant observation, and interviews was used to answer the research questions: (a) What is the context of this community and this community college? (b) In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage? (c) What are the results of the college-community engagement?

Examination of the data revealed several major themes and five significant findings:

1. The community defines itself through a regional, rural lens and is characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and to the history of the region.
2. The college and the community invest in reciprocal relationships and collaborate on mutually beneficial pursuits.
3. An improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce are identified as positive community changes – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes are cited as a public benefit.
4. A community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development is recognized as a positive community change – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes are cited as a public benefit.

5. An enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook are identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes are cited as a public benefit.

When these findings are taken into account with the related literature, this study offers considerations for practice and further research among community college, civic, and policy leaders.

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Community Leaders' Perspectives of a Rural Community College's Impact
on Community Development

by
Reine M. Thomas

A DISSERTATION

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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.

Reine M. Thomas, Author

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Catherine Thomas.

CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The work of community colleges is tied inherently to their local communities by virtue of the founding legislation and mission of community colleges. The connections, interactions, and actions of a community college flow from and into the community. This is especially true in rural communities, where the community college typically plays a vital role in myriad aspects of the community. Today, this college-community connection is an area of heightened national interest as evidenced by the increased focus on post-secondary accountability standards and on college-community relations.

At the same time, developing a full understanding of college-community interactions and resulting impacts is a challenge. Community college assessment of outcomes is typically limited to the performance reporting requirements of government and regulatory agencies which are often viewed as narrow, numeric, and incomplete. Thus, a comprehensive view of the role and impact of community colleges in the community is frequently obscured.

In this era of accountability, it is desirable to develop a more comprehensive understanding of community colleges' relationships, roles, and results in their respective communities, especially with regard to community impact and public benefit. This interest, coupled with a systems theory and asset-based perspective, guided this study as a holistic, community-based view of community college-community interactions, results, and impacts.

Focus of the Study

The place-based context of a rural community and a rural community college, the college-community interaction, and the resulting impact on community development were the foci of this study.

Community college scholars consistently assert the fundamental importance of the relationship between the community college and the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Gleazer, 1980; Levinson, 2005; Vaughan, 2006). This intrinsic focus on community sets the community college apart from other post-secondary institutions (Ratcliff, 1994; Vaughan, 2006), and the commitment to community building helps define the essence of community colleges (Vaughan, 2006). The community college was created as “a college of and for its community” (Mellow & Heelan, 2008, p. 6). Further, the place-based relationship of rural community colleges and their communities is often noted as especially significant because of the relative magnitude of the reciprocal interaction and influence. The community college’s role in community-building in a rural community college is both catalytic and critical (Cavan, 1995; Miller & Tuttle, 2007; Valdez & Killacky, 1995).

The concept of community engagement has garnered increasing interest among institutions of higher education in recent years, emerging in relation to the question of higher education’s benefit to the public. Indeed, community engagement has been referred to as a “movement” in post-secondary education (Maurrasse, 2001; Watson, 2007). This mounting interest is evidenced by the Carnegie Foundation’s establishment of a new classification of higher education institutions – an elective classification focused

on institutions with special commitments in the area of community engagement – which the Carnegie Foundation defines as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-2010).

The nature of community college-community engagement and the results of community building or community development efforts are important to understand, yet challenging to analyze and communicate. The “promise and openness [of the community college], and the fluctuating boundaries between community and college, are both [its] strength and [its] greatest challenge” (Mellow & Heelan, 2008, p. 14). Thus, the utilization of systems and external perspectives, which take into account that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, may prove a helpful lens for the endeavor of understanding the impact of a community college on its local community.

Fluharty and Scaggs (2007) pose the implicit question this way: “Are we ready to expand measures of college success to include community as well as college viability?” (p. 25). Mellow and Heelan (2008) advocate a metric which reflects the complexity of the community college mission and its tie to the community: “The best measure would hold an institution accountable for being an active player in the improvement of its community” (p. 67). In an attempt to explore a holistic, community-based view of a community college, this study drew upon principles of the *Community Capitals Framework* (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013) – a systemic and appreciative view of a community. Hence, the focus of this study was to better understand the place-based

context of a rural community and a rural community college, the nature of college-community interactions, and the resulting impact on community development.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the role a rural community college plays in the development of the rural community. The intent was to provide a holistic, community-based view of community college-community characteristics, interactions, and results.

The over-arching research question was: How does the community college impact the development of the rural community? The specific research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) Context: What is the context of this community and this community college?
- 2) Process: In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage?
- 3) Results: What are the results of the college-community engagement?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for three reasons: (a) the need to better understand community college impact on local community development in the rural setting; (b) the opportunity to contribute to the scholarly literature on rural community colleges and community development and to the scholarly literature on community engagement in higher education; and (c) the pursuit of my professional interests as cultivated by my professional experiences and my participation in the Community College Leadership Program.

Community college impact on community development. First, there is a need for a more comprehensive consideration of community college performance and impact, particularly in rural areas – a consideration that parallels the comprehensiveness of the community college mission. For community college practitioners, it is important to ascertain the community benefits of our institutions in order to inform our own practice. Additionally, it is important to communicate the community benefits of our institutions to the public in order to inform our constituents and inform public policy. Fluharty and Scaggs (2007) comment on the need for clearer connections between rural community colleges and communities this way:

Rural America desperately needs a clearer connection between college and community. The shared futures of rural colleges and rural communities require a rethinking and realignment of the rural college mission as well as new policy frameworks that support both community colleges and rural community development. (p. 25)

In their discussion of needed policy analysis with regard to the shared futures of rural communities and community colleges, these scholars advanced several pertinent questions such as: “How can place and culture contribute to building sustainable rural communities? ... Are we ready to have real conversations about the community dimension of these institutions?” (p. 25).

Public perception of the community college is a long-standing challenge – one that Cohen and Brawer (2008) have noted for decades: “[The maturity of the community college] has not changed the colleges’ perennial problems of funding, public perception, relative emphasis, purposes, and value” (p. 39). The general public and even the natural

allies of community colleges often have an incomplete view of the impact of community colleges (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Cavan (1995) asserts that “the general community and political leaders do not fully comprehend the mission, the variety of services provided, and the tremendous successes of the community college” (p. 14).

The understandings and expectations of the public always matter to public institutions, but in an environment where calls for accountability are increasing at the same time resources are diminishing, the stakes become even higher. “As the community college looks to the next decade, it will be even more critical that the image and the perceptions held by legislators, business, parents, students, and the general public be positively influenced” (Laanan, 2001, p. 71). Presenting a less calculated rationale for bolstering public understanding, Mellow and Heelan (2008) suggest that public perception has simply not caught up with nearly 40 years of change in higher education and that a “much greater focus on community colleges’ contribution to the overall successes and failures of postsecondary education [is] critical for a balanced view of how higher education today is quite different from the higher education of the 1960s” (p. 3).

Thus, it is essential to look with fresh eyes – and through holistic, outside-in perspectives – at the results of community college-community labors. Many observe that the research on community colleges must seek to include more outside-in perspectives as community colleges strive to gather ever-more authentic, holistic, and realistic knowledge of community college missions, interactions, and results.

Contribution to scholarly literature. Secondly, this study is significant for the ways in which it can contribute to scholarly literature. With the culmination of this study, I hope to contribute to scholarly literature in two regards: the arena of rural community colleges' impact on systemic community development and the arena of community colleges and community engagement.

As for the literature on rural community colleges, it is true that much research and scholarly writing is available, especially from the southern and north central accrediting regions, where 72% of the rural community college campuses are located (Hardy, 2005) and where the majority of the Rural Community College Initiative activity took place. That said, rural community colleges in the northwest region of the United States are, by comparison, essentially absent from the scholarly literature on rural community colleges. In Oregon, for example, 82% of the community colleges are classified as rural-serving institutions. It follows that more research on the unique aspects of these institutions and the communities they serve is warranted.

As well, I hope to contribute to the literature by expanding the focus to include a more systemic perspective on the community development aspect of rural community colleges. According to Miller and Tuttle (2007), "Further research should...work to expand the contemporary understanding of the unique characteristics of rural community colleges and how they can best be utilized within the broad framework of working to advance the public good" (p. 127). Presently, the literature on rural community colleges focuses largely on economic development and on challenges faced by rural community colleges. In contrast, this study intends to examine a broader view of the rural

community college's contributions to community development and to the asset-based capacity-building aspects of the rural community college. Mellow and Heelan (2008) assert that too often "research and analysis of community colleges focus on what community colleges lack as opposed to what they contribute" (p. xvii). As a community college practitioner, I believe it is important to seek answers to both questions; however, this study focuses on contributions.

Second, community college contributions to the higher education literature on community engagement are slim. While scholars at public universities are rallying to publicly demonstrate their commitment to their communities through new offices for Community Engagement, dedicated community engagement websites and communiqués, and volumes of scholarly writing, the handful of community college scholars who approach this arena have directed their attention more to community partnerships and civic engagement through service learning. As Watson (2003) observes, universities seem to be striving to develop a new consciousness regarding the communities in which they reside. However, he notes that universities are challenged "to be *of* and not just *in* the community; not simply to engage in knowledge-transfer but to establish a dialogue across the boundary between the university and its community..." (p. 16). In this milieu, it seems incongruous that community colleges, touted as the community's college, are under-represented in this discussion. According to Maurrasse (2001), "One of the great ironies of the burgeoning national movement around higher education/community partnerships or civic engagement is the limited involvement of community colleges" (p. 179).

Another indicator of the absence of community colleges in this arena is the community college response to the Carnegie Foundation's classification for Community Engagement. In the first round of classification recipients in 2006, 76 institutions were recognized as community-engaged institutions. Four of those were community colleges. In the 2008 round of Community Engagement classifications, 119 institutions were successfully recognized with the Community Engagement classification. Nine were community colleges. In the most recent recognition of community-engaged institutions, five community colleges were advanced (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011). The advent of this new Carnegie Commission classification for Community Engagement provides another reason for the significance of this study.

Professional interest and application. Lastly, this study is significant to my own professional interest. As a community college professional, prepared by Oregon State University's Community College Leadership program to embrace a systemic, social constructivist, outcomes-based perspective, I have a personal interest in applying this perspective to my research and to my daily work.

I have worked in community colleges over two decades, serving in leadership roles which have afforded me the opportunity to interact – to engage – to serve – several unique communities. Those professional experiences have afforded me a range of place-based lenses – from a small rural college in an agricultural and recreation-based environment – to an urban community college in a technology and manufacturing environment – to a large rural community college in a government and service-based environment.

At the same time I have had the opportunity to grapple with local-level questions of college and community development, so too have I had the opportunity to grapple with questions of state-wide development in the areas of mission and funding prioritization, performance reporting, public understanding, and systems collaboration. These professional experiences, coupled with my professional preparation, contribute to my professional interest in this study.

The National Commission on Community Colleges (2008) calls upon community college leaders to “develop new accountability measures that better assess the unique and varied missions of their institutions” (p. 9). Mellow and Heelan (2008) also articulate the significance of this need: “We yearn for a true measure of a community college. Is it possible? To be accurately evaluated, community colleges must develop distinctive measures of effectiveness” (p. 51).

I am interested in responding to those calls by exploring the performance of a rural community college by way of its impact on the community – through outside-in perspectives of community constituents and outcomes-based perspectives of a more systemic nature. Counting graduates and transfer students is relatively easy; some say counting is reflective of old-science thinking. Some say counting is reflective of an inherited university accountability system. In a state where community college leaders are trained in systemic thinking, outcomes-based education, and both-and perspectives, it follows that those principles and ‘ways of knowing’ be applied not only to the planning and implementation of community college endeavors, but also to the assessment and reporting of community college endeavors.

Building a more systemic, comprehensive understanding of the community college's mission and impact in the community does not argue with continuing to strengthen the current focus on building a more comprehensive understanding of community college student success; that focus is fundamental. It's not *either-or*; it's *both-and*. Accountability measures for community colleges should strike a balance, maintaining a focus "on both units of analysis – the individual student and the well-being and vitality of a community as a whole" (Mellow & Heelan, 2008, p. 24). The local community as a unit of analysis for community college performance is a professional interest of mine and the third matter of significance for this study.

Summary of Chapter One: Focus and Significance of the Study

In summary, while the community college's connection to the local community is largely inherent, a full understanding of community college-community interaction and the impact of those interactions on the community as a whole is often difficult to articulate. Given the context of today's accountability requirements, it is advantageous to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the community college with regard to community impact and public benefit.

Examining the place-based relationship of a rural community and a rural-serving community college through a systems lens is the focus of this study. The intent is to provide a holistic, community-based view of community college-community contexts, interactions, and results by answering the question: How does the community college impact the development of the rural community?

The significance of this study resides both inside and outside the community college. For community college practitioners such as me, a clearer understanding of the impact of community college endeavors on the community as a whole is important. For the public and for policy-makers, a clearer understanding of the impact of community college endeavors on the community as a whole is perhaps more important.

Scholastically, this study may contribute to the literature on rural community colleges and community development and to the scholarly literature on community engagement in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the role a rural community college plays in the development of its community, using a holistic, community-based lens that considers college and community context, interactions, and results. The significance of the study included the need for a better understanding of community college impact on the local community by community college practitioners, the public, and state and local policy-makers.

To develop a framework for this endeavor, I selected four areas of literature that address these concepts: (a) the public agenda of accountability in higher education; (b) the ‘Community Engagement Movement’ and building the public trust in higher education; (c) the concepts of rurality, community, and community development; and (d) the role of rural community colleges. This chapter presents the review of the literature in these areas, as represented in the following figure:

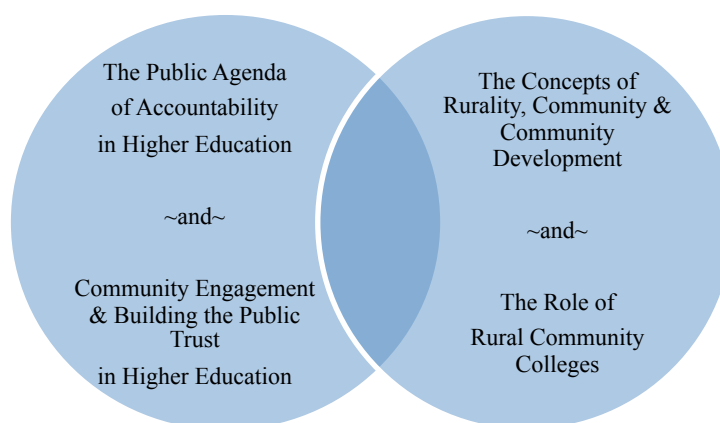


Figure 1. Review of related literature.

The review of the literature was an emergent and recursive process. Early on, I conducted myriad keyword and advanced keyword searches in article databases such as ERIC EbscoHost and FirstSearch as well as Academic Search Premier and Article First.

I also conducted several exploratory searches in Dissertation Abstracts. As my research process ensued, I returned to Dissertation Abstracts as necessary to test a new keyword pairing or check for new dissertations. I also utilized the OSU Scholars Archive to review dissertations.

Additionally, I conducted thorough keyword searches in the OSU Libraries Catalog, the WorldCat Catalog, and the Summit Libraries Catalog. The process I found most helpful was to study the bibliographies in the fruitful books and articles that I was reading, then use both author and title searches to further locate related sources or additional works by a particular author. Further into my research, I accessed the catalog databases frequently for these specific title and author searches.

Occasionally, I supplemented my review with Google Scholar searches, Informaworld searches, and searches on the Community College Research Center and WICHE Policy Publications Clearinghouse sites, among others. Most recently, I examined the thoroughness of my previous article research through the use of OSU Ingenta.

Representative keywords utilized during my review of the scholarly literature included: rural areas; rural America; rural education; rural development; rural community development; rural policy; rural community colleges; rural community colleges and economic development; rural community colleges and community

development; place-based education; place-based theory; Oregon community colleges; community colleges and economic development; community colleges and community development; community theory; community development; community development models; social capital; community capital; asset-based community development; systems thinking; systems theory; logic models; civic engagement higher education; community colleges and civic engagement; community engagement; higher education community engagement; community colleges and community engagement; higher education classification; accountability higher education; accountability community colleges; state accountability standards; institutional effectiveness; higher education performance measures; accountability and public benefit.

Assessing Value: The Public Agenda of Accountability in Higher Education, Public Trust, and Community Engagement

The purpose of this first stage of the literature review was to survey the socio-political backdrop to this study; that is, a public searching to understand the benefits of higher education, and the higher education community trying to answer that question well. To that end, this section reviews literature that explores the public agenda of accountability in higher education, the concept of building public trust, and the community engagement movement in higher education. The subsections below include: (a) the emergence of state-driven higher education accountability requirements and community college concerns regarding state-driven performance accountability requirements; (b) the importance of building the *public trust*, which requires identification of the public benefits of higher education and communicating those

benefits to the public; and (c) the manifestation of demonstrating public benefit through the Community Engagement movement in higher education.

The public agenda of accountability. Public accountability literature reflected the public's growing concern regarding returns on an investment in higher education. In the 1990s, accountability requirements began to emerge as a key challenge for community colleges and all post-secondary institutions as government officials, accrediting agencies, and public constituents began to call for greater accountability from institutions of higher education (Bogue & Hall, 2003; Burke, 2005a, b; Dougherty & Hong, 2006; Laanan, 2001; Leigh & Gill, 2007; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Zumeta, 2001). Burke (2005b) described the accountability pressures on higher education in America as an accountability triangle of three entities: state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces.

This quest for evidence of institutional performance, individual and societal benefit, and quality, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness was driven by the increasing complexity and cost of public higher education and the decreasing availability of state funding; concern over the academic and technical preparation of the American workforce; interest in higher education's role in society; and the need for better linkages between public post-secondary institutions and the community (Ewell & Jones, 1994; Ewell, Wellman, & Paulson, 1997; Laanan, 2001). Mellow and Heelan (2008) observed, "Whether [accountability] is an asset, a tool, or a bludgeon, every indication is that accountability measures are increasing and are here to stay" (p. 56).

The emergence of state-driven accountability mandates. This subsection reviews the emergence of higher education accountability as an instrument of state policy and the increasing importance of the public agenda for higher education. To place into perspective the state accountability requirements for higher education institutions, Ewell and Jones (2006) explained that the mode of post-secondary education accountability that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s focused primarily on regulatory and fiscal compliance, with postsecondary credentials viewed as providing benefits to individuals and as leading to an enhanced quality of life. Performance measures focused on outputs such as credits and inputs such as enrollments. In the 1980s, many states established assessment mandates that, for the first time, focused on learning outcomes, though because of the recession, were for the most part allowed to lapse. During this period, “public institutions were the only unit of analysis, and assessment mandates were put in place piecemeal, with few connections to state policies” (Ewell & Jones, 2006, p. 10).

It was not until the turn of the century that the rules of accountability for higher education began to change to a paradigm of state level accountability (Ewell & Jones, 2006; Shulock, 2006; Wellman, 2006). Myriad federal reports called for new accountability models, including the 2000 and 2004 *Measuring Up* reports (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000, 2004), the 2005 *Business and Higher Education Forum* report (American Council on Education, Business-Higher Education Forum, 2005), the 2005 *National Commission on Accountability* report (National Commission on Accountability, 2005), and the 2006 *Spellings Commission* report (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). They called for an accountability model

emphasizing public agendas and return on investments, not only institutional processes – and on student learning and educational attainment criteria, not only student enrollment counts (Ewell & Jones, 2006; Shulock, 2006; Wellman, 2006).

The literature reflected the emergence of accountability as a tool for state policy initiatives: “The focus of accountability is not on what institutions do but instead on how the state and its citizens benefit...[through] a more capable workforce and a more productive economy” (Ewell & Jones, 2006, p. 12). Wellman (2006) noted that while accountability, access, and quality framed higher education public policy for over 50 years, a new “outside-in aiming of the agenda” (p. 113) was emerging, focusing not on the institution as the unit of performance but on society’s needs from higher education, and on a desire to measure progress to meet a public agenda.

Wellman (2006) identified seven specific elements of this new public agenda: (a) increase academic preparation for college-level work for high school graduates; (b) increase high school graduation rates; (c) decrease socioeconomic achievement gaps by racial and economic lines along the educational pipeline; (d) maintain college affordability through attention to need-based aid, tuition levels, and cost attainment; (e) increase college participation, retention, and degree attainment for all students; (f) improve the quality of student learning outcomes for college graduates; and (g) double the number of college graduates in the science, engineering, and math-related disciplines. The emergence of this new public agenda for post-secondary education used a “functional and utilitarian framing,” (p. 113), focusing on national and state-level outcomes and investment strategies.

In a related vein, Zemsky, Wegner, and Massey (2005) claimed that higher education institutions must be mission-centered, market-smart, and politically savvy in order to succeed in the emerging government-involved environment: “Colleges and universities must find new ways to convey their collective purpose and their value to the public in general – and to state and federal policy makers in particular” (p. 195). They stressed that “there is no forever” when it comes to higher education’s public virtue, thus the necessity of keeping the college mission at the center, using the market to guide coherence and cohesion, and prioritizing goals in order to realize the public agenda, public funding, and ultimately, the public good (p. 197). Burke (2005b) cautioned that colleges and universities should maintain a balance of focus among state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. “Governors and legislators change and so do their demands; clients and customers often shift their desires...the goal of accountability is not to satisfy academic, state, and market desires, but societal needs...” (p. 317).

Government’s stake in higher education accountability was made clear in the Spellings Commission report (U. S. Department of Education, 2006), which called for more access to information about colleges and universities: “[The] lack of useful data and accountability hinders policymakers and the public from making informed decisions and prevents higher education from demonstrating its contribution to the public good” (p. 4).

And 30 years ago, Howard Bowen (1977) sounded the same call:

Educators cannot reasonably ignore the call for accountability. Society needs facts and reliable judgments about the outcomes of higher education. If educators cannot meet this need, decisions about the allocation of resources to higher education will be made on the basis of incomplete criteria that are biased toward the tangible, the quantifiable, and perhaps the irrelevant. (p. xiv)

In summary, over the course of the years just before and after the turn of the 21st century, accountability requirements for institutions of higher education were clearly moving into the halls of government. The performance of higher education was becoming irrevocably intertwined with state-level policymaking and funding.

Community colleges and state-driven accountability requirements. This subsection briefly explores community college concerns regarding state-driven performance accountability requirements. At the same time that accountability began to shift to a focus on public perception, many community college scholars and practitioners began to question the appropriateness of state-driven accountability criteria, especially as they were beginning to be used for policy and funding decisions.

Performance indicators such as student retention rates, graduation rates, and transfer rates which have historically been used as university measurements have long been seen as narrow and incomplete (Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Pincus, 1994). Laanan (2001) maintained that community college performance was often deemed unfavorable not because the university standards were too high but because they were the wrong standards for measuring the performance of community colleges. Bailey and Morest (2006) raised concerns about student outcome measures as ill-defined for the complexity of community college students, with the possible unintended consequence of threatening the community college's equity mission. In a similar vein, Dougherty and Hong (2006) cautioned that key mission areas of the community college were not backed with performance indicators and that, ultimately, this might end up weakening the comprehensive mission of the community college.

Perhaps the strongest statement about mismatched accountability measures came from The National Commission on Community Colleges' report (2008) *Winning the Skills Race and Strengthening America's Middle Class: An Action Agenda for Community Colleges*, which called for community college leaders to develop new accountability measures that "better assess the unique and varied missions" (p. 38) of the community college. The report contended that contributions of community colleges are not easy to document and that traditional performance metrics often reflect the culture of four-year institutions rather than the culture of community colleges. The Commission stressed the complex missions of community colleges within their local communities: "The contributions of community colleges to their communities are difficult to document, [and] the effort to do so is hampered by a lack of appropriate accountability metrics" (p. 38).

Mellow and Heelan (2008) also discussed the need for community college leaders to work with local and state leaders to define a metric which would measure the community college's impact on economic, workforce, and community development. They maintained that, with current performance indicators, "the real value a community college adds to its locality is missed" (p. 67). Moreover, they mused that it would be even more difficult to measure how different a community would be without its community college.

In this accountability milieu, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) responded in 2011 with a new set of community college accountability measures, entitled "The Voluntary Framework of Accountability" (AACC, 2011b). The

metrics are espoused to “give community colleges what many believe has long been lacking in reporting their successes to the public and policymakers” (AACCC, 2011a). The metrics cover student progress and outcomes tracking, career and technical education enrollments and outcomes, Adult Basic Education/GED tracking, and Student Learning Outcomes (in progress). Community college leaders say the measures are “fair” after long-arguing that “they are fundamentally different from four-year institutions and should be judged by different yardsticks” (Fain, 2011).

In summary, the literature showed community college scholars and practitioners questioning the appropriateness of traditional state-driven, university-modeled accountability criteria typically assigned to community college performance reporting. As the public accountability trend began to gain political ground, there began a national call for community college leaders to develop metrics more appropriate for measuring the community college mission, especially with regard to impact on the local community. In response to that call, the American Association of Community Colleges did develop a set of metrics unique to community colleges, unveiled in late 2011, to serve as a roadmap for community colleges to report the progress of their unique student population.

Building the public trust. This sub-section of the literature review highlights the important discussion of building the public trust, the social contract between higher education and the community. Identifying the public benefits of higher education and communicating those benefits to the public have been shown to be critical components of building the public trust.

Three decades ago, Howard Bowen (1977) wrote a classic work *Investment in Learning* in which he discussed the purposes and outcomes of higher education as being both individualistic and collective. He proposed that while Americans have historically leaned toward an individualistic purpose for education, there are inevitable social functions of higher education – as agents of social change and agents of social stability. Bowen (1974) observed that the public or social benefits of higher education are often more subtle and difficult to evaluate than individual benefits, but are, nonetheless, undoubtedly present. The social benefits he identified included: quality of civic and business life; effective citizenship and responsible leadership; community spirit; improved home care and training of children; good public health; public policy change; specialized talent, technological knowledge, and professional earning power; refinement of conduct; cultural heritage preservation; artistic creativity; social problem-solving; economic growth; and military power. Mellow and Heelan (2008) contended that while public benefit or public good is an abstract concept, it manifests in three primary ways – by economic measures, as a civic resource, and as an ethical code. The Spellings Commission report (U. S. Department of Education, 2006) affirmed that “the benefits of higher education are significant both for individuals and for the nation as a whole” (p. 6).

In the opening decade of this century, public benefit emerged as a central focus for higher education. Community college leaders, and leaders in all realms of higher education, were called upon more than ever to engage their external constituents – to discern public needs, establish priorities, align college missions, assessment and reporting – so that their efforts would not only be effective but also understood. In response to this

climate, Wellman (2006) called for education leaders to frame and articulate their work and develop corresponding accountability structures.

Institutions began to find that improving the public's understanding of the work and contributions of post-secondary education was no small task, requiring reciprocal communication, including continuous gathering of public feedback and opinion and continuous communication from institution to constituents. The American Council on Education (2006) launched a campaign, *Solutions for our Future*, to address the public's concern about higher education. The campaign cited societal benefits of a college-educated citizenry such as higher income, better health/life expectancy, more leisure time, better outcomes for children, improved voting rates, reduced incarceration, improved interest in service, better racial understanding, and active thinking processes. The College Board's report *Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society* (2007) similarly asserted that post-secondary education does pay, having a high rate of return not only for individuals, but for society as well. "We all benefit from the higher tax revenues, the greater productivity, the lower demands on social support programs, and the greater levels of civic participation of college-educated adults" (p. 7). The College Board's stated intent was to address the public's questions about investing in higher education, acknowledging that not all the benefits of higher education can be quantified.

In the community college arena, building public support was viewed as one of the six key policy levers of the *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* initiative, led by the Lumina Foundation. The initiative focused on the benefits of an associate

degree, including the individual benefits of increased earnings, improved health care, leisure time, and opportunities for the next generation – and the community benefits of economic development, lowered poverty rates, reduced unemployment, reduced reliance on social safety-net programs, and overall decreased demand on public budgets. From this initiative, a non-profit organization was created ‘Achieving the Dream: Helping More Community College Students Succeed.’ As of this writing, public trust building remained central to its mission. Its website outlined the initiative and its “Approach” to improving community college success; two of the four approaches referred to improving public understanding and interaction with community colleges: ‘Influencing Public Policy’ and ‘Engaging the Public’ (Achieving the Dream, 2012).

Public communication also became increasingly recognized as central to building and sustaining the public trust. Public trust, or the social contract between higher education and the people it serves, was increasingly identified as perhaps the most important asset of higher education (Leveille, 2006). In an era of increased calls for accountability in higher education, community colleges began to realize they had to address this public trust by involving local constituents, demonstrating successes through multiple measures, improving communications, and generally paying attention to the public image (Lanaan, 2001). At the national level, the AACCC (2012) acknowledged the need for increased communication as it launched a “listening tour” in 2011, travelling across the nation in preparation for its new 21st century initiative *Reclaiming the American Dream*. In the Northwest, *The Oregon Community Colleges’ Student Success Plan* (Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, 2008a)

stated that, as part of the public agenda, Oregon community colleges would have to “change the state’s culture regarding the importance of postsecondary education” (p. 7). And four years later in Oregon, a legislatively-established Education Investment Board conducted a series of community forums throughout the state, asserting as one of its goals, to provide “a greater return for the taxpayers’ investment” (Oregon Education Investment Board, 2012, “Goals of the OEIB?” para. 1).

Public communication at the local level by college presidents and other community college leaders was also underscored as an important aspect of building and maintaining the public trust. Spilde (2010) encouraged legislative advocacy and relationship-building. Duncan and Ball (2011) cited accountability as a “pillar of effective advocacy” (p. 61), contending that college presidents should work closely with elected officials at all levels.

In summary, this sub-section of the literature review has highlighted the concept of public trust, the social contract between higher education and the community, and how to build it: by identifying the public benefits of higher education through multiple performance measures, communicating those benefits to the public, and involving local constituents. Research regarding the involvement or engagement of local constituents will be addressed more thoroughly in the following section.

Community engagement in higher education. How, then, in the climate of accountability, do institutions foster community connections and communicate the ways in which they contribute to the public good? This section of the literature review addresses the manifestation of the agenda of public accountability and trust in higher

education through higher education's increasing promotion of 'community engagement' endeavors. The concept of community engagement emerged out of the interest in higher education's accountability to its public, acquiring such attention in post-secondary education as to be called a *movement* (Maurrasse, 2001; Watson, 2007).

Ernest Boyer was one of the first voices to promote the importance of community engagement for institutions of higher education (Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004; Langworthy, 2005; Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2006). In both *The Scholarship of Engagement* (1996) and *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Boyer encouraged universities to expand their view of scholarship and to connect the campus to society: "Clearly, higher education and the rest of society have never been more interdependent than they are today" (1990, p. 76).

Boyer's message took hold. Community engagement appeared to be an "increasingly salient objective for higher education institutions" (Watson, 2007, p. 3). In 2001, the W. K. Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities report *Returning to our Roots - The Engaged Institution* concluded that it was imperative for universities to extend themselves beyond mere outreach and service to a deeper level of community engagement. One of higher education's challenges was noted as the "growing public frustration with what is seen to be our unresponsiveness" (p. 13). A review of the impact of that report indicated that the topic of engagement represented a major concern for higher education reform (McPherson, 2007). Maurrasse (2001) contended that the fate of communities rests with the fate of higher education, though,

unfortunately, colleges and universities are often underutilized assets in local communities.

Researchers exploring the concept of community engagement in higher education have offered various definitions, views, and benchmarks, but with a common thread: exploring the interactions between college and community. Fisher, Fabricant, and Simmons (2004) outlined common forms of college-community engagement as service learning, local economic development, community-based research, social work initiatives. Ramaley's (2005) definition highlighted the common theme of genuine mutuality: "Engagement... [is] characterized by shared goals, a shared agenda, agreed upon definitions of success...The resulting collaboration or partnership is mutually beneficial and is likely to build the capacity and competence of all parties" (p. 18). Holland (2005) asserted that, for many institutions, focusing on the issues of the surrounding community clarifies identity, goals, and performance, while also improving political and financial support from the community. Ostrander (2004) maintained that higher education is propelled toward community engagement by five various forces: (a) criticisms of higher education; (b) the reinvigoration of national civic participation; (c) the call for relevance of academic knowledge; (d) pressing public needs; and (e) practical matters of space and community relations.

The most recognized benchmarking for community engagement was the framework established by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006-2010) for a Community Engagement classification. Defined by Carnegie (2006-2010) as "the collaboration between institutions for the mutually beneficial exchange of

knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity,” the Community Engagement classification was outlined thus in a press release about the program:

Curricular Engagement: describes teaching, learning and scholarship which engage faculty, students and community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. Their interactions address community-identified needs, deepen students’ civic and academic learning, enhance community well-being, and enrich the scholarship of the institution.

Outreach and Partnership Engagement: describes two different but related approaches to community engagement. The first focuses on the application and provision of institutional resources for community use with benefits to both campus and community. The latter focuses on collaborative interactions with community and related scholarship for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration and application of knowledge, information and resources (research, capacity building, economic development, etc.). (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2008, para. 5)

The advent of this new Community Engagement classification for colleges and universities was perhaps the keenest gauge of the significance of the so-called community engagement movement. Through an elective application process offered to college and universities for the first time in 2006, 76 institutions were chosen for the inaugural classification. Of those 76 institutions granted Community Engagement classification status, four were community colleges: Chandler/Gilbert Community College in Arizona, Kapiolani Community College in Hawaii, and Middlesex Community College and Bristol Community College in Massachusetts.

In the 2008 Community Engagement classifications, 119 institutions were successfully recognized with the Community Engagement classification. Nine community colleges were recognized: Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland, Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts, Hocking College in Ohio, Miami Dade College in Florida, Mount Wachusett Community College in Massachusetts,

Northampton Community College in Pennsylvania, Owens Community College in Ohio, Northwest Florida State College in Florida, and Raritan Valley Community College in New Jersey. In 2010, 115 colleges and universities were selected for the Community Engagement classification. Of those 115, six were community colleges: Norwalk Community College in Connecticut, North Shore Community College in Massachusetts, Jefferson Community College in New York, Collin County Community College District and Blinn College in Texas, and Bergen Community College in New Jersey.

Community engagement took hold as a movement inside institutions as well. Colleges and universities began developing institution-wide infrastructures to support community engagement efforts. Walshok (1999) called for both academic and administrative infrastructures in order to respond interactively to the surrounding community. To that end, colleges and universities developed engagement plans; established new outreach and engagement administrative structures; generated engagement benchmarks and outcome indicator categories; created websites; held conferences; expanded service learning, economic development, community-based research, and social work initiatives; and developed new community engagement journals.

The University of Pennsylvania's Center for Community Partnerships was cited by Watson (2007) as the "brand leader" (p. 68) in *Community Engagement*. Brown University's Swearer Center for Public Service, the Bates College Center for Service-Learning, Portland State University's Center for Academic Excellence, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Democracy and Citizenship and Office for Civic

Engagement were noted as having national reputations when chosen for a comparative study of civic engagement (Ostrander, 2004). The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), an alliance of the Big Ten Universities and the University of Illinois, was recognized for its 2005 recommendations on community engagement benchmarking (CIC Committee on Engagement, 2005). Examples of newly-instigated professional journals included the University of Alabama's *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, launched in the fall of 2008, and the University of Georgia's *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. The ninth annual National Outreach Scholarship Conference was held at Pennsylvania State University in 2008. In 2004, Fisher, Fabricant, and Simmons summarized university-community projects with the word "proliferation." Yet, in 2007, a more cautious view was expressed by Butin: "All too often the rhetoric of community engagement outpaces the reality" (p. 34). That said, Simpson's (2011) research study of 13 community-engaged-classified institutions revealed that the perceived benefits of community engagement practices to the community and to the institution were high.

Much of the community engagement activity was stimulated early on by the Campus Compact, a coalition of colleges and universities committed to reconnecting higher education and the community, and by the 1998 Wingspread Conference, a gathering of exemplary campus/community partners (Zlotkowski, et al., 2004). According to Zlotkowski et al. (2004), the Campus Compact conducted a multi-year research project to identify successful higher education-community engagement activities. The initial year of the project focused on community colleges because

of their inherent connection with their communities and because there had been little study of these connections. The research project highlighted best practices in five key areas: institutional culture; curriculum and pedagogy; faculty culture; mechanisms and resources; and community-campus exchanges. The study advanced three unique points about community colleges' Community Engagement: (a) community colleges viewed themselves as members of their communities; (b) community colleges' commitment to the community was observable in all parts of the college; (c) community college service learning was integrated into other civic, pre-professional, and academic community-based learning opportunities.

The majority of community college community engagement-related writing and resources primarily addressed two aspects of the community engagement concept: service learning and partnerships. This observation was supported by the Campus Compact IOEP which identified experiential pedagogies and service learning as key activities, and by the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (formerly the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges), committed to civic engagement through service learning. Additionally, the AACC's website cited a range of community-focused activities including student-community projects and workforce partnerships (<http://www.aacc.nche.edu>).

Over two decades ago, the AACC created a Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, culminating in the report *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century* (1988) which promoted the community mission of community colleges: "Building communities should become the rallying point for the community college in

America” (p. 7). In response to that report, AACC, in partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, launched the Beacon College Project in 1989 which funded a range of community-building projects addressing teaching, tolerance, and service to the community (Barnett, 1995). Then in 2002, AACC’s publication *Community College Engagement in Community Programs and Services* highlighted national survey results of community college community programs and services (Phinney, Schoen, & Hause, 2002). At that time, the nature of highlighted community program and services was broad: 82% of community colleges included community programs and service as part of their mission statements; 55% held community service events; 45% provided service learning opportunities; 51% provided diversity awareness training; 29% offered leadership training; 68% facilitated community summits on local issues; 62% held health fairs for the community; and 76% provided access to arts and cultural events.

The literature reviewed for this section supported the idea that community colleges have been viewed as intrinsically more community-focused than their university counterparts, and have been often seen as having the most successful community-based programs in the United States (Bromley, 2006). In fact, Watson (2007) commented on the range of higher education-community engagement this way:

At one end of the spectrum is the huge community college network, as its title implies, intimately related with both local economies and political preferences. At the other there is the pinnacle of private, research-intensive universities, often having fraught and tense relationships with their immediate localities. (p. 66)

Yet, even with this acknowledgement of community colleges' connections to their communities, community colleges have remained largely outside scholarly discourse about community engagement. Maurrasse (2002) noted that "one of the great ironies of the burgeoning national movement around higher education/community partnerships...is the limited involvement of community colleges" (p. 179). He went on to encourage community colleges to get involved in the community engagement movement and to share their deep knowledge of working successfully with local communities.

Summary of assessing value: The public agenda of accountability in higher education, public trust and community engagement. In summary, literature addressing the public agenda of accountability in higher education, including the concept of community engagement in higher education, provided a socio-political backdrop for this study. The literature review revealed an evolution of the focus in higher education accountability: from a focus on student enrollment to a focus on student learning, and from a focus on institutional processes to a focus on how the institution is meeting the needs of the public. This public agenda for higher education was evident in a review of emerging state-driven accountability requirements.

Also of importance in this section of the literature review was the review of the community college response to increasing accountability requirements. Community college leaders began expressing concern that state-driven accountability measures were inappropriate and ill-defined for community colleges. A call was made for community college leaders to develop new accountability measures which would measure the complexity of community college impact. To that end, the national community college

association did develop and release an accountability framework in 2011, suggested to better frame the unique work of American community colleges.

This portion of the review also traced the concepts of public trust and public benefit within the literature of higher education accountability, revealing an emphasis on improved connection and communication with the public which has manifested in the community engagement movement. An analysis of the literature on community engagement in higher education revealed universities' explicit emphasis on building and documenting linkages to local communities. The establishment of the Carnegie Foundation's *Community Engagement Classification* was explored, and the comparative absence of community college participation in this elective classification was noted. In fact, a significant discovery in the literature review of community engagement in higher education was the lack of contribution by community college scholars to this arena. The interest in the public benefit, return-on-investment, and community engagement of higher education served as an important underpinning of this study, especially as these topics relate to community colleges.

The Concepts of Rurality, Community, and Community Development

The purpose of this second broad section of the literature review is to establish the conceptual, theoretical, and research-based foundations of four interrelated topics which support the focus of this study. The four subsections of this discussion include: (a) the characterization of rurality; (b) the concept of community theory; (c) the models of community development; and (d) the role of rural community colleges.

The characterization of rurality. This subsection of the literature review looks at concepts and implications associated with rurality in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the rural, place-based context and setting of this study. The discussion includes denotative and connotative descriptors of rurality as well the status of rural development policy.

A characterization of rurality must begin with an acknowledgement that the meaning of rural is more varied than might be expected. In some situations, rural has been defined by data – and in some situations, rural has been defined by image. “Most of us aren’t concerned with what is officially rural; rather, we simply *know it when we see it...* [yet for residents, policymakers, and researchers,] understanding the various ways in which rural is defined is a critical step” (Blakely, 2007).

Multiple definitions for rural have been used by the government for statistical and funding purposes, and debates over appropriate size limits have been ongoing (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) found over 15 different definitions of “rural” used by various federal programs. Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) described the array of definitions as dizzying. The U.S. Census Bureau divides the nation into urban and rural. By the Census Bureau definition in 2010, rural areas comprised open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents located outside urbanized areas and urban clusters. According to this system, in 2010, 19.3% (59.5 million) of the population in the United States was deemed rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b). But debates over the appropriate size limits are ongoing (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008).

The federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has characterized the country as metropolitan and nonmetropolitan (U. S. Office of Management and Budget, 2000). Explaining this characterization on its webpage "What Is Rural?," the United States Department of Agriculture (2012) stated that, in 2003, the OMB designated non-metropolitan areas as either micropolitan – a non-metro county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 people – or noncore – neither metro nor micro; outside the OMB, both these non-metro areas have been generally considered rural.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research service has distinguished counties by a rural-urban density typology designed to capture differences in economic characteristics: farming-dependent, mining-dependent, manufacturing-dependent, federal/state government-dependent, services-dependent, and non-specialized – and social characteristics/policy-relevant themes: housing-stress, low education, low employment, persistent poverty, population lost, non-metro recreation, and retirement destination (Blakely, 2007).

In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics created a school district classification system based on proximity of an address to an urbanized area. Thus the U.S. Department of Education categorized school districts as *city, suburban, town, and rural* based on geography, distance, and density factors (Provasnik et. al., 2007).

A rural distinction – or any place-based distinction – of the nation's colleges and universities did not exist in higher education's Carnegie Classification system until 2006. This revision of the Carnegie Classification added setting and size classifications, including, for two-year institutions – rural-serving, suburban-serving, and urban-serving

– and size distinctions of very small, small, medium, large, and very large (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-10). The addition of these new categories was largely credited to the work of Stephen Katsinas, Vincent Lacey, and David Hardy who advocated the utilization of the new classification system to distinguish rural, suburban, and urban institutions and their similarities and differences (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006).

The Northwest is vastly rural according to these categories. For example, of Oregon's 17 community colleges, only one college was classified as *urban-serving*; two colleges were classified as *suburban-serving*; and the remaining 14 community colleges were classified as *rural-serving* institutions. Four community colleges fell into the *rural, large* category (>7,500 annual unduplicated credit enrollment). Five were classified as *rural, medium* colleges (2,500 to 7,500 annual unduplicated credit enrollment). And five colleges were designated as *rural, small* colleges (<2,500 annual unduplicated credit enrollment) (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-10).

These variously defined classification systems revealed researchers attempting to delineate “rural” as distinguished from suburban and urban, so as to communicate a sense of their scale and scope based on the numbers of people living in an area. Rural in this sense referred generally to a small population available to interact within a large space. An alternative method of defining rural has been termed image-based. Often historical and somewhat stereotypical, these image-based definitions of rural often have been equated with small size, isolation, homogeneity, and a strong sense of local identity (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). Davis and Marema (2008) noted that, even though America

is no longer a predominantly rural nation, “rurality lingers in our DNA...It is both a storehouse of our values and the point of origin for our national mythology” (p. 2). Shortall and Warner (2012) observed, “Rural areas have been seen as both idyllic places of peace and backward areas that shunt the lives of rural people” (p. 3).

The media has used rural images to suggest simpler, slower, rustic, or pastoral impressions. Rural residents themselves may have associated rural more with a way of life than with a geographical orientation (Blakely, 2007). And proponents and critics have been found conversely to maintain that rural places are either idyllic or outmoded (Merrett & Collins, 2008).

Kenneth Wilkinson (1991) asserted in *The Community in Rural America* that the distinguishing characteristic of the term *rural* was its ecological meaning, coming from the Latin word *rus*, conveying *room or open space*. “The study of rural life and community... is the study of the associations between...the territorial element and other essential elements of the community” (p. 57). The variation in these other essential elements of the community confounded any kind of absolute definition of rural.

Indeed, researchers have found rural America to be diverse – and its communities, history, resources, and issues have often diverged (Davis & Marema, 2008; Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). For instance, Davis and Marema (2008) debunked three myths about rural America – that there is a single rural America – that isolation alone makes rural places and people different – and that rural Americans are mostly farmers. At the time of their writing, they pointed out that there was more ethnic and racial diversity in rural America than was generally recognized, with significant

population clusters of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics in various rural regions of the country. They explained that rural America was not as geographically isolated, intellectually deprived, nor trouble-free as rural stereotyping would portray. Many rural Americans, living adjacent to 80% of the U.S. highway system, commuted to metropolitan areas for work, shopping, and medical services. Many rural Americans made excellent use of media and telecommunication technology. Yet, many rural Americans did face geographic separation, lack of transportation, persistent poverty, and a high incidence of drug and alcohol addiction. Finally, they clarified that most rural Americans were not farmers, since less than 2% of rural residents claimed the farm as their primary source of income.

Indeed, Shortall and Warner (2012) maintained that because of the significant changes in rural America since the Industrial Revolution and the resulting differentiation of rural realities, “the concept of rurality is necessarily contingent” (p. 10). Fluharty stated it this way in his 2012 testimony to the Agriculture Committee of the U.S. Senate: “There is no one rural America. It is a diverse, dynamic and ever-changing landscape....” (Energy and Economic Growth, 2012, p. 4).

Thus, these various nuances of rurality converged at one significant point: that the meaning of rural – both its denotation and its connotation – has been important to understand, one rural community at a time. Geographic location, sparse population, and local identity may have been oft-defined factors of rurality, but for the purposes of this study, it is important to understand the myriad nuances of rurality as context for

understanding rural community development and for understanding the role of a rural community college in that development.

In the literature on rurality, definitions of rural have been closely coupled with discussions of rural policy. As Blakely (2007) asserted, the definition of rural has had significant public policy implications. Developing an authentic and coherent perception of rural America has been described as just as critical in this global economy as building a coherent and authentic perception of other countries around the world. Indeed, “if rural America were a separate nation, its population would comprise the world’s twenty-third largest country, following the United Kingdom, France, and Italy” (Davis & Marema, 2008, p. 2). When the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2005) convened a seminar discussion to explore current practices and potential policy changes for improving the conditions in rural America, the assertion was made that, with approximately 80% of the nation’s land and over 20% of the nation’s population, rural American communities do not exist at the *margins* of American society.

The evolution of rural America from homogeneous, agrarian-based communities to widely diverse communities often dominated by nonfarm activities such as manufacturing, services, mining, and government operations has complicated rural policy discussions. More recently, the goals, resources, opportunities, and challenges of rural communities have diverged (Whitener & Parker, 2007). In fact, Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) contended that the differences among rural communities have often been more distinct than the differences between rural communities and their urban counterparts. Some areas of rural America, faced with population and economic decline, have focused

on economic stimulation and community growth, while other areas rich in natural amenities have focused on responding to the rapid population growth, through the provision of roads, services, and schools. Whitener and Parker noted in 2007 that, given the various circumstances of rural communities, “rural policy for the future will need to encompass a broader array of issues...and a different mix of solutions” (p. 5)

In terms of federal policy and solutions, the Rural Development Policy Act of 1980 designated the USDA as the lead agency for rural development, and its work in that area has reflected the diversity of rural communities’ needs. Rural Development in this capacity has encompassed a wide array of legislative interests including commodity price support, farm credit, conservation, export promotion, domestic nutritional assistance (including food stamps), agriculture and food sector research, and accessibility and sustainability of forests. Among the 15 titles of the USDA’s 2008 Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (The Farm Bill), was Title VI: Rural Development. That title included these diverse elements: small town funds; planning, coordination, and implementation of rural community and economic development programs; value-added agricultural activities, including renewable energy and locally and regionally produced agricultural products; water and waste disposal application; broadband expansion to underserved areas; a regional collaborative investment program; and a revised definition of rural for program eligibility (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2008).

However, while the USDA has attempted to accommodate this wide range of interests with regard to rural development, systematic approaches to rural development have been lacking. Critics of rural policy have argued that national rural policy has

lacked a clear focus (Freshwater, 2007; Levere, Pate, Appel, Malkin, Schweke, & Dabson, 2005; Stauber, 2001). Stauber (2001) criticized the nation's one-size-fits-all rural policy model, claiming that it was not the result of informed public discussion and that no public institutions existed to serve the unique needs of rural America. Stauber advocated rural policies that would result in survival of rural America's middle class, reduced rural poverty, and improved quality of the natural environment; further, he asserted a need to demonstrate compelling reasons why the public should invest in rural America.

Because of rural areas' diversity and their need to rely predominately on their own human resources, researchers have come to see local solutions as the key to effective development in rural areas. Freshwater (2007) wrote bluntly about the declining coherence of rural policy, claiming that "changes in the international and domestic economies, technological change and different social values have made the old rural policy obsolete" (p. 15). He asserted that rural development policy should be defined at the local level, and reflect local resources, opportunities, and values. In fact, the USDA (2008) itself has declared that in order to be effective and sustainable, rural development efforts would have to recognize local strengths and weaknesses as well as market realities. It also recommended comprehensive objectives, regional planning and utilization of federal technical assistance exemplified by the establishment of four Regional Centers for Rural Development, each situated in rural areas themselves: the North Central Regional Center at Iowa State University; the Northeast Regional Center at

Pennsylvania State University; the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University; and the Western Rural Development Center at Utah State University.

The themes of place-based development and regional collaboration have been frequently advocated in rural policy efforts. To that end, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (n.d.) supported a multi-year national initiative, *Rural People, Rural Policy*, seeking to build local and regional networks and a systems-change approach to rural policy reform. In Oregon, the non-profit Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) has partnered with the Ford Family Foundation to sponsor the *Ford Institute for Community Building Leadership Program*, providing leadership training to rural communities (Rural Development Initiatives, n.d.). The 2004 conference proceedings from the Center for the Study of Rural America identified seven components needed for rural regions to prosper: a sense of place; engagement by higher education; an entrepreneurial culture; collaboration and cooperation among regional leaders; financial investment from multiple institutions; strong leadership, organizational, and economic infrastructure; and education and training programs to serve the region's goals (Drabenstott, Novack, & Weiler, 2004).

In the face of this evolving and complex rural landscape, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2006) advanced a "New Rural Paradigm" for policy and development consideration. The paradigm focused on a multi-sectoral, place-based approach, characterized by a focus on place rather than sector and investments rather than subsidies. In similar fashion, Fluharty of the Rural Policy Research Institute (Energy and Economic Growth, 2012) continued to advocate for a new

rural policy centering upon innovation and collaboration, strategic and incentivized investments, and regional frameworks.

In summary, the literature review showed rurality to be a concept that has been variously defined and not necessarily widely understood. Denotatively, it has been most often identified by population-related statistics, economic characteristics, geographic settings, or size classifications. Connotatively, rural stereotypes have often included images of isolated, pastoral settings, and a homogeneous, agrarian-based identity. An important theme in the literature was the need to recognize the diversity of contemporary rural America, especially for the purpose of rural policy development. The discussion on rural policy emphasized the importance of local decision-making, place-based development, regional collaboration, and engagement by higher education. This section of the literature review helped to establish the unique situation of rural America, providing context for a deeper understanding of the setting of this study.

The concept of community. The purpose of this section is to further construct the foundational concepts of a rural community for this study. The literature review has revealed that the concepts of *rurality* and *community* are often closely associated, and having explored rurality and needs particular to rural development, the review now turns to community as a concept to further broaden the understanding of the community college and its role in a rural community.

The concept of community has been not only closely associated with the concept of rural, but also like rural, it has been defined in myriad ways. Wilkinson (1991) wrote that community is the “focus of continuing controversies in theory and policy” (p. 1). He

outlined various perspectives on the concept of community – sociological perspectives which focus on aspects of community social life; ecological perspectives which focus on adaptive mechanisms of community; cultural perspectives which focus on institutions and values; organizational perspectives which focus on the structures and relationships between local and larger societies; and social psychological perspectives which focus on community identification and satisfaction. With respect to the sociological approach to the concept of community, Luloff and Krannich (2002) observed that community is not only an important disciplinary topic, but also an important topic of practical application and policy, as evidenced by the renewed interest in community-based topics by sociologists as well as by lay-persons.

Bridger, Luloff, and Krannich (2002) discussed the ebb and flow of community theory, citing the influence of three leading scholars: (a) Talcott Parsons' systems-theory view of community, characterized by patterns of interaction and clear spatial boundaries; (b) Roland Warren's great change thesis which argued that after World War II, communities in America lost their autonomy and local solidarity as a result of their new reliance on extra-local institutions and sources of income; and (c) Kenneth Wilkinson's theory that social interaction serves as the essential element of community by delineating territory, providing local associations, giving direction to collective actions, and promoting community identity.

Wilkinson (1991) stated that the role of community is to meet the needs of people for collective involvement and social definition, arguing that the community has not disappeared nor ceased to be important. And it is Wilkinson's theoretical construct that

has been used for much ensuing community research, including the 50 year follow-up study on a *Rural Life Study Series* published in 1940-43. Considered a seminal study of rural and community life in the U.S., the *Rural Life Study Series* was coordinated by the USDA after the Great Depression in order to provide a holistic picture of community and community change in six American communities: El Cerrito, New Mexico; Sublette, Kansas; Irwin, Iowa; Harmony, Georgia; Landaff, New Hampshire; and Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The follow-up studies were conducted using comparative ethnographic case studies, and study editors Richard Krannich and A.E. Luloff (2002) wrote that the key finding from the restudy was the persistence and vibrancy of the communities. They noted key factors contributing to the sustainability of these communities: episodic localized efforts to address shared needs and concerns, the significance of cultural traditions and belief systems, the importance of localized institutions to community involvement, the assistance of a broad range of governmental development programs and policies, and the spatial relationships to regional urban centers.

Seventeen years after Wilkinson's writing, Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) observed that while sociologists use the term community in many ways, they ascribe to three defining aspects of the term community: a place or location; a social system; and a shared, common identity. They maintained that a shared sense of place, involving human, cultural, and environmental relationships, is often central to the concept of community.

In summary, the concept of community has been often associated with the concept of rural. That intersection of the two concepts has included the elements of social interaction, a localized place, and a common identity. These intersecting elements informed this study of a community and its community college.

Models of community development. The concepts of rurality and community previously discussed, emphasizing place-based context, social interaction, and local solutions, provide the backdrop for a review of community development models. This section of the literature review gives a review of six theoretical models of community development, including the Community Capitals Framework, which is discussed in more detail.

In 1980, James Christenson opened the book *Community Development in America*, with the sentence: “The community development profession is coming of age” (p. 3). That said, Christenson went on to note that in spite of the growth in community development activities, the terminology and the profession of community development remained ambiguous.

Three decades later, that same sentiment of community development ambiguity has continued as a theme in the literature, and Christenson’s (1980, 1989) typology of community development has been frequently referenced as an initial framework for the discussion of community development (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Green & Haines, 2002). Christenson’s typology advanced three models for community development: (a) self-help models, (b) technical assistance models, and (c) conflict models. The self-help or cooperative approach utilizes the premise of helping people help themselves. The

practitioner/change agent assumes a role of facilitator/educator, and the emphasis is on process, and on residents having ownership in the development process (Christenson, 1980). Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) explained that the self-help approach to community development often uses a social action process which includes visioning; goal-setting; broad-based participation; asset-analysis; and planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The technical assistance approach utilizes the premise of situation assessment, identification of community need, information/causal analysis, solution recommendation and implementation, rational planning and assessment. The practitioner/change agent assumes a role of advisor/consultant, and the emphasis is on the task to be performed and the outcome of the effort as opposed to building the capacity of residents (Christenson, 1980).

The conflict approach utilizes the premise of community problems and community members' lack of power. The practitioner/change agent assumes a role of advocate and organizer, and the emphasis is on confronting issues with the local power structure. Christenson (1980) maintained that the conflict approach to community building is often used to pursue a goal such as justice or equality. Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) added that those using the conflict approach to community building make use of suspicions of formal community power.

In addition to Christenson's (1980, 1989) models of community development, three more current modes of community development have been added to the community development discussion: Green and Haines (2002) discussion of *Asset-Building*; Pigg and Bradshaw's (2003) discussion of *Catalytic Community Development*; and Flora and

Flora's (2008, 2013) discussion of *Appreciative Inquiry and the Community Capitals Framework*.

Green and Haines (2002) approached the process of community development in terms of building on community assets rather than addressing community needs. Thus, asset-mapping replaces needs assessment as the initial step in community development efforts and considers five types of community assets – physical, human, social, financial, and environmental. Green and Haines also asserted that community development is directed toward the community of place and is accomplished through public participation of local residents and community-based organizations. At a 2005 W.K. Kellogg Foundation seminar *The State of 21st Century Rural America: Implications for Policy and Practice*, asset-based community development was named as the “most frequently cited theory of community development” (p. 6), a theory which builds on existing community resources – finding them, connecting them and mobilizing them in strategic ways for community benefit.

Pigg and Bradshaw (2003) advanced ‘catalytic community development’ which emphasizes expanding local capacity by leveraging local resources and finding local solutions. Essentially, they maintained that rural community development should be community-based, characterized by the following six features: capacity-building of knowledge, skills, and resources; empowerment of diverse community residents; collaboration that creates linkages among a diverse network of organizations; an expanded, regional locus of activity and relationship; open access to information

including government, education, and nonprofit sources and broadband technologies; and comprehensive, rather than categorical development goals and activities.

The third new mode of community development, promoted by Flora and Flora (2008, 2013) advocates an asset-based premise to community development, similar to that advanced by Green and Haines (2002). “Every community, however rural, isolated, or poor, has resources within it. When those resources...are invested to create new resources, they become *capital*” (Flora & Flora, 2008, p.17). By adopting the *Appreciate-Inquiry* (AI) approach, Flora and Flora affirmed the importance of building on strengths, recognizing what is working, and seeking out success factors in community development studies. They utilize the AI approach in the context of their own Community Capitals Framework (CCF) (Figure 2) which identifies seven types of capital found within healthy and sustainable communities: natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, financial capital, and built capital. The CCF offers a view of the whole community system and how the capitals interact.

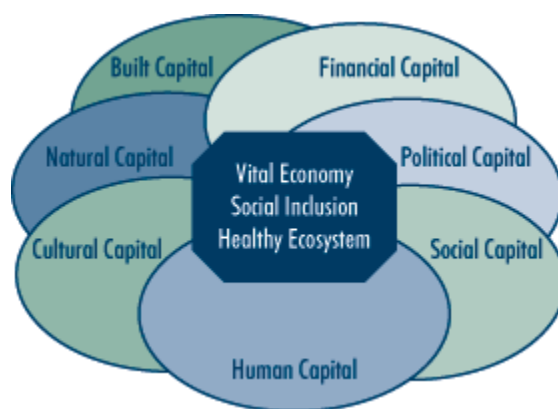


Figure 2. Community Capitals Framework. From Rural communities: Legacy and change, 3rd edition, p. 19, by C. B. Flora and J. L. Flora, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008.

The seven community capitals are defined as follows:

1. Natural capital is the natural resources, beauty and amenities of a locale – its landscape, climate, air, and water – on which all other capitals depend.

2. Cultural capital includes the dynamic of heritages, values, generations, races, and ethnicities. It reflects what voices are heard, listened to, have influence and what voices are hegemonic; it is the way people know the world.

3. Human capital refers to the skills and abilities of individuals, including leadership capacity and ability to access resources. Both formal and informal education and experience create human capital.

4. Social capital, both bonding and bridging, is the social glue of a community. Social capital includes the networks, mutual trust, and norms of reciprocity that are key to community prosperity.

5. Political capital describes the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources. It includes power, voice, connections, and organizations.

6. Financial capital is money that is used for investment in community capacity-building rather than consumption, including government monies, grants, contracts, investments, philanthropy, and reallocations.

7. Built capital includes infrastructure that supports the community such as housing, buildings, schools, utilities, road and transportation infrastructure, and telecommunications infrastructure.

A key aspect of the CCF, an initiative of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University, is the interaction among the seven capitals

and the way in which an investment in one capital can build assets in others (Flora et al., 2004). In a presentation at the 5th annual *Community Capitals Framework Institute*, Blewett (2008) explained that when assets are invested to create new resources which will serve the community for a long horizon of time, they become community capital. For instance, in one community research evaluation, Emery and Flora (2006) conducted a systemic analysis of community and economic development endeavors using the CCF and found that a leadership development training process, which resulted in great increases of social capital, in turn influenced the development of other capitals, and emerged as a critical factor in that community's transformation.

In a case study report on rural community development, Flora, Bregendahl, Fey, Chen, and Friel (2004) emphasized the holistic lens of the CCF, noting that community development is complex and multi-sectoral compared with economic development. In another study, the CCF was used to review exemplary case studies of community and economic development in 57 communities in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Fey, Bregendahl, & Flora, 2006). This three-part CCF research model analyzed: (a) the context or the pre-existing community characteristics and the impetus for community development; (b) the process of community and economic development actions, investments, and interventions initiated as change strategies; and (c) the results as outputs and outcomes of community change. In their concluding remarks, the researchers noted that rural communities which recognized that their challenges were interrelated and approached their community development efforts accordingly set themselves apart from others.

The kind of studies which have utilized the CCF have been assorted, highlighting a range of applications including a built-capital political-capital impact study (Olson, 2007); new pioneer [rural resident] case studies (Abrahamson, 2007); and a sustainability-values land-use paper (Collins, 2006). The University of Minnesota Extension adapted the CCF to its need for a collective approach to both program improvement and accountability. The Extension modified terminology to refer to the capitals as *domains of impact* and targeted social units, community groups, and industry sectors instead of rural communities. The Extension leaders also highlighted the use of the CCF for communicating with key stakeholders (Chazdon, Bartholomay, Marczak, & Lochner, 2007). Blewett (2008) advocated the use of the CCF as an assessment tool to gather perceptions about the strength of capitals within a community, as a tool to map assets or strategies or results in a community, and as a tool to identify unique partnership opportunities.

Summary of rurality, community, and community development. In summary, this section reviewed six prominent theories of community development including the self-help model, the technical assistance model, the conflict-based model, the asset-based model, the catalytic model, and the appreciative inquiry-CCF model. The CCF model, used to inform this study, emphasizes a holistic appraisal of the interaction of seven community capitals (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial, and built) and their contribution to successful communities. This appreciative-inquiry-based model has proven itself to be a versatile, flexible tool for communities for a range of purposes.

The Role of Rural Community Colleges

The purpose of this section is to review the existing literature on rural community colleges. This discussion highlights the key themes and regional sources of the prevailing literature.

In literature reviewed exploring the scope of rural community colleges in the first decade of this century, it was found that, of America's 896 publicly-controlled two-year community and technical college districts, 553 or 62% were classified by the Carnegie Foundation as *rural-serving* community college districts (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Nearly a third of the nation's community college student enrollments occurred at rural community colleges (Hardy, 2005). In Oregon, for example, approximately 60% of the state's unduplicated student enrollment occurred at the 14 rural-serving institutions while approximately 40% occurred at the state's three urban/suburban-serving institutions (Oregon Department of Community Colleges & Workforce Development, 2008b). This kind of disaggregation of state and national data has underscored the central role played by rural community colleges in this country (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007).

The best-known research regarding the role of the rural community college has grown out of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), a 1994-2001 demonstration project to promote economic development and increase access to post-secondary education in distressed areas of rural America. This initiative, involving 24 rural community colleges from 11 states, was funded by the Ford Foundation, managed by MDC Inc., and assessed by the American Association of Community Colleges.

In *Rural Colleges as Catalysts for Community Change: The RCCI Experience*, Rubin (2001) stressed the importance of community colleges' mission, capacity, and position in the community for place-based economic development and people-based education. The results of the first phase of the RCCI were advanced as a state policy framework in six areas: economic and community development; access to education; workforce preparation; technology; funding; and governance (Chesson & Rubin, 2002). Common themes among the examples of rural revitalization were empowerment, social capital, innovation, and collaboration. "RCCI has shown that rural community colleges, when empowered to innovate, can be catalysts for rural development" (Chesson & Rubin, 2002, p. 3).

A second phase of the RCCI initiative, in 2002-2007, was also Ford-Foundation-funded; this time managed by USDA-supported regional rural development centers, the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC) at Mississippi State University and the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) at Iowa State University (Rural Community College Alliance, n.d.). Its goals were still economic development and educational access, but with an added dimension of civic engagement. The notion was to utilize the two regional centers within the land grant institutions to institutionalize the initiative and develop sustainable relationships among the community colleges, the land-grant universities, and the communities.

Evaluation of the Southern Rural Development Center's RCCI program revealed three key factors supporting community colleges' outreach roles: committed and well-funded partners; a culture of change; and focus on economic development and

educational access (Salant & Kane, 2007). Evaluation of the North Central Regional Center's RCCI program yielded a list of success factors which included: flexible, albeit limited, funding; a strategy to identify assets; connecting *passion for place* to action; new collaborations; and coaching expertise (Emery, 2008).

Finally, a continuing outcome of the RCCI has been the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA), an organization of rural colleges primarily from Appalachia, the South, the Southwest, and the Northern Plains Indian Reservations. The RCCI seeks to provide peer learning and support and to represent the voice of rural community colleges regarding challenges of rural America such as changing economies and demographics and disconnected public policies (Scaggs, 2004).

The *Mid South Partnership for Rural Community Colleges*, a research and technical assistance partnership among Mississippi's land grant institutions and southern community colleges, credits its beginning to the RCCI as well. In the paper *Invigorating Rural Economies: The Rural Development Mission of Mississippi's Community Colleges* (Rubin, Cejda, Fluharty, Lincoln, & Ziembroski, 2005), recommendations were made to both community colleges and the state. Recommendations to the colleges included: (a) Shift the college's mindset to place more emphasis on the college's role in the community; (b) Expand the benchmarks by which the college measures its success; and (c) Be a strong voice in rural development initiatives. Recommendations to the state included: (a) Encourage community colleges to play expanded roles in community and economic development; (b) Make community colleges eligible grantees for community

and economic development programs; and (c) Publicly recognize community college for their work in community and economic development.

Beyond the extensive RCCI research, there has been additional interest in the role of rural community colleges in the communities they serve. Frequently-covered topics in the literature on community colleges included: a) the issues faced by rural community colleges, especially fiscal-related challenges; b) leadership in rural community colleges; and c) the institutions' roles in economic development.

Research regarding the issues, especially fiscal challenges, that rural community colleges face has highlighted the symbiotic relationship between a rural community and its community college. Fluharty and Scaggs (2007) wrote about rural community colleges serving rural communities which have limited financial resources: "Rural community colleges and their communities share a common destiny" (p. 19). They noted that while parts of rural America are prospering, other areas are in economic decline or mired in poverty. The downward spiral of state funding for community colleges and its impact on rural community colleges was also addressed by Rosessler, Katsinas, and Hardy (2006), who noted that rural-serving community colleges appear to be the most vulnerable to funding shortages. Hardy and Katsinas (2007) then discussed the similarities and differences between rural community colleges and urban and suburban colleges, highlighting the fiscal challenges faced by rural community colleges and noting the need for rural leaders and policymakers to take into account the uniqueness of rural community colleges. Johnson's (1999) dissertation study of institutional capacity and financial base at small, medium, and large rural community colleges made

recommendations for state policy considerations regarding rural community colleges' geography, poverty, size, economies of scale, and tuition. Seven years later, Rudibaugh's (2006) research suggested that community colleges which serve poor, rural regions gain from developing regional, national, and even global networks and entrepreneurial activities which allow them to tap into new funding sources and student markets. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) conducted a study in Kansas which cited challenges for rural community colleges that included funding inequities among rural community colleges as well as challenges with technology, grant writing, hiring, and an evolving mission. They also cited geographical and economic community contexts and systemic and programmatic community college contexts as long-time challenges.

In the second vein of rural community college research, studies related to rural community college leadership have often focused on the leadership challenges and opportunities related to place and relationships at rural community colleges. Parker (2010) asserted the importance of community college presidents taking on leadership roles in the community. Leist (2007) cited rural geography, rural politics, and rural culture as unique challenges for rural community college presidents. Clark and Davis (2007) stressed the importance of a rural community college president's deep engagement with the community in order to develop a systemic view of the relationship between the community and the community college. Hicswa's (2003) research maintained that rural community college presidents play a crucial role in vision-building for the community's development. Her study demonstrated that by building social capital and providing leadership to comprehensive community visioning, the rural community

college president creates hope in rural communities. York's (2001) dissertation study about how community college leaders in Oregon establish connections with other community leaders asserted that community college leaders tend to define the results of their community connections by college outcomes rather than by community impact.

Third, the role of the community college in economic development has been addressed widely, even beyond the previously reviewed research related to the RCCI. As simply stated by Phelps (2012a), "U.S. community colleges have historically played a prominent role in economic and workforce development" (p. 1). This role as an economic engine for the nation was recently expounded on by Boggs (2012), who described community colleges' quick and localized responses to workforce and economic needs. As well, Jacobs (2012) wrote about community colleges having proximity to the local workforce, technical training experience, and program-offering flexibility, all of which have positioned community colleges to engage successfully in local economic development.

Katsinas and Lacey (1989) promoted the unique positioning of community colleges' local delivery systems to meet economic development challenges through their non-traditional economic development programs such as small business development centers and customized training programs. Katsinas's (1994) review of the community college-economic development literature ended with a call for community college leaders to get involved in community college-economic development policy formation. Rosenfeld (2001) emphasized the importance for rural community colleges to build associations in order to serve as a systems integrator and a broker of services and

information within what he called *learning regions*, places where the most successful rural economies would develop and where the most successful community colleges would position themselves.

Dissertations involving rural community colleges and economic development have included Kingry's (1984) study which investigated stakeholder perceptions of Oregon community colleges' roles in local economic development, determining that all stakeholder groups (college administration, college faculty, and the business community) supported the view that community colleges should place even more importance on economic development activities. Currin's (1998) study found that a small, rural community college's economic development contributions were supported by the backdrop of statewide initiatives and institutional commitment, strong college-business connections and close collaboration with economic development organizations. Parker's (2010) study in North Carolina concluded that the primary role of the community college was to support economic development. Gossett's (2002) study of western North Carolina small business owners found that the most important economic development activity for community colleges was perceived to be their job-training programs for existing businesses. Thomas's (2003) dissertation identified successful community college economic development programs and services in rural southwest Virginia, while Haynes's (2006) study focused on the utilization, needs, and gaps in workforce education, training, and retraining of business and industry in rural Mississippi community college districts.

The semantic lines between economic development and community development or community-building have sometimes blurred. But in the literature of rural community colleges, the underlying thesis that rural community colleges' play an important role in the development of the community has been consistent. Harlacher (1969) discussed community development, saying, "It is in the area of community development that the community college has the best opportunity to integrate with community" (p. 29).

Miller and Tuttle's (2007) study of three rural communities identified four outcomes beyond academic programs and job training: developing community inclusiveness, developing community pride, creating a value-added community lifestyle, and being the central defining component of the community. Miller and Kissinger (2007) maintained that rural community college services such as economic development, cultural enrichment, educational opportunity, and leisure programs extend program activity outputs to influence the status and identity of both individuals and the community as a whole.

Noting the heightened importance of rural community colleges to their communities, Eddy and Murray (2007), advocated for collective visioning and planning so that community expectations of rural community colleges are realistic. At the same time, Eddy and Murray called for state and federal policy-makers to address the "rural differential" (p. 102), recognizing that rural development requires a regional approach and that the needs in rural community colleges are not all the same. Over a decade earlier, Valek (1995) observed that rural community colleges were committed to assisting communities with their most crucial needs. She cited community colleges' capacity-

building role through promoting cooperation, maximizing existing resources, and providing consistency over time.

In summary, the literature on the role of rural community colleges can be characterized as quite rich, especially with regard to rural community colleges and economic development in the southern and north central regions of the United States. Much of the activity and ensuing literature has been credited to the RCCIs which promoted economic development and post-secondary access in distressed areas of rural America. Key recommendations from this initiative included a call for state government to encourage and to recognize rural community colleges' role in rural economic development and a call to rural community colleges to place more emphasis on their community role, to advocate for rural development initiatives, and to expand the benchmarks by which community college success is measured.

Three key themes emerged in the literature review of rural community colleges: rural community college issues, rural community college leadership, and rural community college economic development. The literature on rural community college issues related to limited financial resources, exacerbated by weak regional economies and diminishing state resources, and affecting all aspects of a college's operation. The literature on rural community college leadership communicated the unique challenges of and the keen need for strong relationships between community college leaders and their communities. The literature on rural community colleges and economic development emphasized the importance of supporting local economic vitality through a range of education and training roles and collaborations.

Relative to this study, two observations about the literature on rural community colleges were of particular interest. First, the majority of the scholarly literature on rural community colleges has originated from the southern and north-central regions of the country. Community colleges in the Northwest, and especially rural Northwest community colleges, have been essentially absent from the discussion. Second, while the primary theme of rural community college literature has been economic development, these discussions have not employed a systems-view of the broader aspect of college and community interaction and community development.

Summary of Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The literature review proved very helpful for establishing the conceptual, theoretical, and scholastic background of this study. Moreover, as the review of the literature progressed, I began to recognize connections and relationships among significant concepts in the different areas of literature which eventually led to the development of a framework that comfortably (and I believe, coherently) linked my personal research perspective, the focus of my research study, and my chosen research strategy. As well, the literature review revealed opportunities where this study might one day contribute to the literature base, daily practice, and policy discussions.

Key findings in the literature that have shaped my study include: (a) the emerging focus on the public agenda of accountability in higher education, especially with regard to the call for articulation of public benefit; (b) the mounting activity and corresponding literature related to community engagement in higher education, including the Carnegie Foundation's new Community Engagement classification; (c) the dearth of community

college contribution to the community engagement literature; (d) the myriad voices calling for better measures of the community colleges' complex mission and impact on local communities, especially related to state performance measures; (e) the need to better understand rural America's diversity, needs, and policy directions; (f) Wilkinson's theory of community which emphasizes social interaction, localized place, and common identity; (g) the assets-based, systems-view lens of community development found in Flora and Flora's CCF; (h) the absence of literature on rural community colleges in the Northwest; and (i) the absence of literature on community colleges' impact on community development, especially through an appreciative, holistic lens.

CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

As stated in Chapter One, the focus of this study was to describe and understand the relationship of a rural community college with its local community: the place-based context of the rural community and community college, college-community engagement, and the resulting impact of the college-community interaction on community development. As I examined the community college's role in the development of the community, my intent was to provide a holistic, community-based view of college-community interactions and results.

Research Paradigm

Given the study purpose and my personal research perspective as a social constructivist, I chose interpretive research from among three broad research traditions – positivist, interpretive, and critical – as the appropriate research orientation for my study.

Conceptually, the constructivist-interpretive paradigm is characterized by a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and interpretive, naturalistic methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). According to Schwandt (1998), the interpretive researcher seeks to understand the “complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (pp. 221-222). Indeed, the researcher's concern for understanding the emic perspective and the meaning people construct as they interact in their social worlds is central to interpretive research (Merriam, 1998).

Also, the approach of the interpretive researcher is holistic (Schwandt, 1998). The researcher considers how the parts contribute to the whole and recognizes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts: “A description and understanding of a person's social

environment or an organization's political context is essential for overall understanding of what is observed" (Patton, 1990, p. 49). According to Stake (1995), the researcher must look at interconnections and context – temporal, spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal. As well, interpretive research is inductive and oriented toward discovery and exploration, minimizing "investigator manipulation of the study setting" (Patton, 1990, p. 41).

These conceptual tenets of the interpretive paradigm translate pragmatically to five central characteristics of interpretive research (Merriam, 1998). These characteristics aligned with my research purpose and my preferred research role: (a) I wanted to understand the meaning that individuals construct as they live and interact with their social world; (b) I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, thus able to be responsive to the context and data collection situations; (c) My research was conducted in the field so that I could familiarize myself with both the context and the participants of the study; (d) I used an inductive research strategy; and (e) The product of my study is descriptive and interpretive. With this epistemological foundation and research paradigm, I chose to utilize a case study research strategy.

Rationale for Research Strategy

I chose the case study strategy because of its emphasis on understanding processes and contexts. This strategy aligned with the focus of my study – the interaction of a rural community college and a rural community – and supported my inquiry into the relationships that exist among an environmental context, an organization, and social processes. "The key feature of the case study approach is not method or data, but the emphasis on understanding processes as they occur in their context" (Hartley, 2004, p. 332). To understand the complex phenomenon of the

case, I strove to view the case through the emic, experiential perspective of the study participants, and at the same time, maintain my own etic perspective in order to make conceptual, theoretical sense of the case (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

Case study is termed a *bounded* system by Creswell (1998), and Yin (2003) wrote that case study is the appropriate approach “when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context” (p. 4). Certainly, the interplay of context and case was a salient feature of my study. Further, the purpose of my study lent itself to an *instrumental* case study distinction, in that the intent is to advance understanding of the relationship of the community college and the community and the resulting community development: “A particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory...[it] is looked at in depth, its context scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed...because this helps us pursue the external interest” (Stake, 1994, p. 237). And finally, I utilized a *single* case design, because it was appropriate for in-depth exploration (Hartley, 2004).

Theoretical Framework of Study

In addition to my social constructivist research perspective and my choice of a case study research strategy, the theoretical concepts that emerged as a scaffold for my research study included: (a) the concepts of rurality and community; (b) systems theory and the Community Capitals Framework; and (c) college-community engagement and the relationship of higher education to public benefit. Many scholars endorse the importance of a theoretical scaffold in qualitative research. Hartley (2004) asserted that, in qualitative research, “The value of theory is key” (p. 324). Merriam (1998) maintained that theory permeates the entire qualitative research process. “All aspects of the study are affected by its theoretical framework...The very questions

you raise derive from your view of the world” (pp. 47, 49). Yin (2003) advocated reliance on theoretical concepts to guide the design and data collection of case studies, because theory places the study in appropriate research literature and helps define the unit of analysis, which is ultimately, the case itself.

A systems perspective, represented by the Community Capitals Framework (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013), informed this study. The systems perspective, such as advanced by Capra (1996), emphasized the interconnectedness of parts to a “functional whole.” In this study, the functional whole was the community, and my goal was to understand the community embedded in its natural and social environment and the interdependence of its parts. Patton (1990) included systems theory as one of ten theoretical traditions in qualitative research, noting the merit of a systems orientation in “making sense of” (p. 79) qualitative data as well as the world’s complexities.

Figure 3 represents the theoretical framework of this study.

Case Selection, Site Access, and Study Participants

The case for this study was a rural Northwest community and the rural community college within it. I selected a small, rural-serving community college, utilizing the Carnegie Classification of Colleges and Universities. It is classified as a small, rural-serving college with an annual unduplicated credit enrollment of under 2,500 students (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2006-10). The college is located in a mainly agricultural community, within a large seven-county region. The main campus of the college is situated in a city of about 14,000 people.

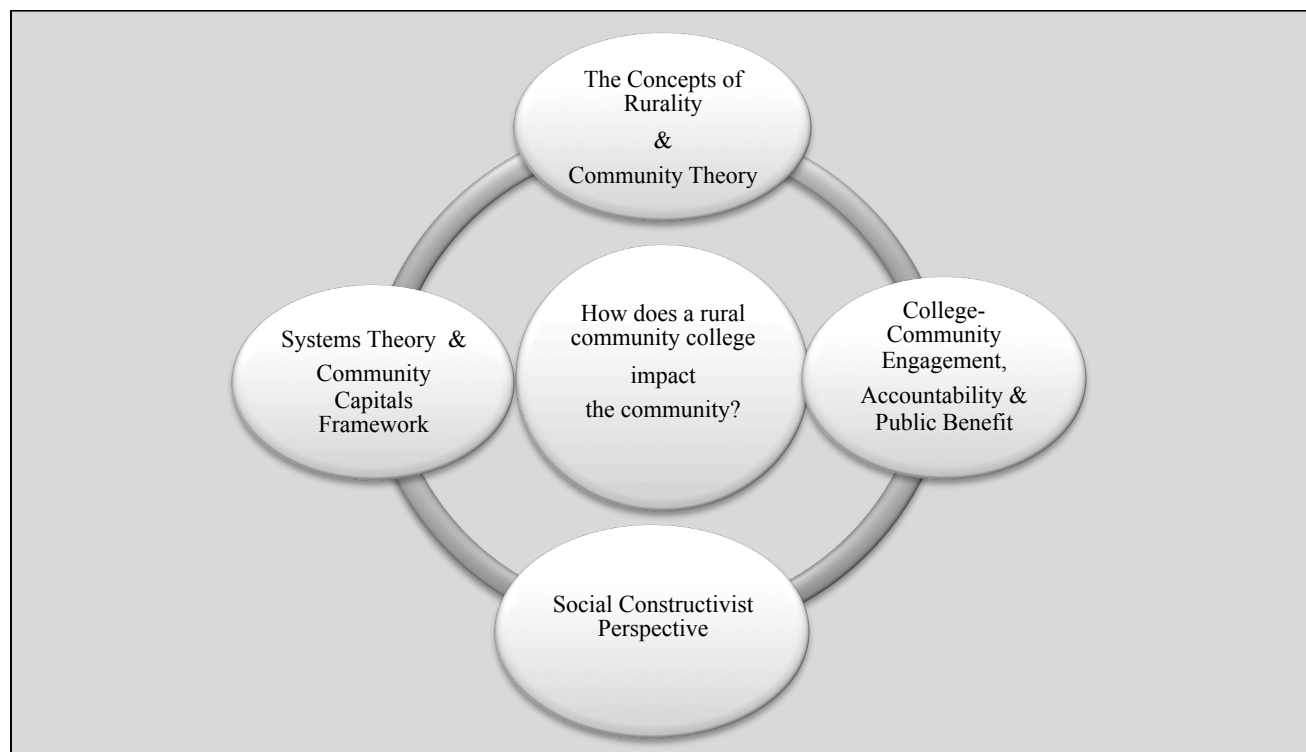


Figure 3. The study's theoretical framework.

I have chosen this college (and therefore, this community) from the classification of small, rural community colleges in the Northwest based on my professional knowledge of those colleges and communities, “leaning toward [the] case that seems to offer ‘opportunity to learn’ and [taking] the case from which [I] feel [I] can learn the most” (Stake, 1994, p. 243). In choosing the community college, I also took into consideration the importance of the ability to gain access to the community and the community college, gaining approval from the “critical gatekeeper” of the case study site, as suggested by Hartley (2004).

The primary participants in the study were key community leaders; I identified important participant attributes (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994), including community leadership, and utilized a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton 1990), criterion sampling, to select participants

from within the case. I also selected individuals who were apt to be “information-rich” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999) with regard to my focus on college-community engagement. Participants included: elected officials; business and industry executives; and health, education, and human services leaders. By including a variety of key community leaders, I hoped to discover an array of perceptions of the community college’s role in community development. As Patton (1990) explained, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases...from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169).

Data

I followed a basic logic model (See Appendix A) to guide my data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation for this study: (a) data about the context of the community and the community college; (b) data about the process of interaction and engagement of the college and the community; and c) data about the results of that interaction. Also, I utilized selected concepts from the Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification Application (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-10) and the Community Capitals Framework (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013) to inform data gathering, analysis, and interpretation.

Data collection procedures. Consistent with a case study research strategy, I employed multiple qualitative methods of data collection, including document review, individual interviews, and participant observation (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Stake, 1995). Prior to the interview-based data collection, I conducted a preliminary document review by examining databases of county/city socio-economic information; community newspaper archives; college and community websites; college and community planning reports and public

information and marketing documents. Following the document review, I conducted participant observations and individual interviews with 11 study participants over two months, November and December 2009, following the study's Interview Protocol. (See Appendix B)

Data analysis procedures. Before I began the data analysis process, I reviewed the desired products of the data analysis process: (a) a description of the case – the rural community and the rural-serving community college; (b) an analysis of themes related to the process of college-community interaction; and (c) an analysis of themes related to the results of the college-community engagement, including positive changes in the conditions of the community; and (d) an interpretation of the impact of the college on community development (Stake, 1995).

To those ends and through an iterative process, I looked for patterns, themes, and constructs in the data – patterns which identified relationships within the case; themes which described salient, recurrent features of the case; and constructs, new and previously identified in the literature (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999).

First, I personally transcribed all 11 participant interviews. This was an extensive process, but one that truly enhanced my familiarity with and understanding of the interview data. Next, I read and reread the data in order to gain a keen sense of the “overall data,” writing reflective notes in the margins as I read (Creswell, 1998). After ruminating on the holistic sense of the overall data, I sketched my initial ideas (Wolcott, 1994) on large wall-hung concept maps, so that I could have a display of my early observations as a visual backdrop to my subsequent data analysis process.

At that point, I began the process of highlighting certain data through descriptive phrases and looking for “patterned regularities” (Creswell, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). Next, I moved back

and forth between viewing the data holistically, and reducing it by searching for patterns and sorting into categories. Creswell (1998) referred to this process of sorting, categorizing, and reducing data as “winnowing” (p. 140), and Wolcott (1994) made the point that some data may begin to be discarded. Both of these were apt descriptions of my data analysis process – sorting, discarding, resorting, and searching for possible connections and patterns in the data. Creswell (1998) advocated this “process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (p. 154). Hartley (2004) wrote that “Questions lead to further questions...the researcher must be alert to the need to draw on disconfirming data and possible alternative explanations” (p. 329). Toward the end of the categorical aggregation process, I once again wrote my ideas on large wall posters so that I would have that visual backdrop as I began my writing.

As I moved to writing up the research, I endeavored first to create a rich description of the context of the case and to draw out conceptual implications, which went “beyond mere fact and surface appearances” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). At the same time, I was cognizant of the dual responsibility not only to write a thorough description of the case, but also to recognize that the descriptive narrative was not the sole focus of the case as cautioned by Hartley (2004): “Every effort must be made to draw out the wider implications of the study while giving a strong sense of the particular circumstances of the case” (p. 330). And finally, just as data collection and analysis represented an iterative process, so too was the process of writing up this research. Stake (1994) asserted that “Case content evolves in the act of writing itself” (p. 240). And so it was with this study. I wrote several drafts, organizing and reorganizing the salient concepts, always

falling back on the logic model design of the study to provide a basic organization for my writing.

Strategies to Ensure Soundness of Data, Data Analysis, and Interpretation

The following section describes the strategies I used to ensure the soundness of the data. Methodological triangulation, data source triangulation, member-checking, and reflexivity were employed to support the credibility of this study.

Triangulation as a strategy to increase credibility. I used both methodological triangulation and data source triangulation protocols to ensure soundness of the data within this qualitative study (Stake, 1994). I collected data through multiple methods, including interviews, observations, and review of documents, and I collected data from multiple study participants.

For instance, to increase confidence in the soundness of my descriptions of the community and community college context, I spent significant time reviewing a wide range of documents prior to and during my interview and observational data-gathering. College documents included planning documents, self-study reports, public information releases, and web-site postings. Community documents included socio-economic data, governmental and community-based organization planning and study reports, and local newspaper archives, among others. As well, I sought multiple perspectives from 11 different study participants who represented three different civic sectors. Thus, I was engaged in both an iterative methods and data triangulation process as I endeavored to establish trustworthiness of my qualitative study.

Participant feedback as a strategy to increase credibility. I solicited feedback on the transcribed interview data from the individual study participants as a strategy to ensure soundness of the data. Seeking participant feedback or *member-checking* the accuracy of the

data is a widely recognized technique (Creswell, 1998). And since a major tenet of the interpretive study is to represent the emic perspective of the study participants, this strategy supported the credibility and the completeness of the data as well.

Reflexivity as a strategy to increase credibility. In an effort to further ensure the soundness of my study, and in recognition that my involvement as researcher shaped the very nature of my research study, I employed three reflexivity strategies during the course of my study. The strategies included: noting my presuppositions at the beginning of the study and then reviewing those presuppositions during the research process; maintaining research notes in order to depict my feelings during the research process; and listening critically to my taped interviews for the purpose of scrutinizing my personal performance (King, 2004, p. 20). Krefting (1999) cautioned that, because a qualitative researcher is actually part of the research and the researcher's background necessarily "dictates the framework from which he or she will organize, study, and analyze the findings," it is imperative that the researcher "continuously reflect on ... her own characteristics and examine how they influence data gathering and analysis" (p. 177). I endeavored to accomplish that during the course of this study.

Because the researcher is "the primary instrument" in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), I acknowledged the matter of researcher trustworthiness and competence which are inherent to discussions of methodological rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 1990). To those matters, I responded with the "Personal Disclosure" which follows in this chapter, in tandem with the basic design of my research study, which is intended to demonstrate an alignment of a social-constructivist worldview, an interpretive inquiry, qualitative methodologies, inductive analysis, and holistic thinking. Ultimately, I recognize that it is as Patton (1990) suggested:

“The task is to do one’s best to make sense of things....Creativity, intellectual rigor, perseverance, insight – these are the intangibles that go beyond the routine application of scientific procedures” (p. 477).

Strategies for Protection of Human Subjects

In addition to the foundation in research ethics provided in my doctoral program coursework, I successfully completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online course Human Research Curriculum in January 2008. As well, I closely followed the university’s human subjects policy and gained approval through the university’s Institutional Review Board before commencing this study.

Specifically, I utilized the Informed Consent Form process, providing information to and securing signatures from each of the study participants. I maintained all research data in locked filing cabinets and used pass-word-protected computer files. When gathering and analyzing data, I used study participant identification codes, and when writing up the report, I utilized pseudonyms for the study participants, attributing direct quotes by pseudonym.

The strategies discussed above are objective correlatives for the subjective, personal code of ethics which I endeavored to exercise. Simply put, I adhered to Robert Stake’s assertion (1994): “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 244).

Personal Disclosure

I chose to conduct a qualitative study because of my worldview that embraces social constructivism, systems theory, and place-based concepts. I recognized, as discussed in regard to the theoretical framework of the study, that my own personal and professional background,

disciplinary orientation, and literature-based lens became the scaffolding for the theoretical perspective and subsequent purpose, focus, and design of my study.

As stated in Chapter One, I have worked in community colleges over two decades, serving in leadership roles that have afforded me the opportunity to interact with and serve in three unique communities. Those professional experiences have afforded me a range of place-based lenses – from a small, rural college in an agricultural and recreation-based environment – to an urban community college in a technology and manufacturing environment – to a large, rural community college in a government and service-based environment.

At the same time as I have had the opportunity to grapple with local-level questions of college and community development, I have also had the opportunity to grapple with state-level policy-based questions around mission and funding prioritization, performance reporting, public understanding, and systems collaboration. These professional experiences, coupled with my professional preparation, contribute to my worldview and the etic perspective of this research study, as well as my desire to better understand the emic perspective of community leaders in a small, rural community.

Summary of Chapter Three: Design of the Study

In summary, the focus of this study was to describe and understand the relationship of a rural community college with its local community: the place-based context of the rural community and community college; college-community engagement; and the resulting impact of the community college on community development. To conduct this qualitative study, I drew upon my social constructivist perspective, a case study research strategy and a single case design. A theoretical framework, comprised of the following associated concepts, provided the

scaffolding for the design of my study: (a) the concepts of community and rurality; (b) systems theory, the Community Capitals Framework and community development; and (c) college-community engagement and the relationship of higher education to public benefit.

I employed multiple qualitative methods of data collection, including document review, individual interviews, and participant observation to explore the case, which is a rural community in the Northwest and the rural-serving community college within it. The unit of analysis was the community. I engaged in an iterative process of inductive analysis and holistic thinking to analyze the data – looking for patterns, themes, and constructs that were identified in the literature and that emerged as new ideas.

Ultimately, this research study provides: (a) a description of the case – the rural community and the rural-serving community college; (b) an analysis of the themes related to the process of college-community interaction; (c) an analysis of the themes related to the results of the college-community engagement; and (d) an interpretation of the impact of the college on community development.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Chapter Four presents the findings of this qualitative research study which examined the role a rural community college plays in the development of a rural community. The intent of the study was to provide a holistic, community-based view of community college-community context, interactions, and results.

The participants in the study were community leaders, including (a) elected officials, (b) business and industry executives, and (c) health, education, and human services leaders. As discussed in Chapter Three, a combination of constant comparative analysis and theoretical analysis was used to analyze the data from the 11 participant interviews. Each participant has been given a pseudonym and is described in more detail in Table 1.

The findings that emerged from the data analysis are presented here by way of the primary research questions that follow a logic-model design of context, process, and results. Thus, the four sections of this chapter are:

- Context: What is the context of this community and this community college?
- Process: In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage?
- Results: What are the results of the college-community engagement?
- Summary of Findings

Table 1

Chart of Community Leader Study Participants

Pseudonym	Sector Represented	Years in Community	Gender	Primary Role
Paul	City Government	17	M	Elected Official: City Mayor
Lee	County Government	58	M	Elected Official: County Judge
Sue	Business/Industry	2	F	Chamber of Commerce Director
Gene	Education	8	M	College President
Mark	City Government	16	M	Elected Official: City Council
Ray	Human Services	30	M	Senior Center Director; Children and Families Commissioner
Lynn	Education	48	F	School District Superintendent
James	State Government	26	M	Elected Official: State Representative
Jill	Business/Industry	10	F	Port Director
Sam	Business/Industry	3	M	Technology Company Executive
Ann	Health Care	55	F	Hospital Administrator

In the first section of this chapter, findings from the document review and participant interviews provide a description of the context in which the community and

the community college are situated. In the second section, findings from participant interviews provide insights into college and community interaction. In the third section, findings from participant interviews provide understanding of the perceived results of college and community interaction.

Context: What Is the Context of This Community and This Community College?

This first section of Chapter Four presents the findings from the data analysis of the first research question regarding the defining characteristics and conditions of the community and the community college: What is the context of this community and this community college? The data were derived from interviews with the 11 study participants, from participant observation, and from a document review of the community and the community college. The descriptive themes which emerged from the data analysis include:

1. Community
 - a. Regional Identity and Attitude: A sense of place
 - b. Regional Identity and Attitude: A sense of time
 - c. Regional Identity and Attitude: A sense of work
2. Community College
 - a. Small, rural, comprehensive institution
 - b. Community-attuned
 - c. Dynamic Approach

This study comes at a time when community colleges have been facing a public increasingly interested in returns on investment in higher education, and searching for

ways to measure that investment. Community college leaders have proposed that a community college cannot be accurately assessed without close examination of the communities where they are situated and their relationship with those communities. At the heart of the community college mission is connecting with and indeed joining other community institutions to bolster a community, to provide educational opportunities to its citizens not only for workforce development but for overall quality of life. Thus the first consideration for this study is a contextual examination of both the community and the college under exploration.

The community. The site of this study is a community located in the Northwest within a national scenic area. The primary community is a city of approximately 14,000 residents situated within a county of 24,000 residents, covering 2,387 square miles – or 10 persons per square mile. The city and the county are commonly viewed as part of a larger region comprised of five counties within one state and two counties in a bordering state, totaling nearly 90,000 residents and covering nearly 10,000 square miles.

The community is located about 90 miles from a large metropolitan area. The primary community falls into the *micropolitan* category set by the U. S. Office of Management and Budget (2000), defined as an area with a population of 10,000 to 49,999, plus surrounding counties that are linked by commuting patterns. The U. S. OMB definition, which remained in place at the time of this writing (Economic Research Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2012), stated that these micropolitan areas often represent important economic and trade centers in rural areas. That definition held true of this community.

A review of Bureau of Economic Analysis data for the years 1969-2008 revealed that the county's population grew from 20,802 to 23,820 or 18.6% during that 40-year period. By comparison, the percentage of population growth for the state was 83.5% and for the nation, 51.2%, during that same period of time. The county population is predominantly white, with an estimated 12% Hispanic and 4% Native American population as of 2008.

Agricultural and forest products have long been the underpinning of the area's economy, including production and processing of sweet cherries and production of dry-land wheat. As well, the area's economy has long been bolstered by a major river which runs through the region, generating significant hydroelectric power, and in decades past, supporting a large aluminum production industry. Today, the city's industrial park is diversifying, including the arrival of a new Internet data storage complex in 2006. Small business, transportation, tourism, and an emerging wind-energy industry continue to grow in the area.

Characteristics: Regional identity and attitude. The 11 community leaders who participated in the study expanded on the preceding information about the community by offering their perceptions of the unique characteristics of the community. The data analysis of community characteristics elicited one over-arching theme – *Regional Identity and Attitude*. This theme of Regional Identity and Attitude developed from a fusion of three sub-themes which emerged from the study participants' interview responses:

- (a) a sense of place;
- (b) a sense of time;

(c) a sense of work.

These sub-themes permeated the data, both oral and written. Taken together, the local history, geography, and economy of this community intermingled to create a certain regional identity and attitude described by the study participants.

A sense of place. The research findings revealed a strong sense of *place* among the study participants – defined here as a recognition and respect for the community’s location and natural environment. This prevailing view was quantified by Lee: “On a scale from 1-10, I’d say the influence and importance of our geographic location and natural surroundings is a 9.” Paul reiterated, “The community’s physical location is a definite strength – and the scenic beauty is a factor – but even more than the scenic beauty, I think it is the location that is most critical.”

The major river flowing through this community seems to underlie the community’s sense of place. Additionally, another large river lies to the east of the region and a mountain range crests to the west. Surrounded by steep rolling hills and sharp cliffs of basalt, much of the community is situated on a plateau, though the heart of the community is positioned on the banks of the river. As Jill explained, “We were initially a river community, until the [interstate highway] cut us off from the river, and the community lost its sense of purpose. We’ve been working really hard to make the connection back to the river.”

This sense of place, referenced by the community leaders, contributes to a regional identity that grows out of the region itself, which is sprawling and rural, extending beyond city boundaries and county lines, and following the river to include

seven counties in two states. When the community leaders discussed their community, they referenced city, county, and region interchangeably. Gene made this representative assertion: “When I say community, I’m talking 10,000 square miles... The community has taken on the attitude of blurring the boundaries between counties and states, and that is a huge, huge strength.” In this same vein, James noted the reciprocity among these bi-state rural counties, “We’re unique here...We service multiple counties and also serve across the river...Our airport is across the river...So there’s this reciprocal relationship that is critical to a rural community.” And Sam added this commentary about the community’s location: “You can describe it as a gateway – it’s either the front or the back, and in between is some very, very beautiful country – We easily draw from a 5-community rural area, which includes [the adjacent] state.”

Community leaders also discussed the location of the community as it pertained to transportation and access. They underscored the advantages of the community location with regard to transport of goods and people, citing the interstate highway, the railway, the river and an airport as easily accessible modes of transportation. “The community is at the crossroads of major north-south and east-west highways – as well as having rail, a deepwater port, and a small airport. We’re close to [the city], but not *too* close” (Paul). Lee further addressed the distance from the state’s metropolitan area: “At one time, our location was... a little *too far* from [the city], but now, we are looked at as a little Eden.” James added, “From a geographical standpoint, I think our proximity to everything – the interstate, the river, transportation access – is a vital key to the growth potential here.”

A sense of time. Second, the research findings revealed a strong *sense of time* in this community. As community leaders described the people and the activities of the community today, they often did so through historical references and turns-of-phrase which emphasized their awareness and appreciation of local history and of hearty ancestry.

Two historical references are frequently linked to the characterization of this region. First, the region is recognized as one of the oldest inhabited locations in North America, attributable to an historical tribal fishing area, which was a major gathering place and trading center for early Indian tribes. Second, the region is celebrated as a critical juncture for early pioneers heading west. Gene observed, “We have a very deep history and appreciation of history. We are daily reminded of our history as a community...so there’s pride [in this] community.” Paul described the community by way of its history: “We are truly the regional hub – just as 10,000 years ago, when this community was the regional hub for 51 Native American tribes who camped in this area.”

Other community leaders described the people of the community in terms reminiscent of hale-and-hearty pioneers. Paul articulated the community’s historical connection this way:

At the core of the community are folks whose ancestors loaded their wagons and came West...They have that can-do pioneer spirit. In fact, [global Internet company] built on the spot where those folks put in their wagons to the river – and our data loop [today] has been called the Pioneer Loop.

Other participants described the community inhabitants in similar terms, highlighting strength, independence, tenacity and the Western, pioneering spirit: “The

people here are very strong. They're strong-minded, and they're independent. They have that kind of pioneering spirit" (Sue). "It's a community that has faced adversity and survived" (Lee). "It's a Western community – open, honest, embracing of people who wander in" (Mark). "We understand what it takes to survive, and there's a lot of perseverance in this community" (Lynn).

When asked, "How would you characterize this community?" Gene retrieved a large cowboy belt buckle from a bookshelf and proclaimed:

This describes my community – It's a silver belt buckle that simply has the words: *Git Er Done*. The people within this 10,000 square miles have [that] attitude. People here are what I call a hearty breed of people that have had hard times and know how to live when things are not exactly peachy keen. [These are] folks that don't give up; they're very focused on moving forward.

A sense of work. The third research finding revealed another element of this regional identity – a strong sense of the community's place-based regional economy and work ethic. According to these community leaders, the agricultural heritage runs deep. Grain and tree fruit production have long contributed to the region's economy, as did forest products until a downturn in the timber industry in the 1990s. Lee explained it this way: "The fact that this community is historically a farming community – that agrarian base – helped shape this community as a *working man's community*." Lynn echoed, "It's definitely a rural community – it has very strong roots in agriculture."

The theme of this being a working man's community was repeated by several community leaders. Sue put it simply, "I think that this is a working community." Sam reflected further on work ethic as an inherent part of the community's composition:

You're talking in large part about a lot of people who understand what hard living really means. What I see in this community are the kind of people that I was raised by...you know, on a farm...where I got up at 3am, and I worked really hard. I went to school, and I got a car from my grandfather...just so that I could get back to the farm *faster*.

Other community leaders spoke about the working-man's theme in relation to the aluminum industry that dominated the region's economy for 50 years. James articulated it this way:

I consider this community, a working, somewhat blue-collar community – a common community...and I think a lot of that comes from the aluminum days. You know, we had 1200 people here that worked at the aluminum industry...so that's an aspect I think is important to realize.

Finally, the data revealed the community leaders' sensibility to the region's place-based economy, and specifically, to the importance of the major river that runs through this region. The river, which supports three hydroelectric dams within this region, symbolizes the place-based concept. James emphasized: "The dams are critical...the hydro-electric has been a key economic factor the last 60 years, to the entire Northwest, but certainly to [this community]."

Those dams, a local converter station, and an emerging regional wind-power industry, combine to create a sizeable power-grid in the region. Gene explained: "It's amazing when you start looking around...We're such a central locus for power; within 80 miles of where we're sitting right now, approximately one-third of the power for the West Coast is generated."

And just as the hydroelectric power drew the aluminum industry that dominated the economy of the area for 50 years, so it attracted a famous high-tech company to open

an Internet data storage complex on the banks of the river in 2006. The community leaders agreed that the arrival of this high-tech company signaled a transition in the community's economy: "The community has transitioned from a company town, with the Aluminum Company, to a more modern, diversified town" (Lee).

As of this writing, the opportunities for work and industry in the region are expanding. For example, small business, tourism and recreation, retail trade and services continue to grow. "We've really found strength in our small business endeavors. We're no longer looking to *just* agriculture or timber or the aluminum plant," Lynn stated. And part of that diversification is looking to green energy options as well; a Bi-State Renewable Energy Zone was formed in 2008 in order to encourage development of green power projects in the region. According to Sue, "Our dams, our power grid, and what's happening with wind and solar...I think this community can very well be on the leading edge of alternative energy." Lee summarized the view of the community's transitioning industrial base and community leaders' eye to the future, "The arrival of [a global Internet company] in this community represents the future... The conversion from the aluminum industry - or old technology - to a fiber-oriented high-tech community is a significant change."

Summary. In summary, the characteristics of the community manifest a regional identity and attitude. This theme developed from a fusion of three sub-themes which emerged from the study participants' interview responses: (a) a sense of place, including a recognition and respect for the location and natural environment of the community; (b) a sense of time, including an awareness and appreciation of the local history and hearty

ancestry of the region; and (c) a sense of work, including an understanding and embrace of the place-based regional economy and the working man's ethics.

The community college. This community college is one of 14 community colleges in the state categorized as rural-serving institutions. It is one of four community colleges in the state designated *rural, small* having <2,500 annual unduplicated credit enrollment. As such, the college's annual full-time student equivalency was 1,270 in 2009-2010, derived from service to approximately 4900 students overall. Students attending the community college that same year were 78% white, 18% Hispanic and the remaining 4% was comprised of Native American, Asian, African American, and Pacific Islander.

The college is deemed a comprehensive community college and is governed by a local board. In 2009-2010, the college's enrollment was comprised of 48% college transfer students, 34% career and technical education students, 16% developmental education students and 1% adult continuing education.

In support of that programming, the college employed 19 full-time faculty, 104 adjunct faculty, 66 full-time and 18 part-time staff and administrators. The college's 2010 budget included \$12,124,063 revenue (excluding capital projects) and \$14,809,991 planned expenditures. The 2010 operating and non-operating revenues were comprised of 11% state grants and contracts, 31% state support, 20% property taxes, 19% tuition and fees, 4% investment income, 7% federal grants and contracts, and 1% local grants and contracts. The college's largest operating expense in 2010 was instruction at 34%; followed by institutional support, 19%; plant operation and maintenance 8%; academic

support 8%; student services 7%; bookstore 5%; with financial aid, public services, and depreciation, expenses ranging from 1-7% respectively. At 9%, interest on college debt was the largest non-operating expense.

The college began in the late 1970s as an area education service district, operating out of leased facilities and area high schools. In the late 1980s, the voters of the community changed its designation from a service district to a community college. And in the mid-1990s, the passage of a bond election afforded the purchase and renovation of a former hospital as the college campus. The college expanded its district to include a neighboring county through an annexation vote eight years later. Shortly thereafter, the community supported a second bond measure, which provided for new construction and renovation of its initial campus site and purchase of property and new construction in the newly annexed county.

While the college's taxing district covers two counties, it claims as its service area not only those two counties, but three smaller counties to the east and two counties in an adjacent state. The community college's mission statement asserts that the college "builds dreams and transforms lives by providing lifelong education programs that strengthen our community." The college's vision is to "become the first option of choice for education and training services in the communities we serve."

Characteristics: Community-attuned and dynamic approach. The community leaders' descriptions of the community college fell into two thematic categories: (a) *community-attuned* and (b) *dynamic approach*. The community-attuned theme refers to the study participants' perceptions of the college as integrated and in sync with the

community. The dynamic approach theme represents a continuum of related perceptions about the college's approach to its work.

Community-attuned. First, the majority of community leaders felt the college was well-attuned to the community. Lynn used the term “well-connected to this community” to describe the college. In closely related terms, Paul remarked that “the college has embraced the community.” Mark described that embrace as reciprocal: “The community college is attuned to the community. Its roots are in this community. It started here and grew here – organically. There’s a sense of personal connection to and ownership of the college by the community.”

Expanding on the community's familial view of the college, Ann commented on the college's growing and becoming, “It's not a step-child any more...It's really its own unique school and culture.” Gene echoed, “You hear a lot...It's a *real* college now.” Speaking about the evolution of the college within the community, James added, “It's always been here...as an asset to the community...and [now] it looks like a real entity, a real part of the community, a real vital college...a gem in the crown of the community.”

According to the community leaders, an aspect of the college's attunement to the community was simply its broad-based appeal. That broad appeal referred to the range of ages served by the college: “The college is multi-generational, serving 15-16 year-olds up through 80 year-olds” (Ann). The broad appeal of the college also referred to the range of programs available at the college:

The options, the menu of offerings, are so varied that 10 people would describe the college in 10 different ways...It depends upon what has touched your family...and I think that is a real strength.

The community college can be something to everyone in the community. (James)

Lee added that some of the college's appeal had to do with the fact that the college "tailors its learning to personal applications...and [its] programs...make a lot of sense to the community, both to the people who need them for jobs and to the broader community."

Also related to this theme of attunement to the community, many community leaders referenced a significant level of college integration into the community, described as the "blurring of the boundaries between the college and the community" by Gene. Sue explained, "The college is really a part of the fabric of the community." Others spoke about the community college's integration into the community in different terms, but with the same underlying sentiment: "The college and the community [have] become a natural interplay...The college recognizes that what's good for the [community] is good for the [college]" (Paul). "It's the *community's* college," added Gene. And finally, James mused, "Gosh, I've never thought about what the [city] or the [region] would be without the college... because they're such a part of it. I think that's the image – they're *just a part of the community*."

Dynamic approach. The college's proactive approach to its work was highlighted by many of the community leaders. Ann's description was typical of the community leaders' views: "I'm going to use the word, *dynamic*, just because there's been so much change, and the college is kind of embracing everything that's possible."

The college's approach was also described as "progressive" by Sue, who went on to say that the community college "looks at a problem and searches for solutions."

Others echoed that the college is "part of the solution, not part of the problem" (Paul),

that “everybody [at the college] is pretty solutions-driven” (Jill), and that a “willingness to be a part of the solution is what [the college] is all about” (James).

Several community leaders spoke about the college’s demonstrated agility and flexibility, in response to community opportunities. With regard to the “wind energy program, they were very responsive...When they saw a particular opportunity, they got on it” (Ray). Lee echoed that thought: “The community college jumped on the opportunity they saw for wind energy training. They didn’t have their heads-in-the-sand. They said, ‘Let’s embrace this opportunity, and they have.’” This action-orientation was referred to by Jill as the college being “nimble and flexible.” Gene reflected on the college’s agility as *a necessity* for a rural college, noting that regional opportunities and funding challenges “drive the strategic direction of the college and [drive the college] to be agile and nimble.” And finally, Lynn’s remarks rounded out the study participants’ thoughts about the dynamic approach of the community college: “I would say *the college really gets it* – in terms of how to make things happen in this community.”

Summary. In summary, the community college of this study is a small, rural, comprehensive community college serving approximately 5,000 students per year. It serves a seven-county geographic region described in the previous section and its mission statement is to “build dreams and transform lives by providing lifelong education programs that strengthen [the] community.” The study participants described the community college as being community-attuned and taking a dynamic approach to its work. The community-attuned theme referred to the study participants’ perceptions of the college as being integrated and in sync with the community. The dynamic approach

theme represented a continuum of related community perceptions about the college's proactive approach to its work.

Summary: Context. This study focuses on a rural community and its college, and the fluid boundaries between them. Community leaders demonstrate a strong sense of regional identity and attitude. A working man's ethic and community themes of place, time and work permeate the college as they do the community as a whole. The study's participants understand their economy as place-based, and believe in bolstering it together. The college is recognized as an integral part of the community's proactive, solution-seeking energy, community-attuned and dynamic in its approach.

Process: In What Ways Do the College and the Community Interact and Engage?

This second section of Chapter Four presents the findings from the data analysis of the second research question regarding the process of community and community college engagement. The data were derived from interviews with the 11 study participants. The study participants were community leaders including: (a) elected officials, (b) business and industry executives; and (3) health, education, and human services leaders.

These findings respond to the question: In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage? Three themes emerged from the data analyses:

1. Community Leadership-Partnership Network
2. Regionally-driven Instructional Programs
3. Community Presence

Theme One: Community leadership-partnership network. When asked the question “In what ways do the college and the community partner?” a nearly unanimous first response from the study participants was: “through the Community Outreach Team!” In fact, 10 of the 11 community leaders cited The Community Outreach Team in their response. “The Community Outreach Team is the single biggest way [the college] partners with the community” (Mark). “We are a networked community. We don’t talk about it a lot, but we are like interlacing fingers, and what makes that powerful is that we have a common focus and direction...People are proud of the college and proud of what they do as a community” (Gene).

Study participants explained that The Community Outreach Team is a group of community leaders who came together to focus on economic and community development efforts that would improve the quality of life for the residents of the area. It was dubbed a city-county-community effort, composed originally of a handful of key community leaders from the chamber, the city, the county, and the college. Over the past eight years or so, the now-expanded group has proven successful in their efforts to collectively plan, sponsor, promote, deliver, and complete a variety of Community Enhancement Projects. An annual *Community Enhancement Project Book* and twice-yearly trips to Washington D.C. are used to promote their projects and to advance their fiscal and policy requests. “The Community Outreach Team picks a project, and everyone, including the college, puts its weight behind that project, even if it’s not their own project. We pick the one that makes the most sense for the community” (Lee).

A range of Community Enhancement Projects were cited as successfully completed endeavors by and for this community over the last several years. The projects included capital construction/restoration projects and workforce development investments, such as: the downtown Riverfront Access-Freeway Undercrossing; the state Veterans Home; the college's Rural Healthcare Clinical-Simulation Center; the local 17-mile Fiber Optic Broadband Loop; the regional Interpretive Center; the Wastewater Treatment Plant Renovation; the Fire Station; the Library Mezzanine Project; the College Campus Construction project; and various downtown Building and Street Restorations.

Formation, membership, recognition. The community leaders shared stories about how the group formed when the community's economy crumbled nearly a decade ago. Paul told it this way:

When the aluminum plants closed – and that was after the lumber industry had already died – this community had 15% unemployment. There was nowhere to go but up. So the city, the chamber, the county and the college got together and created a community vision – an aligned vision that said: *Here's what we need to do to get out of this.* That was the beginning of the Community Outreach Team.

The Community Outreach Team membership expanded beyond the original four entities to include representatives from the port, the economic development district, and the council of governments, among others. Study participants stressed that the group was not insular, that the team-members belonged to myriad groups within the community where ongoing communication and networking took place. In fact, Gene talked about the “breadth and transparency” of the community leadership network: “Membership of the Community Outreach Team *is everybody*...The Port, the Chamber, the Parks, the City, the

County, the PUD...and several others who attend the [Inter]Government Group, the Economic Development Team, the Power Breakfasts.”

At the time of this study, six of the 11 community leader study participants were, or had previously been, members of the Community Outreach Team. The six community leaders who were members of the Community Outreach Team spoke in buoyant terms about the group. “You create the dream, you create the vision, and if it’s the right thing to do, it will be funded...I share that philosophy with the rest of the *Git Er Done* gang...and we’ve been very successful” (Gene).

As well, the five other community leader study participants also recognized and supported the work of the Community Outreach Team. They talked about staying abreast of the team’s efforts through civic meetings and through the media. As Lynn remarked:

While [The Community Outreach Team] is not my personal experience, that’s an experience that I hear about through our Inter-governmental Meetings, and I know they’ve been able to bring a great deal to the region just based on working together and going forth as one voice and coalescing around one specific issue and then going back to Washington D.C. and meeting with representatives and congressmen and getting things out on the table.

Ann commented on tracking of the Outreach Team’s work through the local newspaper, “I think the publicity...[is] always really good for the public to be reminded that these people aren’t just sitting in an office, but they’re back there telling our story.”

The partnership and the process: Unified. One of the salient descriptors of this Community Outreach Team was their commitment to the partnership, their commitment to the community at large, and their commitment to speaking with one community voice. “We drop our individual constituent perspectives...our constituents are the people who

live [here], and each member of the Community Outreach Team can speak for the other” (Paul). Examples were given of elected officials speaking to the community college’s need for a nursing program and conversely, college and hospital leaders speaking to the community’s need for fiber. Paul called it *unity*: “The biggest part of our community partnership – and that includes the community college which was there from the beginning – is that we are all *unified*.”

This emphasis on a unified partnership reverberated through the community leaders’ responses. Lee put it this way: “The partnership is the key – it goes beyond a formal partnership – and it supersedes our organizations. Nobody has any *turf* and everyone will say that *the team* got me the money.”

According to these community leaders, their planning process is both strategic and recursive. They each participate in many planning processes for various local and regional organizations, thus they have an awareness of a range of environmental scans and regional needs lists, including the county’s economic development list. But, noted Gene, “There are a gazillion SWOT analyses in the community, but unless you connect those together in terms of strategic focuses for the community, you’ll never get anywhere.”

Several of the team-members described the process of determining the strategic community priorities as relatively low-key. Sue reflected with a hint of wonderment: “We all have projects that get thrown out on the table and then collectively – *and this is the part that works so well and I don’t know how* – collectively, we pick our top two or

three priorities...It's like all the egos get checked at the door!" Jill delivered the following commentary, with a smile:

Process? There is no process. It works by mutual agreement. We all have needs, and we'll sit around the room and go through our lists...but we don't really take turns...some agencies have more need in a certain year than others. And it seems really simple to do, but when we go to other communities, we hear that they just can't seem to figure it out...can't seem to figure out that it's about trying to make the community a better place. If it means expanding the nursing program at the college, then that supports the hospital, too, so the hospital can hire more doctors and service more people in the community, and that helps us all. If the city needs to get an infrastructure project funded, maybe a water system, then we may attract more businesses or build more houses, and that helps us all, too. And so, everything is just so tied together...

From these discussions, the team prepared for the most visible part of their collective work, the twice-yearly trips to the nation's capitol. The community leaders each referenced the importance of these trips, through which they seek federal assistance for their community development efforts. Gene described those trips to Washington D.C. as "stakes in the ground that drive the whole, invisible planning process that results in the successes we've had." In preparation, the Outreach Team put together a *Team Book* each year that became its primary tool for describing the community enhancement projects, reflecting the planning and community investments already in place, and tracking past accomplishments. Their first trip was in March to drop the project requests and the second in September to follow-up with their education or lobby of the congressional delegation.

Mark summarized the process and partnership this way: "We meet, coordinate, educate ourselves, and identify priorities in the community." Mark also emphasized the

cohesion among the partners, “We each can speak to all the projects and each others’ interests. As a team, we can collectively say, ‘Our top priority is this,’ and know that no one is going to have a different [side-bar] conversation.” In the same vein, Jill observed that the Community Outreach Team had “evolved into a kind of support group,” making “lobbying trips twice year back to D.C... [which have] been very, very successful.”

The college’s role in the Community Outreach Team. The community leaders who participated in this study underscored not only the Community Outreach Team’s collaborative spirit and financial successes, but also the college’s involvement in the team, which included the president and three other executive leaders at various times. “The college is a big part of [the team]...What’s good for the college is good for the community...and what’s good for the community...is good for the college. So, it’s a real synergistic relationship that is pretty amazing” (Sue).

Community leaders commented on the contributions of the college leadership, who have helped the team “weave [their] way through the difficult bureaucratic red tape” of Washington D.C. (Sue). One college executive took on the role of maintaining contact and scheduling meetings with the congressmen. The importance of that role was emphasized by Lee: “[The scheduler’s] persistence with our D.C. contacts is very important to our success.” Gene explained why a community college executive maintains that role, year after year: “The scheduler’s role doesn’t change [because] the scheduler needs to have a relationship with the congressional delegation.” Ray discussed the college’s role in facilitating the “institutions in the community working so well together”

and underscored the reciprocity involved: “The community has really supported the college because they know how important the college is to this area.”

The majority of the study participants specifically commented on the college president’s leadership in the Community Outreach Team, especially with relation to “going to D.C. to get funding” (Ray). The following statements were indicative of the study participants’ comments: “[The president] brought the college off the hill. He married the college and the Chamber” (Paul). Sam, while not a member of the team, underscored the importance of the college president’s leadership with regard to seeking federal legislative support. “The college is a...driving force [of the Community Outreach Team]...and the fortunate part is that the current president knows his way around that [Washington DC] environment.” Sue echoed the merit of the college president’s acumen with regard to the Washington DC visits: “I’ve seen the college president take us to places that we couldn’t get to otherwise.”

Personal relationships – trust. Apart from the community development successes, the six community leaders who participated directly on the Community Outreach Team spoke adamantly of the personal relationships that developed among the team members, “The team members have developed a close relationship that goes beyond our respective entities. We make trips to D.C....we sat through a hurricane together...we all know each others’ business...and we want to paint the *whole picture* of our community” (Lee).

The theme of *trust* was highlighted by several of the community leaders. Mark put it this way: “The chemistry has to be there; the strength of the team is in the trust that’s shared.” Sue spoke to an appreciation of the team relationship by simply stating,

“There aren’t these back-door agendas.” And finally, Jill expanded on the relationships that have developed among the members of the team:

The thing that is so great is that there is a lot of trust between that core group of people. We may be having a discussion with six or eight of us in the room, and we know that it is not going to end up everywhere. And I think if we didn’t have the Community Outreach Team, I would not have that same kind of partnership with the college – or any of those people...That’s where the personal relationships are probably the most important...[being able to] call-up and bounce ideas and come up with solutions.

Summary. In summary, a network of community leaders known as the Community Outreach Team was noted by study participants as the principal emblem of college-community engagement and interaction. Leaders at the community college were cited as important members of this city-county-community team which was credited with creating a unified partnership and generating several successful community enhancement projects.

Theme Two: Regionally-driven instructional programs. This section is a continuation of the findings from the second research question: In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage? This section will describe the second theme emerging from the data: Regionally-driven instructional programs.

All 11 community leaders cited three areas of the college’s instructional programming as important focal points and emblems of the college’s engagement with the surrounding community. Two of those programs were Associate of Applied Science Degree programs: Nursing and Renewable Energy Technology. “The college is always looking for ways to partner with the community – anyone who has a need, especially

training for industry” (Lee). The third area these community leaders spoke to was the college’s connection with the local high schools.

Regionally-driven nursing program. The college launched its Nursing Program in 2001. As community leaders explained, the program developed in response to community need and with community support. Four regional hospitals and several long-term care facilities in across two states sought assistance in addressing their rural healthcare staffing shortages. Jill stated it simply: “There [was] a huge lack of nurses in rural communities, so they started the rural nursing program.” Gene reported the situation this way:

We made a community decision to move forward to develop our own nurses, to support the healthcare needs in the region. Prior to that time, [the hospitals] would bring in, at very high costs, nurses who would stay a year or so and then leave, and so it was very expensive and created constant turmoil, and they were beginning to lose their critical resources. So it was one of those times where some urgent steps were necessary and so it was decided by a number of people that we needed to do something.

The development process of this expensive and complex college program was characterized as a community effort. Ann explained that regional hospitals provided significant support in the start-up years: “For quite a few years, [one hospital] was able to give \$50,000 a year...and in-kind faculty...and a preceptor differential to hospital employees who [worked] with the student nurses.” The partnership development between the college and the local healthcare industry took shape right alongside the program development. As James remarked, “You know, this hospital reached out to the college, and that partnership just grew and grew.”

The partnership grew, in part, from the collaborative work of community healthcare professionals and college faculty and staff. Ann reflected that hospital personnel had “worked closely with the college to be a strong clinical site...to host the Board of Nursing or NW Health Foundation visits...to co-chair the Nursing Advisory Committee...to help everybody put their best foot forward.” Additionally, the partnership efforts to build the nursing program extended beyond the college and the healthcare industry to workforce partners and community leaders. To that end, the Community Outreach Team took “the first trip to Washington D.C. for the college” (Gene), resulting in significant federal funding to shore-up the program and to develop a Rural Clinical Simulation Center, which was “designated by the United State Department of Labor in 2003 as a model for rural healthcare and workforce training” (Gene).

Reflecting upon the college’s efforts with the nursing program, the community leaders spoke about the college’s focus on serving its regional community, working with local industry, and providing family-wage employment.

The community, this locale, is extremely important – because the college has taken advantage of what’s here in the community. The nursing program is an example – it provides services to a broad, rural area – and it’s important that we’ve got that training right here – so people can train without having to uproot themselves to go outside the region. And then when they’re finished, they can get jobs right here in the community they live. (Lee)

Sam recognized the college’s efforts to work with industry: “This college is trying very, very hard... [to provide] the Nursing Program in cooperation with industry, which they are doing and...[they are] successful at.” Sue underscored the merit of not only local training, but also, local employment, of nurses: “The nursing program is so critical. From

a workforce development perspective, their students have jobs! And that's what it's all about – making sure there are trained nurses, but also, getting them into jobs.”

Regionally-driven renewable energy program. Six years later, in 2007, the community college launched its Renewable Energy Program. According to these community leaders, the development of this program paralleled the nursing program development in many ways. First, the renewable energy program was created in response to a rapidly emerging wind-energy industry in the region. After a workforce needs survey, the college crafted a non-credit pilot program and then a one-year certificate and a two-year associate degree to train wind turbine technicians. Also, much like the nursing program, the Renewable Energy Program was established with notable financial and intellectual capital from industry partners and with significant federal support. Gene explained, “[What the college does] is a reflection of the community. The wind technology program is a perfect example. The college didn't develop it, *they did.*” He added, “And that's the reason for the nearly 100% hire rate for graduates, because [the wind industry] knows that it's *their program*”.

Other community leaders, too, talked about the renewable energy program in terms of its reflection of the community and its reciprocity with the community. “Because renewable energy spawns here, this is the first wind-energy program on the west coast,” Sam said. “That's how this community helps the college, *and* how the college is looking at the community and serving *them.*” The regional reflection and reciprocity inherent in the wind-energy program was framed by Sue as a three-way partnership between business, the college, and the community:

You know, talking about ways the community and the college partner...let's talk about wind development. The college saw a need; they developed a program. We now have people who are actually working at these jobs – living here, working here – doing whatever they need to do here in town. So, it really is a partnership between the business and the college and the community.

Some of the community leaders put the college's response to community programming in a broader historic context, reflecting on the technology programs that preceded the renewable energy technology program. "In addition to the wind training, the college partnered with the Corps of Engineers...providing the workforce from *within* the community, *for* the community" (Lee). They recounted how the college – in an attempt to stay abreast of industry needs and community-based employment opportunities – had modified its technology program from a microelectronics program in partnership with Intel, to an electronic engineering technology program in partnership with the Corps of Engineers and the BPA. "Developing curriculum around the Corps of Engineers' needs and the Intel electronic technician program several years ago, and now, an outcropping of that work and that willingness is the Wind Technology Program" (James).

In summary, the community leaders exhibited an appreciation for the college's willingness to reflect the region, respond quickly, and change focus as needed to develop instructional programs that serve the local area and its residents. Jill encapsulated the perspective this way:

[The college has] really been trying to see what they can instruct the local populous in that will help raise the educational level and the wage level here in the community. They had a program in partnership with the dam. The [students] were training to work [there], but then the dam turned down the number of students that they were accepting into jobs. So then, the community college

turned its sights to Intel...changed [the curriculum] a little bit so that [the students] could try to get jobs in [microelectronics]. So now, they have changed that some core [curriculum] to work with the wind-energy sector. They've been nimble and flexible and made those changes so that when [students] leave the community college, they're going to get a job at the other end.

College connections to local schools. According to these community leaders, the college's connection to local high schools reflected a significant partnership effort and a vital contribution to individuals, families, and the region. The college collaborated with a half-dozen high schools in both states to provide Dual Credit Programs, which offer high school students the opportunity to earn both college and high-school credit while still enrolled in the public school system. James cited the college's "philosophy and willingness to be involved with the high schools' juniors and seniors" as an example of community interaction: "This is where [our communities] are so fortunate."

As well, it was noted that the college worked with local high schools on the Career Pathways program, designed to facilitate students' entry and progress through Career and Technical Education curriculum at the college. "K-12 connections such as *Running Start*, *Project Advance*, and the *Pathways* model are all trying to create seamless educational pathways for students" (Mark). Lynn noted that college programs like Wind Technology and Nursing "influence decisions around programs" at the high school level.

The opportunity for high-school students to earn college credits and launch their college studies was high on the list of several study participants. "The high school into post-high-school opportunities are there...[the school districts] work very closely with the community college on those endeavors" (Lynn). Expanding upon this view, Jill added, "I think that anytime we can get the college really integrated in with the high-school, it's

just a fantastic opportunity. Of course, there's that whole money-saving thing, but also, there's the whole experience of just *being in college* and knowing what's going on".

Ray discussed recent legislation in both states "where high school kids can go to the college." He added, "They're going to the community college both to get what they feel is a good education, plus... saving money so they can make college affordable." And finally, Ann provided testimony to the importance of the college-K-12 connection: "All of my kids were able to take college-level classes when they were in high school, and that really helps families. It's just amazing how high school kids can benefit from this."

Summary. In summary, the college's efforts to partner with local industries and local school districts to develop strong instructional programs were named as examples of how the college engaged with the community. The community leaders cited the development of the college's Nursing Program and Renewable Energy Technology Program and its relationship with local high schools as illustrations of strong college-community interaction.

Theme Three: A community presence. This section is a continuation of the findings from the second research question: In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage? This section describes the third and final theme emerging from the data: a community presence. The community presence theme refers to an array of college-community interactions, exchanges, and resource sharing perceived by the community leaders to contribute to the college's presence in the community. Four sub-themes contribute to the over-arching theme of a community presence: (a) broad-

based involvement; (b) personal associations; (c) business community connections; and (d) college facilities and facilities resource-sharing.

Broad-based involvement. All the community leaders discussed the importance of college representatives' involvement in the community. In that regard, several community leaders noted the visibility of the college throughout the community. Paul reflected, "Early on in this community, community college folks only hung out with themselves. That happened with many of the educators in the area, K-12 as well." Paul then went on to say, "But today, the community college is involved more. The college is visible – at the table" (Paul). James built on the opinion that the college is involved: "Probably the greatest lesson here [with regard to the college working with the community] is what can happen with a *spirit of willingness* – to cooperate and be involved in so many things."

According to the community leaders, the breadth of the college's involvement in the community was supported in many ways. For instance, the college's community presence was supported by a college policy, promoting community volunteerism and staff participation in community activities. Gene commented that the fact that everyone at the college is seen as a leader is "the real secret ingredient for the college." Lee also spoke to this plurality of college involvement: "[The college president] has more than himself involved in community partnership. He has surrounded himself by people who are active in the community. So the college's partnering in the community is a *plural*." Particular arms of the college which were cited as contributing to the college presence in the community included a childcare resource and referral program, a small business

development center, and the college foundation. “The college foundation fosters community connections and is the ultimate in partnership, supporting students and sponsoring activities such as the *Science Summit* and the *Humanities Series*” (Mark).

Personal associations. A majority of the community leaders cited personal interactions with specific individuals from the college. These personal associations with college employees were viewed as an important aspect of the college’s community presence. Ray emphasized the significance of personal relationships, especially in a rural community: “In a rural community, you know people more, so... it’s *all about* personal relationships – for better or worse. And so, when you talk about the college, I don’t necessarily think about *the college*, I think about *the people* there.” Mark echoed the sentiment that the general public learns about the community college “through personal experience.”

The community leaders’ discussions of personal interactions with specific individuals from the college involved a range of examples including college employees’ participation in community groups such as Rotary and Lions, service on local boards, involvement in community events such as the Job Fair, and lending of a particular expertise to a community partner. Lynn recalled that when the new school district formed, the college’s chief academic officer “facilitated some of the visioning and [planning] efforts” for the new district. Another community leader had this to say about a long-time college employee: “[She] would bend over backwards for us – to be able to use space, to help us co-sponsor events, and just always figuring out how to make something work” (Ann). One community leader cited several college employees

throughout the interview: a student services administrator, two instructional administrators, a resource development administrator, a business and industry coordinator, a faculty member, and the college president, finally summarizing this way: “I know many of the folks who work [at the college]...and I can’t say enough good things about them” (Ray).

The importance of a day-to-day college presence in the community was underscored by Sam, who shared that he learned about the college “by being a member of community functions, going to the city council and the Chamber... [where] paths cross – and water cooler conversations happen.” This community leader went on to underscore the importance of the college’s understanding of the natural development of community relationships, likening the building of community relationships to a spider web:

You see, most things don’t happen with a plan. They kind of happen within a spider web. And I think...from the college perspective...If you go out with a plan to market yourself...it’s not really going to happen. It’s only going to happen through this thing called *connectedness*. Being connected in the community through groups, organizations, and places where you can go and *just be*, is the right way to do things.

Business community connections. The linkage of the college and the business community was referenced by many community leaders as an important facet of the college’s presence in the community. Ray expressed “how important the Small Business Development Center has been and how many successes they’ve had.” Mark also cited the agents of the SBDC as having a “huge impact on the business community.” Ann cited the value of “working closely” with individuals from the college after receiving Workforce Development Grants.

But none of the community leaders spoke more strongly about the need for the college to build and maintain ties with the business community than Sam, technology company representative. He stressed the value of the college operating outside of any kind of “education silo” and connecting actively to the business community:

For schools, being integrated into the business community is critical. The simple fact of the matter is – and I know this [may not be] popular – schools in general *do not* set the standard by which a community thinks...*Businesses do*. The business community is what sets perception, sets the tone, sets the pace in a community. That’s why the spider web is key...Schools need to be integrated with business...meeting with them, talking to them, understanding them and what they’re doing on a regular basis.

College facilities and facilities resource-sharing. The final aspect of this community presence theme was not about people, but about the college’s facilities and the college’s approach to sharing of campus facilities, which was viewed by the study participants as an objective correlative of the process of college-community interaction. Several community leaders pointed out the value they perceived in the college’s move to a permanent, and then improved, college campus, in its campus co-location with community partners, and in its convivial approach to the community’s use of college facilities.

Paul offered the college’s successful bond elections as evidence of the college-community connection, “The college passed its bond measure in tough economic times – the people said, *I’m willing to invest in progress* – and the college [was] a good steward of that money.” In this same vein, James also commented on the mutual support demonstrated by facilities-bond efforts: “[The college campus site] had been dormant and things were falling down, so the Board and the community supporting the college and

being willing to take it on was key.” Jill added, “The college passing the bond so they could get some new buildings and expand programs has been a positive change. That will have nothing but good effects in the community as a whole.” Ray made this observation: “The college played a role in [the community’s development] over a period of time, turning a hospital into a nice community college campus.” And Lee reflected upon the community’s “overwhelming support of the college’s bond measure,” saying: “The community had a good impression of the college. Between [global Internet company], the growth in house-building, and activity at the college, there was a euphoria in the community, and they supported the college’s growth.”

Ann cited the college library as an example of college-community interaction by way of resource-sharing: “Their major re-do of the library... [it’s] now as nice as the public library so that’s an investment in the community, just having another library space.” And Gene commented that the college “makes the amphitheatre open for events. [It’s a] gathering place, and nicely fits being right next to the park.” This sentiment about the college’s open-door hospitality was most strongly expressed by Lynn:

The college is very open. They’re very good about offering space, offering opportunities for people to come and be a part of the college. For example, when we have our monthly meetings, they’re in the college’s board room...The Education Service District is on the campus...the college theater [has been used] for community-theater [productions]...and the Extension Service is [housed] there, so Master Gardeners do plant clinics up at the college campus.

Summary. In summary, the college’s presence in the community emerged as the third theme in the data about the process of college-community interaction and engagement. Study participants spoke to four sub-themes which contributed to the

community presence theme: (a) the college's broad-based involvement in the community; (b) community members' personal associations with college employees; (c) the college's connections to the business community; and (d) the college's facilities and facilities-sharing with the community.

Summary: Process. Three themes emerged from the data analysis of interviews with 11 participants regarding how the college and community interact and engage: a community leadership-partnership network, regionally driven instructional programs, and the college's community presence. The college and the community network through a Community Outreach Team, which allows community leaders to better understand and address the community's requirements. "Like interlacing fingers," community leaders in this network have developed rewarding, trusting, productive relationships that have yielded solutions to community challenges, including regionally driven instructional programs in nursing, renewable energy, and high school student advancement. Additionally, the college's integral role in these community partnerships leads to its strong presence in the community as a whole, as one of the vital forces in the region's successes. It is involved in the community in myriad ways, notably through personal connections, business involvement, and resource and facilities sharing to help fill community needs.

Results: What Are the Results of the College–Community Engagement?

This section of Chapter Four presents the findings from the data analysis of the third research question regarding the results of college – community engagement. The data were derived from interviews with the 11 study participants. The study participants

were community leaders including: (a) elected officials; (b) business and industry executives; and (3) health, education, and human services leaders.

These findings respond to the question: What are the results of college–community engagement? The data analysis elicited three key themes that answered this third research question:

1. Improved Economy and Skilled-up Workforce
2. Strengthened Community Leadership
3. Bolstered Perception of Community and its Future

Theme One: Improved economy and skilled-up workforce. The community leaders’ narratives were filled with stories about how the collective work of the college and the community resulted in an advancement of the local workforce and ultimately, a shoring-up and change in the local economy. They spoke about the upswing in the economy as a positive change in the community and as a public benefit of having the community college in the region. “The community college is an economic driver for this community. If we didn’t have a community college, this community wouldn’t be where we are today” (Paul). Mark underscored the public benefit aspect of the college’s contributions: “Economic development is first – the public benefits from the college’s contribution to attracting business and industry to the community.” Lynn spoke about the community’s “economic vitality” as “very much tied to the community college.” James listed several aspects of the college’s contributions toward positive change in the community: recruiting a high-tech company, building the Community Outreach Team, developing a nursing program, winning the veterans home siting, and securing broad-

band connectivity and then summarized the college's involvement in positive economic changes this way:

I guess the baseline for [the positive changes in this community] would be economic development and the fact that the college has been a very positive partner in that economic development...The college has, and is increasingly, playing a bigger role in the standard of living in the community.

Many of the community leaders provided context to their opinions that the college and community worked together to improve the economy. Several study participants referred to the community's strengthened economic base as a "diversified economy" (Paul), citing the demise of the aluminum industry and the arrival of a large technology-based company and several wind energy companies as emblems of that change. "One change [in the community] is the industrial base changing from the old economy – the aluminum company – to a more diverse new economy. [Global Internet company] is the symbol of it" (Ray). Jill spoke to the economic improvement in the community as leading a deeper shift in the community:

I think that right now, [the community] is going through a transition...and I think all of a sudden, it's almost like this light is shining on [the community]. It went from the doom-and-gloom of this 1950s aluminum plant...to Hey! We are on the cutting edge of the super highway of information. [Global Internet company] has chosen to come here, and like I said, it's just given the community a lot of optimism.

Lynn reflected on new "cottage industries" and the wind turbine industry as evidence that the community "has really *gotten* the idea of how to survive economically so that we're not so dependent upon a particular industry." This leader went on to comment, "People from this community are now getting those jobs, and whether they

stay here or go somewhere else, neighboring counties or states, there's *real opportunity* economically." Lee summarized the notion of the community's diversifying economy this way: "The conversion from an aluminum industry/old technology to a fiber-oriented, high-tech community is a significant change. [A senator] coined the term *The New Trail* for our efforts, and the college has provided the worker training that we've needed."

In support of the improved economy just discussed, nearly all the study participants responded that the college's role in worker training and skilling-up of the local workforce was a major result of college and community engagement. The response of Sue was enthusiastic: "Workforce development! Workforce development! Workforce development!" In discussing the economic upturn in the community, Jill stated it plainly, "The college was there to help with the workforce training," while Ray spoke to workforce training as a community investment: "Investing in human capital is what's going to move you ahead...it's just so critical."

The community leaders addressed many aspects of the college's contribution to skilling-up the local workforce. First, several community leaders spoke about workforce skill development in terms of local access to education and training that then resulted in local jobs, ultimately benefiting the whole community: "Local residents can improve their skills and lives...without leaving home and family. That is a benefit to the entire community" (Mark). Lee made this same point: "The public benefits from having a college locally in that they can get an education that provides for direct employment – right here in the community." James also emphasized local access, but highlighted the high-school connection to the economic development equation: "[Economic

development] starts with the college's relationship with the high schools. That's been key for this particular community and this region."

Lee described an inverse relationship of an improved economy and workforce in the community, noting that when aluminum industry jobs were all that was available, there was no incentive for people to pursue an education. However, now, a "local demand for high-wage jobs means that people *must* continue their education."

Ann pointed out another aspect of the local workforce development theme – that the recruitment for the college's wind program had a secondary multiplier effect on the local workforce: "We have a number of employees working for us now because their spouses are in the wind program, so that has really helped us as well."

Community leaders also underscored how a skilled-up workforce improved not only individual lives, but also improved the community's economy and livability. Several longer quotes are provided below as key findings in that regard, where study participants articulated the public benefit of the college's efforts to train the workforce. The first quote describes workforce development as having a trickle-down effect in the community:

Anytime you can educate a person into a job, *it's a miracle*. And that really travels down through the community. It's like the trickle-down effect. If somebody is making a living wage rather than minimum wage because they've been educated...suddenly they can buy the \$200-\$300,000 house which feeds the real estate agent which feeds the grocery store which feeds the...It's the best thing. And *that* is the public benefit of having a college in your town. (Sue)

The second quote illustrates the community leader's emergent awareness of the connections between individual and public benefit of local workforce development:

You know, I don't think I would have thought of all this, except for being here and seeing how this community actually works...The community college allows people to get an education and improve their marketable skills and get a decent job at an affordable price. So, just economically, for the whole community, it's real important. We all know that you need training and skills in order to move forward and advance economically. So that's individual *and* it's public benefit because if we're going to reduce the unemployment rate, people are going to have to have skills so when the economy does turn around, they're going to be hired. (Ray)

Finally, Ann, the health care community leader, described the result of college-community engagement and a skilled-up workforce as having an impact that surpassed an improved economy. She spoke about an improved rural healthcare system as an important result and positive change within the community:

Our public benefits by being able to stay here and be hospitalized at this hospital! We were experiencing a serious shortage of nurses, and having the college's nursing program here in the community has made a huge difference in the quality of care and the number of patients that we can take care of. We had years when we would not be able to admit patients here because we didn't have enough nurses and we would hate having to transfer someone to the city. Now that happens very rarely. (Ann)

Theme Two: Strengthened community leadership. The community leaders discussed community leadership as both the process of college and community engagement and the product of college and community engagement. In the previous section of this chapter, community leadership was presented as a finding related to the process of college-community interaction, and in this section, community leadership is presented as a finding related to the results of college-community engagement.

In response to questions about positive changes in the community and public benefits from the college's presence in the community, study participants reflected on the

improved efficacy of community leadership overall as a positive change and as a public benefit derived in part from college-community engagement. The term *strengthened community leadership* includes the first sub-theme of unified leaders, representing how community leaders learned to work collaboratively and then learned to build on that unity to develop unified political influence on the community's behalf. This strengthened community leadership theme also incorporates the sub-theme of emergent collective wisdom in four areas: (a) unified leaders; (b) the importance of a shared vision; (c) the recognition of regional assets; and (d) a leveraged approach to seeking financial capital.

Unified leaders. Sue spoke to the essence of this finding: "You can't really partner if you don't get along." And Lee's statement demonstrated the overall sense of this unified community leaders sub-theme as expressed by the study participants: "Working together has changed the dynamic of the community, and the community college has played such a big part in all of it. The public benefits from a college willing to work with community partners to leverage community resources. It's a two-way street."

Some of the community leaders reflected on the unique individuals who were part of the community leadership and the unique situations in the community. "And you know, I was just thinking, that a part of all this has been the *right* individuals at the *right* time with the *right* things happening" (James). Gene also reported, "I think it's the leadership that's in the community right now, able to work together well and get those projects done and keep moving along." He went on to underscore that "developing the network that provides direction to the community didn't just happen," and further noted, "We developed the relationships first...invested time to be together...polished the stone"

of relationship-building and communication. Sam echoed the importance of the leaders' collaboration and timing with regard to industry recruitment: "This community...had a very, very cohesive group. They came together on this, and they brought it in!"

Ray reinforced the idea that the city and the county and the college worked together well: "It just seems like in the last several years, there hasn't been a lot of bickering" and added that other communities tried to use this community outreach team model and failed because "the community leaders didn't talk to each other." He went on to observe, "Sometimes you take it for granted, that this is just the way things should work; but apparently, this community is rather unique." In that same vein, Paul addressed the qualities and commitment of community leaders and observed that necessity emerged as a driver of the improved community leadership: "The community needed bold and visionary people to survive...So, the community has moved past a lot of territorial issues. Breaking down the political walls in a community takes time – and you have to work to keep it that way."

The interview data also revealed that community leaders felt their unified relationships with one another fostered more political influence, and ultimately, success in their community development endeavors. Jill emphasized the importance of the community's political capital in attracting a large Internet company to the community: "Political capital – that was definitely where the Community Outreach Team [came] in." This data-point was corroborated by Gene: "Political capital is probably the number one thing" [in community development]. He expanded upon that assertion, discussing the network of social and political connections necessary for effective community

development, “Our team developed such significant social connections... You can’t generate capital unless you’ve got the connections. [You can’t] jump to building capital before you’ve given thought to would you be supported in the direction you’re going.” Sue also spoke about the community leaders’ investment in political capital: “Political capital is one [investment that has been made in order for positive changes to occur] – very much so. It’s one of those things we do – nobody ever wants to say we lobby, but we do, and it’s utilizing political capital.” She then talked about the yield to the community: “Because of that, financial capital is invested. Quite frankly, there’s been a lot of dollars flowing into this community – and into the college for programs – because of political capital. So, I don’t how it fits, but it fits, and it’s filtering into the community.”

With regard to the college’s investment in the community’s political capital, the remarks of Ray were representative: “[The college] has played an important role in that political capital through the Community Outreach Team, which has been tremendous.” In a related vein, Sue spoke to the college’s political capital as an unrecognized contribution to the community: “I think having that federal relationship is great for the college and great for the community, but probably not something the community even sees.”

Shared vision. In terms of emergent collective wisdom, the development of a shared vision for the community was highlighted by the study participants as a foundation for strengthened community leadership. Gene described the vision this way: “That shared vision is one of excellence, of economic vitality, of providing a family wage

job, and a good place to live for everybody in this community. It's about community pride.”

Some of the credit for the focused vision of community leaders was attributed to skill-sets and strategic lenses, while some of the credit for the focused vision of community leaders was ascribed to the community's historical economic hardships. James made the first point about shared vision deriving from “the talent and willingness of a good group of people that have a vision for the community and share an awareness of the local inventory.” Paul made the second point about shared vision growing out of economic adversity: “[The vision] really grew out of adversity. We knew we couldn't go back to Kansas, so we asked ourselves: ‘What are we going to become?’” He went on to talk about acting upon the shared vision, “The people today are willing to work together to accomplish things. This community doesn't tear itself apart as other communities do. The college and community have become *a natural interplay....*”

Other study participants emphasized the effects of the shared community vision when discussing positive changes in the community. “People are envisioning a future for this area...They're making it more livable...In the last ten years, we've been much more thoughtful about our growth, our future and who are we as a community, asking: *What do we want to look like?*” (Lynn). Jill emphasized community-based goals as an effect of the shared vision: “The Community Outreach Team fostered some really strong partnerships between somewhat disparate entities, which now really come together with this common view and this common goal... *What's good for the community?*” Similarly, Sam talked about the importance of a shared community vision and purpose for successful industry-

recruitment, stressing that “companies coming here want a cohesive business community.” Sam also pointed out that recruitment of a large high-tech company to this community was a result of “investing time in making sure that they were all together – the chamber, the port, the city, the college, the county. Everybody really got together with a very, very clear job.”

And last, the effect of the unified leadership and shared community vision on the broader community was expressed by Lee: “There’s a vibrancy in the community now – a sense that we can do it ourselves...We’ve got leaders who have a good sense of the whole community, and [citizens] who seem to be looking up to the leaders to lead.”

Recognition of regional assets. Another aspect of the strengthened community leadership theme and emergent collective wisdom sub-theme was described by community leaders as a rekindled recognition of the region’s assets. This sub-theme emerged from the study participants’ narratives about the wisdom which transpired when leaders collectively contemplated their regional situation and determined that their geographical location and natural resources should be viewed and pursued as an opportunity rather than a challenge. This finding builds on the data reported in the first section of this chapter, where the context of the community was discussed under the finding “Regional identity and attitude.”

Community leaders reiterated the importance of the region’s natural resources, scenic beauty, and geographical location; but moreover, they emphasized their acknowledgement of the importance of these resources to quality of life, regional identity and economic development. Lee’s remarks represented this renewed appreciation for the

region's natural assets; he cited it as one of the top positive changes in the community within the past decade: "This effort to take advantage of the assets of the area we live in is a significant positive change."

An aspect of this finding was a new outlook on the region's national scenic area designation. "One of the things we recently recognized was that the Scenic Area provides opportunity" (Gene). Once viewed as an impediment to change or at least a "good news - bad news kind of thing" (Jill), partially because of its restrictions on urban growth boundaries, community leaders acknowledged that the national scenic area not only protects the environment, but also encourages economic development, "[It] can help us have a vibrant, yet thoughtful, development of this whole region...We discovered things we didn't know in terms of strengths that we can exercise and opportunities that we can pursue" (Gene).

With reference to finding the balance between natural resource preservation and economic development, Sue added: "We live in the most beautiful place in the world, so we want to make sure that we don't kill it. On the other hand...there's responsible growth and development that can happen – that will allow the best of both worlds." Lee summarized the perspective this way: "We are never going to be covered over with concrete – and that is now seen as an asset...The community is using those things that could be disadvantages, as advantages." He went on to cite examples of leveraging the region's natural capital and taking advantage of location toward community development: a river-front trail, an interpretive center, and an outdoor amphitheatre. "We've gotten money [from funding agencies] as a result of our being in the scenic area."

Another aspect of this finding was the community leaders' deepening appreciation of the major river which flows through the region. Several community leaders discussed community efforts to reconnect to the nearby river: "[By way of] a river-front trail...we're reconnecting to the river in a positive way. We're no longer this mini-industrialized, separated community" (Lynn). A long-term commitment to that river-front trail was evidence of a positive community change from Jill's perspective: "The river-front trail is a positive change; it has been an ongoing project for fifteen years! There's an underpass that gets you down to the river again and there's a nine-mile trail. So you know, we're really trying hard to have that river be a part of the community" (Jill). Gene also discussed community leaders' recognition of the major river as a key regional asset and described a federal legislator's "fascination" with the community's efforts to reconnect to the river. He reported that the legislative interest in their efforts resulted in "a lot of funding" for the construction of a freeway underpass to the river and related projects: "We took advantage of the natural capital – a reflection of the community returning to [its] roots."

Still other community leaders cited the river's practical importance for the attraction of a large Internet provider to the community: "They needed easy access to the water for their cooling and they needed reliable, inexpensive power" (James). Ray also spoke to the importance of the river's derivatives as a draw for the Internet giant: "I think [Global Internet company] came here because of the electricity, the water...and the natural environment within the area was attractive to them." Sue spoke about the river as "the best renewable energy flowing right out of here" and then spoke about other natural

resources as important regional assets: “We have sunshine, and we have wind. We have some abilities/some assets that a lot of other communities this size don’t have. At the same time, we [know to] use it wisely.”

This re-embraced wisdom regarding the region’s natural assets extended beyond observations about the national scenic area and the region’s major river. Also inherent in this theme were the community leaders’ reflections about the region’s natural beauty and enhanced livability. Community leaders talked about the region’s beauty and natural recreational activities. “It’s beautiful around here, and it’s like a well-kept secret...this is a really nice place to live...and we’ve managed to maintain that” (Lynn). Ray reflected on recreation: “Folks really like it here because you’re close to many different recreational/outdoor activities from the sail-boarding to the mountains to the [other] rivers...The location is important.”

Several community leaders also commented on the region’s ability to attract new employers and employees who seek out quality of living. Ann said, “The beauty of the area, whether it’s fishing or biking, and close proximity to [the city], certainly help us recruit employees.” Jill also talked about the region’s natural capital serving as a strong attractor of new industry to the community: “[Global Internet company] chose us because of our natural beauty, because they have young employees, and guess what? They want to mountain-bike, ski, and climb, and so this was a great location.” Paul echoed that statement, “The scenic beauty was very important to [Global Internet company] when they were considering moving here. They said: ‘Our people have to live here.’ So, the scenic beauty and the recreational opportunities mattered to them.”

Finally, community leaders spoke again about their recognition of the region's bi-state identity as an important asset and a positive change in the community. "The community has taken on the attitude of blurring the boundaries between counties and states, and that is a huge, huge strength," remarked Gene. Sue amplified this point about broadening the lens of the community: "One of the positive things is that you look right over there and you can see [another state]... We haven't put ourselves in a box... We look at region-wide solutions." She said more about this bi-state lens with regard to the community college: "They are the college for both sides of the river... And to me, that's one of the most positive things... because it's not just about our however-many-little-acres-right-here that we live in. This is a positive change in the community." James echoed this notion, calling it a mandate and citing the college's adoption of that role as well: "We're unique here... because of our proximity to the state line... For example, the Renewable Energy Zone is on both sides of the river... [We've] accept[ed] that regional mandate... and the college has really taken that on."

A leveraged approach to financial capital. In addition to this rekindled recognition of the region's assets, the community leaders' fresh approach to pursuit of financial capital was an important theme in the study participants' narratives about strengthened leadership and lessons learned. The essence of their leveraged approach to financial capital was described as two-fold: (a) to make a significant, collective, and material commitment to a community development project prior to approaching external funders for support; and (b) to follow-through to completion on supported projects.

As Paul explained, “We figured something out about asking for Financial Capital: We never asked for the first dollar. We said: Here’s the concept, here’s the plan, and we’ve already started it. We’ve never asked for a hand-out – just a hand-up.” He went on to explain the second part of the community leaders’ approach: “The other thing is that we’ve done what we said we’d do with the funding we’ve received. [A federal legislator] told me one time: ‘I drove under the underpass the other day, and I saw that you did exactly what you said you were going to do.’” He claimed that the community had “built a reputation of saying what we’ll do – and then doing it,” noting that the community had received more federal money per capita than any other community in the state.

On this data-point of never asking for the first dollar, the similarity of the community leaders’ narratives was striking, as exemplified by Lee’s remarks on the topic: “[We pursue] whatever we see the community needs... We’re willing to go after the investment that’s needed. We always say: We never ask for the first dollar; we ask for the last dollar. And we never ask for a hand-out; we only ask for a hand-up.” Likewise, reflecting on the “incredible strength of having congressmen and senators from both sides of the river,” Gene said, “We’re not looking for a hand-out – we’re just looking for a hand-up. We will never ask you for that first step – for that first dollar – but we may ask you to help us fund our dream.” And in parallel form, Jill reminisced about the accomplishments of the community with regard to securing funding for community development projects: “Reconnecting the downtown to the waterfront took 24 financial partners (local, state, and federal agencies). That’s an example of this community’s strength. The community has just proved itself time and time again.” Her statement was

punctuated by her closing remarks: “We don’t go ask for the first dollar; we ask for the last dollar... And if we say this is what we’re going to do, we’ll follow-through. We’ll get the project done.”

Theme Three: Bolstered perception of community and its future. The community leaders spoke about the college contributing to a bolstered perception of the community, both internally and externally – how the community is seen by others and how the community sees itself. They spoke about the merit of having a community college in the community in terms of its contribution to the residents looking hopefully to the community’s future. They also spoke about the merit of having a community college in the community in terms of creating a positive external impression of the community as a whole.

Mark referred to the college as a tool of hope within the community’s tool-chest: “Having a community college in this community is another reason to *hope* – it provides one other tool in the community’s tool-chest to help shape how the community grows. The college’s contribution to the community’s optimism and self-respect was referenced by Gene as well: “The community stands a couple inches taller when they’re talking about the college...” And Paul commented that “the community college is part of the solution for this community.” Additionally, Paul reflected on the college as a sign of progress and hope, “The college has helped the community with their vision of what the community can become...When the college was growing, the community viewed that as a sign of progress. It was a sign of hope.”

This sense that the college helped the community look to the future, with hope and vibrancy, was discussed by Lee: “The community has changed its perspective to a community which is looking for opportunity – working to find what it takes to make a community vibrant – asking the question: ‘How do we grab it by the horns?’ ...And,” he added, “the community college has played such a big part in all of it.” The concept that the college provides a common ground for the community and a solid base for the future was advanced by Sam: “Having a college in your community is a foundational requirement for longevity...foundational in helping people feel connected. As diverse as our society is, the college is a place where everybody can be the same...on a quest for knowledge.” He summed up his viewpoint about the college supporting the community’s outlook this way: “So if I look at it, I would really say that the college is a place that is the future.”

Other community leaders portrayed the community college as providing a boon to the external view of the community. They explained that the community college contributed to the attraction of new residents and new industry to the area. They also explained that the community college contributed to an overall impression of the community. Ray maintained that “having a community college adds to the picture of what the community is.” He went on to explain, “The public benefit is *how we’re seen* ...the college provides an economic engine, attracts folks to the area for classes, and [contributes] to how the community markets itself.” James talked about the “perception” of the community: “Whether it’s attracting industry or attracting quality people to live in the region, I think it’s a positive community perception with the college being here.”

The college's presence was viewed by Sam as adding a degree of uniqueness to the community's image: "Having a college allows this community to build a mystique... a persona...a representation to the rest of the world." Lynn built upon this view, adding a visual image to this data-point: "The community college really is a little crown jewel up on the hill there. As you look at it, you know... it's very nice to have that as part of this community" (Lynn).

And finally, this theme of the community college contributing to a bolstered perception of the community and its future was supported by the comments of Paul who commended the college on its mission and role and positive impact on the growth and future of the community:

The community college is an advocate for the community. And the community college is an economic driver for the community. Yes, their product is education, but the college is about the growth and the future of this community. It is a palette of colors and while it may be a bit overused, the college really is about *building dreams*. The college is growing and it's going. The college is the advocate, the economic driver– it gives, not takes – and oh, by the way, *they do education*.

Summary: Results. In summary, the results of college-community engagement that were identified by the community leaders who participated in this study center around three themes:

1. Improved Economy and Skilled-up Workforce
2. Strengthened Community Leadership
3. Bolstered Perception of Community and its Future.

The college's contributions to a diversified local economy and to providing local workforce development that led to local employment were noted. The college's role in the improved unity and efficacy of local leadership, including leadership wisdom such as the importance of a shared community vision, the recognition of regional assets, and taking a leveraged approach to seeking financial capital were also highlighted. And finally, the importance of the college's presence and involvement in the community with regard to bolstering both the community's view of itself and outsiders' view of the community was underscored.

Summary: Chapter Four

Chapter Four presented the findings of this holistic study investigating the impact of a rural community college on its community. In a time when there has been significant public interest in the return on investment in higher education, and when community colleges have proposed they cannot be accurately viewed apart from their communities, this study explored the context, process, and results of the community college–community interaction in one rural community. The community context findings included a unique sense of regional identity and attitude, as well as a particular sense of place, time and work. The college context findings noted an institution particularly attuned to its community that approached its interactions with the community in a progressive, proactive, “dynamic” way. The process findings were articulated in three themes that identified unified, trusting, solution-oriented relationships among community leaders including the college president, resulting in regionally-driven instructional programs that respond to community needs and a buoyed sense of the college's presence

and vital role in the community, fostered by the interactions articulated by the first two themes. The results findings also fell into three themes that showed how the college-community interactions together advanced the community's economy, workforce, leaders and leadership, and overall hopeful perception of the community and its future.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter reviews the purpose and significance of the study and presents a summary of the data themes detailed in Chapter Four. It then provides a discussion of significant findings in relation to the literature, analyzes the limitations of the study, offers considerations for professional practice and further research, and proffers the researcher's closing reflections.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the role a rural community college plays in the development of a rural community. The study examined community leaders' perceptions of their community and its community college, the interaction between the community and the community college, and the results of that college-community interaction. The participants in the study were 11 community leaders, including elected officials; business and industry executives; and health, education, and human services leaders.

While a community college's connection to the local community is largely inherent, a full understanding of community college-community interaction and the impact of those interactions on the community as a whole is often difficult to articulate. Given today's demand on higher education institutions to defend their benefit to the public, I felt it advantageous to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a community college with regard to engagement with and impact on the community it serves.

Thus, the relationship of a rural community and a rural-serving community college was the focus of this study. The intent was to provide a community-based view of community college-community contexts, interactions, and results by answering the question: *How does the community college impact the development of the rural community?*

Summary of Data Themes

This first section of Chapter Five summarizes the data themes presented in Chapter Four. Next, the data themes are synthesized into significant findings and discussed within the framework of the three research questions: (1) What is the context of this community and this community college? (2) In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage? and (3) What are the results of the college-community engagement?

The data and subsequent findings were derived from interviews with the 11 study participants, from participant observation, and from a document review of the community and the community college. The themes/findings which emerged from the data analysis were:

1. The community was characterized by a:
 - a. regional identity and attitude including a sense of place;
 - b. regional identity and attitude including a sense of time;
 - c. regional identity and attitude including a sense of work.
2. The community college was characterized as being:
 - a. small, rural, and comprehensive;

- b. community-attuned;
 - c. dynamic in its approach.
3. The community college and the community interacted by way of:
- a. a community-based leadership-partnership network;
 - b. the college's regionally-driven instructional programs;
 - c. the college's presence in the community.
4. The results of the college-community interaction were:
- a. an improved economy and skilled-up workforce;
 - b. unified and strengthened community leadership;
 - c. a bolstered perception of the community and its future.

Discussion of Research Questions and Significant Findings

From the above data themes, five significant findings emerged. In this study, significant findings emerged from a synthesis of data themes and an alignment of those data themes to key language from the literature. The term “significant” in this study is used to convey importance, not to convey statistical significance. They were as follows:

1. The community defined itself through a regional, rural lens and was characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and to the history of the region.
2. The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits.
3. An improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit.

4. A community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development was recognized as a positive community change – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit.
5. An enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook were identified as positive community changes – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit.

The correspondence of research questions to data themes and the synthesis of those themes into significant findings is illustrated in Table 2: Research Questions to Data Themes to Significant Findings.

The discussion that follows is organized by the three research questions and the corresponding significant findings. Thus, the first section covers research question one: “What is the context of this community and this community college?” and the single corresponding significant finding. The following section covers research question two: “In what ways do the college and the community interact and engage?” and the single corresponding significant finding. The third section covers the research question three: “What are the results of the college-community engagement?” and the three corresponding significant findings.

Research Question 1: What is the context of this community and this community college?

The people within this 10,000 square mile region have that Git-Er-Done attitude and pioneering spirit...We have a deep history...an agrarian base that shaped this community... and our location and natural surroundings are critical...

Table 2

Research Questions to Data Themes to Significant Findings

Research Questions	Data Themes	Significant Findings
What was the context of this community and this community college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community was characterized by a regional identity and attitude, including a sense of place; a sense of time; a sense of work. The community college was characterized as being small, rural & comprehensive; community-attuned; and dynamic in its approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community defined itself through a regional, rural lens and was characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and to the history of the region.
In what ways did the college and the community interact and engage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community college and the community interacted by way of a community-based leadership-partnership network; the college's regionally-driven instructional programs; the college's presence in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits.
What were the results of the college-community engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The results of the college-community interaction were an improved economy and skilled-up workforce; unified and strengthened community leadership; a bolstered perception of the community and its future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An improved economy and skilled-up workforce were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. A community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development was recognized as a positive community change – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. An enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit.

Significant Finding 1: The community defined itself through a regional, rural lens and is characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and to the history of the region. A significant finding did emerge in response to the first research question regarding the context of the study: The community defined itself through a regional, rural lens and was characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and to the cultural history of the region. Through the assets-and-systems-based lens of community capitals, this finding highlighted the importance of both the natural capital and the cultural capital of the community.

The importance of context for this study was three-fold. As an interpretive study, the underlying assumption was that a description of the context was part of the complex whole, and therefore, central to building understanding of the research topic (Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 1994; Stake, 1995). Also, as a case study, the context of the study was important because “the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context” (Yin, 2003, p. 4). Finally, for this community study, it was important to view the findings through a systemic lens, interpreting how the community was situated in its natural and social environment (Capra, 1996; Patton, 1990). The Community Capitals Framework (CFF) (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013) was used as a point of departure to inform an appreciative, systems lens for the significant findings of this study.

The 11 community leaders who participated in this study described this community in terms of an interconnectedness of people to place and a broad geographical definition of the community. They spoke proudly about the community’s rural

characteristics, multiple-county composition, geographical location, natural resources, and cultural history.

They emphasized the rural nature of the community, citing a seven-county region, distinguished not only by its sprawling land mass but also by its human and commercial connections and reciprocities. The participants viewed the community's physical location as noteworthy, with regard to natural resources, livability, and transportation access.

The participants' descriptions of the community also included a strong sense of local cultural history. They made frequent allusions to the community's centuries-old history as a regional trading hub. They also referred to the community as a place of hale-and-hearty pioneers. The participants drew from this pioneer analogy to portray the people of the community as *Western*: strong, open, and tenacious.

The study participants' depiction of the community also underscored the importance of the regional economy. They referenced the value of the river running through the multi-county community and a related pride in local work traditions. Also of significance in their narratives were the prominence of the *working-man's* theme and the progression of the local economy from agriculture and timber to aluminum manufacturing and more recently, to a diversified high-technology economy. Taken together, the study participants' reflections on this community revealed a palpable rural and regional identity and attitude – punctuated by the interconnectedness of its people to the region's natural and cultural environments.

The study participants also made repeated references to the community college's embrace of the region, noting that it reached out beyond its district boundaries to serve

the seven-county community. The college's planning efforts, leadership networking, and program development strategies were all cited as evidence of the college's regional, rural orientation. The college's nursing and renewable energy programs were noted as reflections of the community. In fact, the community leaders' descriptions of the community and the college were often intermingled: "I've never thought about what the [region] would be without the college...it's just part of the community," James remarked. Thus, this finding about the community's regional identity and approach included the community college as well and reflected the literature's emphasis on the relationship of colleges to their unique locales, "Colleges...are place-based institutions, deeply affected by their local environment" (Harkavy & Hodges, 2012, p. 3).

Certainly the study participants' description of the community as *rural* aligned with both quantitative and qualitative definitions of rurality in the literature. This seven-county community was designated *non-metropolitan* by the Office of Management and Budget (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). Additionally, based on the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA, 2004) Rural-Urban Continuum Code of 1-9, three of the counties in this region were rated a "9" – completely rural – and the remaining counties were rated a "6" – population of 2,500-19,999. As well, the study participants' strong sense of *regional identity and attitude* was consistent with connotative definitions of rural which link community size, location, and homogeneity to a strong sense of local identity (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). Like the participants' narratives, the literature also reflected the realities of a rural American community steadily transitioning from an agrarian-based society to a more diversified society (Davis & Marema, 2008).

In similar fashion, the size and nature of this study's community college aligned with the quantitative literature designating this college as a *small, rural* community college (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-10). As well, the community leaders' perceptions of the community college as part of the "fabric of the community" was consistent with the literature on rural community colleges as in this quote that emphasized the strong connection between college and community, "Rural community colleges and their communities share a common destiny" (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007, p. 19).

Indeed, the study participants' observations on the interconnectedness of the region's people to the region's natural and cultural environments were in keeping with the literature on rurality and community in many respects. Their observations reflected the literature on *community* which defined community as territory and as relationships (Procter, 2005); which emphasized location as the fundamental element of community studies, followed by social interaction and common identity (Wilkinson, 1991); and which described community as "a shared sense of place" (Flora & Flora, 2013, p. 9).

In this study, the participants' focus on the interrelationship of people and place was also echoed in the literature by John Livingston (1996) who wrote: "A sense of community is most simply put as an awareness of simultaneous belonging to both a society and a place" (p. 132). As well, the literature supported the participants' beliefs that their community was strengthened by its members' deep understanding of their hale-and-hearty cultural history: "The bonds of community are strongest when they are fashioned from strands of shared history and culture" (Selznick, 1996, p. 197).

Finally, this finding revealed how the study participants' views on the centrality of natural and cultural capital to this region's identity reflected the literature on "community capitals" (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). The participants held strong beliefs about the significance of the community's geographic location, of the river connecting the communities of the region and fueling historical economies, and of the intrinsic value of the area's scenic beauty to the livability of the region. These observations aligned with the CCF literature on natural capital, defined as natural resources, local landscape, and the environment. As well, the participants held strong beliefs about the significance of the community's rural, Western orientation, its agrarian heritage, and its pioneering spirit. These observations aligned with the CCF literature on cultural capital, defined as the community's values, traditions, heritage recognition, and lens on the world (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006; Fey, Bregendahl, & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013).

In summary, the participants' sensibilities toward place and the environment, and their views on the interconnectedness of people to regional history and culture were significant to this study. Those perspectives on place underscored the importance of context to this study and were consistent with literature in multiple disciplines which stressed the importance of understanding the context of place to understanding the meaning of human interaction within that place (Brandt, 2006; Capra, 1996; Gruenewald, 2002, 2003a, b; Wheatley, 1992). The significance of this study's finding that the community defined itself through a regional, rural lens and was characterized by an interconnectedness of its people to the land and the cultural history correlated with the literature as summarized eloquently here:

The connection between human communities and place is not unique to rural areas, but here one can be certain that the land is not mere scenery and hiking trail, or resources in need of extraction. Here the land becomes part of people's lives, intermingled with buying and selling, working and playing, living and dying. It is both history and future. In rural communities is an opportunity for the land's rhythm's to become part of everyday life, an immediate linkage between the land's fertility and the community's prosperity. (Vitek, 1996, p. 3)

And finally, within the logic-model design of this study, the first part of the study has now been presented. The backdrop or context of the study was revealed as a rural community wherein the people view themselves as interconnected with place and with the culture of the region. This finding represented the study participants' recognition of the importance of natural and cultural capital to the identity of the region.

Research Question 2: What is the process of college and community engagement?

We are a networked community...We are like interlacing fingers, and what makes that powerful is that we have a common focus and direction...People are proud of the college and proud of what they do as a community...

Significant Finding 2: The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits. A significant finding emerged in response to the second research question regarding the process of college-community engagement: The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits. This finding highlighted the importance of the development of social capital between the college and the community.

Ten of the 11 community leaders cited the Community Outreach Team as “the single best way” the college partnered with the community. This network of community leaders was described as an alliance which had developed among leaders from the college, government, industry, and local commerce. In the course of their narratives, the study participants underscored the uniqueness of this network of leaders, stressing the importance of developing relationships, building mutual understanding, communicating regularly, maintaining reciprocity, and fostering trust among the members of this leadership group. According to Mark, “The chemistry has to be there...The strength of the team is in the trust that’s shared. We drop our individual constituent perspectives, and our constituents are simply the people who live here.” Essentially, the study participants’ interview narratives operationalized the term *social capital*, and their descriptions of the community leadership network coincided with three defining factors attributed to social capital in current social science literature: networks, trust, and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000).

A nuance of this finding regarding college and community leaders’ engagement in a collaborative network related to intentionality, commitment, and consistency over time – all necessary elements for the development of such social capital. The community leaders underscored the fact that the core group persistently “spent a lot of time together” – discussing, planning, traveling, and advocating. With this in mind, Mark raised the continuity of the network as a potential challenge: “Sustaining community leadership is an intrinsic concern. Now, it’s the right people in the right positions at the right time.

What if that changes? It's tenuous. That's a challenge." As it turned out, this recognition of the work it takes to develop and sustain partnership networks was prevalent in the literature: "The existence of a network of connections is not a natural given...It is the product of an endless effort...necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250). The importance of time, persistence, and consistency of participants in community development efforts was also noted in Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) research (Eller, Martinez, Pace, Pavel, Garza, & Barnett, 1998; Emery, 2008). Likewise, the Council on Competitiveness (2010) described effective collaboration as an "*ongoing* undertaking" (p. 8).

The study participants' observations of the import of social capital within the community, especially with regard to community development, will be further discussed in this chapter's next section. The notion from this study that social capital within the community carried real and important implications for community development was consistent with the literature (Fukuyama, 2002; Woodcock & Narayan, 2000). Therefore, following the logic model design of this study, a discussion of how social capital translates from a finding on process to a finding on results will continue in the next section. Indeed, this finding that the development of social capital within this community was perceived by the study participants as both a notable aspect of the process of college-community engagement and a notable aspect of the results of college-community engagement speaks to a concept in community development literature, as noted by Fukuyama (2002): "The concept of social capital is clearly advancing from an academic concept to a practical policy objective" (p. 35).

While this core group of community leaders worked closely as a unique team to build strong ties based on a spirit of trust, reciprocity, and shared goals, the study participants also reported myriad other examples of a broader, horizontal-functioning network of community and college representatives that contributed actively to the process of college-community engagement, focusing on collaboration and mutual pursuits.

For example, participants in this study viewed the collaboration between college instructional leaders and community-based industry leaders as an important example of intentional college-community engagement. Specifically, they spoke highly of the college's active collaboration with the healthcare and wind-energy industries during development of the college's nursing and renewable energy programs. "We made a community decision to move forward to develop our own nurses...the hospital reached out to the college and that partnership just grew and grew...And the wind technology program is [another] perfect example...The college didn't develop it, the wind industry did...and [that's] the reason for the nearly 100% hire rate for graduates." These examples of college-community engagement described by the participants of this study aligned readily with the literature on community engagement in higher education, wherein, as a response to the public agenda of accountability in higher education, post-secondary institutions were called to be more purposeful with regard to improving connections and communications with their communities (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Fisher, Fabricant, & Simmons, 2004; Murrasse, 2001; McPherson, 2007; Watson, 2007).

The participants in this study also saw the regular, day-to-day community presence of college employees and sharing of college facilities as essential to college-

community relations and mutuality. They noted the college's visibility and its spirit of willingness to be "at the table." As well, they affirmed college-community interactions in these regards: the value of personal relationships in a rural community, the importance of business community connections, and the merit of operating outside the education silo. As one study participant noted: "Being integrated into the business community is critical...The simple fact of the matter is...Schools in general do not set the standard by which a community thinks – businesses do. That's why the spider web is key...." This reported involvement of community college representatives – far beyond college leaders – cooperating with civic, education, and business colleagues throughout the community linked with a concept in the social capital literature referred to as "radius of trust" (Emery, 2008; Fukuyama, 1995), which essentially referred to the broadening circle of people who share in established cooperative norms. In the case of this community, study participants perceived a broad-based radius of trust between college and community members.

In a related vein, the study participants' views of the process of college-community engagement were consistent with many salient aspects of community engagement literature and specifically, the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification Framework (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2006-10). This framework defined community engagement as the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and

reciprocity” (Driscoll, 2008, 2009). It assessed post-secondary institutions’ curricular engagement with their communities and outreach to and partnerships with the community.

The college-community engagement described by participants in this study reflected the tenets of the Carnegie initiative and its literature in these ways: a focus on community-identified needs, enhanced community well-being, and student learning; and the collaborative interaction and exchange of resources toward capacity building and economic development.

At the same time, the college-community engagement described in this study was *not* consistent with two tenets of the Carnegie’s Community Engagement framework and its literature, specifically, a focus on students’ civic learning and a focus on enriching the scholarship and research of the institution. While civic learning through service learning, community-based internships, and maintaining a scholarly partnership with the community were cited as top-ranked community engagement practices in Simpson’s (2011) research of Carnegie-classified institutions, the study participants in this study did not report these particular aspects. These differences may be nuances, but the aspects of the Carnegie framework which are not called out in this study may be seen as more university-oriented practices.

As well, reports from this current study are also not consistent with observations in community engagement literature that all too often the relationships between communities and post-secondary institutions are one-way (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011), that the “rhetoric of community engagement outpaces the reality” (Butin, 2007, p. 34), and that community engagement “needs to be... deeper

(more significant, serious, and sustained)” (Harkavy & Hodges, 2012, p. 10). The perspectives of this study’s participants did not align with these remarks from the literature, which appeared to be directed largely at college and university audiences. In fact, these study participants underscored the reciprocal, regular, and serious engagement with the community by their local community college.

The perceptions on college-community interaction shared by the participants in this study also aligned with the literature on the relationship between community colleges and the communities they serve, inherent in the mission and the role of community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Gleazer, 1980; Levinson, 2005; Ratcliff, 1994; Vaughan, 2006). These study participants expressed the belief that the local community college is, as the literature suggested: “a college of and for its community” (Mellow & Heelan, 2008, p. 6).

Finally, this significant finding represented the study participants’ opinion that the development of social capital within the community undergirded the processes of college-community engagement, whether that was through a community leader network, through college and industry program development collaborations, or through day-to-day personal interactions and business transactions. This opinion aligned with the literature on community capitals (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013) and specifically the literature on social capital, defined as trust, cooperation, connections, and reciprocity – the social glue of a community (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006; Fey, Bregendahl, & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013).

In summary and in keeping with the logic-model design of this study, two parts of the study have now been presented. In the previous section, the context of the study was revealed as a rural community wherein the study participants viewed the people as interconnected with the place, the culture, and the history of the region. Within this context, the community college was also viewed as an integral part of the whole of the community.

Within this section, the process of college-community engagement was represented in Significant Finding 2: The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits. The study participants' personal experiences with the leadership network in this community and their perspectives on the process of college-community engagement between the college and industry partners and among college representatives and the larger community in day-to-day community interactions yielded the above finding. Their experiences and perspectives echoed literature on community capitals, literature on social capital, literature on community engagement in higher education, and literature on the mission and role of community colleges. These findings represented the study participants' opinions about the importance of social capital investments within the community.

Research Question 3: What are the results of college and community engagement?

The community college is an economic driver for this community...And the college is here to help with workforce training because investing in human capital is what's going to move you ahead...It's the connectedness that people really need...Everyone working together has changed the environment/the dynamic of the community, and the community

college has played such a big part in all of it...If we didn't have a community college, this community wouldn't be where we are today...

Three significant findings emerged in response to the third research question regarding the results of college-community engagement: (a) An improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit; (b) A community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development was recognized as a positive community change – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit; and (c) An enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. These findings also highlighted the importance of the investments in and the interactions among the seven community capitals.

Significant Finding 3: An improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce were identified as positive community changes – and the community college's contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. First and foremost, the participants in this study identified an improved regional economy and a skilled-up workforce as positive community changes, for which the community college was directly recognized. Specifically, participants in this study cited career-and-technical education programs at the local community college which had recently been developed to

respond to the need for local healthcare workers and local alternative energy workers as a central factor in a recent upswing in the local economy.

The study participants had high praise for the community college's efforts to educate the local workforce as reflected by Jill: "Allowing people a stepping stone into a new career path is huge...It's kind of like the rising tide floats all boats." Their recognition of the importance of an educated, local workforce and citizenry to the development of the community overall supported the literature which stated that education and training are generally considered the most important forms of human capital development within a community (Becker, 2007) and the literature which discussed the role of community colleges in developing human capital (Hlavna, 1992; Laanan, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2006; Steigleder & Soares, 2012). As asserted by the American Association of Community Colleges (2012), "The development of human potential is what community colleges are all about" (p. xi).

Indeed, a principal finding of this study was the community leaders' acknowledgment of this rural community college's central role in regional workforce and economic development: "The economic vitality of the community is very much to the credit of the community college," one leader said. The study participants' views on the college's role in economic development were consistent with the literature on the importance of community colleges' roles in local workforce and economic development (AACC, 2012; Bredfeldt, 2009; Chesson & Rubin, 2002; Jacobs, 2012; Katsinas, 1994; Katsinas & Lacey, 1989; Kingry, 1984; Murray, 2010; Rogers, 2010; Rubin, 2001; Rubin, Cejda, Fluharty, Lincoln, & Ziembroski, 2005; Salant & Kane, 2007). Most recently,

AACC (2012) maintained, “Even now, in the midst of an economy struggling to recover, community colleges have responded to calls for retreading the American workforce, training displaced workers, and helping develop new industries” (p. viii).

The literature cited economic development as a key factor in rural community colleges’ successful outreach roles (Salant & King, 2007), and in fact, Parker’s (2010) research asserted that supporting economic development was community colleges’ primary role. Jacobs (2012) cited community colleges as partnering to create “comprehensive economic revitalization strategies” (p. 191). Also, rural development policy frameworks that advanced the rural community college’s role in place-based economic and community development, workforce preparation, and people-based education appeared in the literature in congruence with the findings of this study (Chesson & Rubin, 2002; Rubin, 2001; Rubin, Cejda, Fluharty, Lincoln & Ziembroski, 2005). One difference between this current study and the majority of the literature on community colleges’ role in economic development was that the study participants in this study were community leaders, including elected officials, whose voices have not been a significant part of the conversation in the literature on rural community college’ roles in rural community development. More typically, research has investigated internal college perceptions and/or strictly business community perceptions of community colleges’ roles in local economic development (Currin, 1988; Gossett, 2002; Kingry, 1984; Thomas, 2003).

An important aspect of this finding on an *improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce* was the many references to ‘regional’ highlighted in the data about the

development of the college's nursing and renewable energy programs. Indeed, the study participants' earlier characterization of the community as a region in the first significant finding manifested again in this workforce and economic development finding as well.

For example, the study participants' accounts of the development of the college's nursing and renewable energy programs revealed the college's collaboration with regional hospitals across two states and the college's collaboration with the wind-technology industry in several regional counties and beyond. The study participants' accounts also revealed that the healthcare and renewable energy jobs were interspersed throughout the seven-county region, so that ultimately, graduates of these programs found jobs in that broader community, thus contributing to the development of human capital across the entire region. Similarly, Phelps (2012b) advanced the importance of post-secondary education efforts: "The formula and strategies for preparing workers and communities for the 21st century must...capitalize on regional economic interests" (p. 5).

The region's workforce and economic development achievements cited by the study participants as important results of college-community engagement bear many consistencies with the literature on regional development. The concepts from this study that aligned with the literature on regional development included: the merit of face-to-face connections; the need for a regional, unifying narrative; regional stewards practicing collaborative regional leadership, working from a jointly envisioned regional plan; shared pursuit and acquisition of external funding; and the capacity to aggregate demand and pool resources (Council on Competitiveness, 2010; Drabenstott, Novack, & Weiler,

2004; Eddy & Murray, 2007; University of Montana Public Policy Research Institute, 2008).

Significant Finding 4: A community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development was recognized as a positive community change – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. The development of the community leadership network and the recognition of leadership wisdom that emerged from their collective work was a significant finding of this study. The participants in this study provided several insights on a unified and strengthened community leadership network as not only an important part of the process of college-community engagement, discussed earlier in this chapter, but also as a significant result of college-community engagement. They described the strengthened community leadership network as a positive change in the community and as a way the public benefited from the college’s presence in the community. This recognition of the importance of the development of social capital among community leaders was echoed in the literature where social capital was viewed as a critical community characteristic – not solely for the inherent social benefits to the community – but as a vehicle for mobilizing growth in other asset areas (Emery & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Woodcock & Narayan, 2000).

Participants in this study viewed this strengthened community leadership network as a result of college-community engagement that served as a factor in positive change in the community. They referenced again the spirit of collaboration that was evident in the

efforts of the Community Outreach Team and the cooperative, collective efforts of the broader leadership network. These they viewed as levers for community development, leading to such accomplishments as broadband Internet implementation, high-tech industry recruitment, built infrastructure, and program development.

These endorsements of the community leadership network reflected the literature on social capital's impetus for activation of other community resources: "In order for systems and organizations to change, people have to have trust in the people and the process...As the radius grows and includes more partners, more people, energy, resources and collaborative efforts are mobilized" (Emery, 2008. p. 22). Flora and Flora (2013) also note that a community with "well-developed social infrastructure tends to engage in collective action for community betterment" (p. 133). Said another way, the leadership collaborations, which were described by the study participants as having increased community capacity, paralleled the literature from the Council on Competitiveness (2010) which underscored the importance of what they deemed the "3 C's" of regional collaboration: conversation, connection, and capacity. Also, in its report, *Reclaiming the American Dream*, AACC (2012) called for "collaboration at entirely new levels, among internal and external entities" in order to "optimize results for individuals, communities, and the nation" (p. ix).

The study participants' narratives about the community leadership network reflected a perception that their community development strategies had been honed in recent years, and while the community leaders were not overtly following prescribed community development models, their efforts mirrored the literature on self-help

community development in three ways: a focus on social capital and civic capacity within the community power-structure, a focus on long-term goals and priority-setting, and a focus on system change (Christenson, 1989; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). As well, their efforts also reflected several tenets of the appreciative inquiry approach: a focus on community assets, an awareness of learning from each other, an elemental use of conversation and dialogue, and a discovery of the community's positive core (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). The premise was "Build on what is there and what is working" (Flora & Flora, 2013, p. 379). The study participants' reported experiences also aligned with the literature on catalytic community development (Pigg & Bradshaw, 2003), which stressed the challenge of building capacity within a broad, varied, and regional network of cooperative relationships and complementary resources to ends that are comprehensive, rather than categorical in nature.

Consistent with an asset-based approach to community development in the literature (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), the community leaders spoke positively in several regards about their recognition and utilization of local assets. They told about: fostering the development of their own social capital within the community; learning how to wield their social capital into political capital through word and action; embracing the importance of the community's natural capital, specifically the community's geographic location, rivers, and scenic beauty; advancing the human capital in the community through education and training in the fields of healthcare and natural energy; and

investing in built capital infrastructure in order to facilitate human capital development and leverage additional resources.

The study participants' accounts of college and community leaders' actions in support of community development were consistent with the literature from the CCF and the Rural Community College Initiative (Emery, 2008; Emery & Flora, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2004, 2008, 2013) which described how community assets can be invested in order to increase capacity across community capitals, resulting in an increase of the flow of assets, and leading to an upward spiral effect in the community. Indeed, the community development efforts described by the study participants focused more on getting building-blocks in place in the community than solving one specific problem – more on laying groundwork for the community's collective future than on meeting one organization's immediate need.

For example, the study participants talked about the importance of the change effort related to establishing broadband Internet in the community. They described this as a thorny collective endeavor – held as a foundational change and requiring a large investment of social, political, and fiscal capital – which they trusted would open the doors for further community development, such as the recruitment of a global high-tech Internet company and the improvement of education and healthcare services. This specific example was consistent with community capitals and community development literature. In this instance, community leaders utilized social and political capital to support a strategic built-capital investment that would ultimately create further investments in human capital. Researchers have noted not only the benefits of asset-based

community development but also the importance of built capital infrastructure – rural Internet connectivity, for example – to reduce a rural community’s isolation from markets and information, and to ensure a rural community’s ability to participate in a global world and economy (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Strover, 1999). This pragmatic example of efficacy in community development also becomes an example for the next part of this finding: understanding of community assets.

The participants in the study also reported insights gained through their collective endeavors to focus on community assets rather than on individual organizational needs. The development of community leaders’ knowledge and skills, “sharpening the saw” as one study participant called it, was a thread that ran through the findings. For example, the leaders collectively began embracing "place" and the region's natural capital opportunities as they considered their community's future - viewing, investing in, and leveraging the river that runs through the community for all its many attributes, including water, power, recreation, culture – and viewing and embracing the region’s national scenic area as an “advantage rather than a disadvantage.” With this viewpoint, the leaders learned to see and appreciate the balance between natural resource preservation and community development. This evolved recognition and respect for the community’s natural capital was consistent with the literature, which called for greater emphasis on leadership actions to recognize and enhance a community’s natural resources (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013).

Another aspect of the improved efficacy of the community leadership network representing a positive change in the community revolved around the community leaders’

approach to pursuit of financial capital for the region, particularly with federal legislators. This was cited by the study participants as a strategic lesson learned by the community leaders.

Some of the participants noted the importance of first establishing social capital among the leaders before that social capital could be parlayed into political capital, to be utilized both within the community and beyond. Several study participants called-out community college leaders as providing the know-how for linking to external resources. As suggested by Sue, “The college has played an important role in the building that political capital...Having that federal relationship is great for the college and great for the community.” The literature underscored the fact that “linkages” among community members and outside sources are key to all community development (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). Whether that be horizontal linkages extending laterally among community members and between communities, or vertical linkages extending upward to state and federal resources and agencies, the connections are critical. “Successful rural communities not only engage local governments but also selectively link with...higher levels of government” (Flora & Flora, 2013).

Interestingly, a maxim repeated by all of the Community Outreach Team study participants, “We never ask for the first dollar; we only ask for the last dollar, and we never ask for a hand-out, only a hand-up” not only represented the lesson learned, but was also consistent with the literature in two regards. Flora and Flora (2008, 2013), for example, emphasized that while most successful community development efforts build on community assets, external funders often look for a local community’s ability to

“mobilize” local resources first, and that is just what the community leaders of this study did. A final observation that applied to this illustration of the community leaders’ cohesiveness and enthusiasm as exhibited by their mirrored use of language with regard to the ‘federal ask’ was reflected in the literature as such: “When contextualized in the rhetoric of individuals working to build community...citizen rhetoric functions to create community belief and motivation” (Proctor, 2005, p. 8). Said another way, telling a region’s story has been advanced as one of the new tasks of regional leadership. “Regions cannot be expected to act like regions without a unifying narrative that creates a shared sense of identity” (Council on Competitiveness, 2010, p. 44). This “power of storytelling” was also inherent in the appreciative inquiry model of community development (Flora & Flora, 2013, p. 379).

Finally, the study participants described their community development efforts and results as an intermingling of process and result – community leaders taking stock of local assets, defining a vision and plan for the community’s future, and then taking collective action. This finding that community development efforts emerged as simultaneous processes and products was consistent with the literature which discussed the distinction and relationship between “development *in* community and development *of* community” (Claude, Bridger, & Luloff, 2000; Luloff & Bridger, 2003, p. 212; Wilkinson, 1991).

All in all, the results of the college and the community working together in the rural region of this study reflected several aspects of the literature on rural development policy. First, the various community development results reflected the assertion

(Freshwater, 2007) that rural development policy should be defined at the local level and should reflect local resources, opportunities, and values. Likewise, Hewitt and Thompson (2012) observed that rural regionalism in the United States was “essentially bottom-up...driven by voluntary interests...to tackle development issues” (p. 253). Second, the findings of this study which described the processes and the results of this community’s development aligned with U.S. Department of Agriculture (2008) assertions that rural development efforts should recognize local strengths and weaknesses, utilize broad objectives and regional planning, and seek federal technical assistance. Third, the findings of this study reflected strong similarities to seven components identified as factors needed for rural regions to prosper: a sense of place; engagement by higher education; an entrepreneurial culture; collaboration and cooperation among regional leaders; financial investment from multiple institutions; strong leadership, organizational, and economic infrastructure; and education and training programs that serve the region’s goals (Drabenstott, Novack, & Weiler, 2004, p. 69). And fourth, the findings for this study lined up with many of Fluharty’s (Energy and Economic Growth, 2012) guiding principles for 21st century rural policies, including: asset-based development; flexibility and local input; investment in new intermediaries; and attention to natural resources, heritage and culture, and renewable energies.

Significant Finding 5: An enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook are identified as positive community changes – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes are cited as a public benefit. The final significant finding of this study represented a summary sentiment that was expressed by

participants as they responded to the interview questions about positive changes in the community and how the community benefited from having a community college in its midst. The study participants expressed opinions that the college represented “hope, pride and progress” in the community, that it operated as an “advocate and a driver” for the community, and that now the community’s modus operandi was one of “looking for opportunity.” As Jill put it, “There is an optimism in the community now.” Their observations portrayed the community college as a boon not only to internal community perceptions, but also to the external view of the community. They said that the positive perception of the community and the community college helped to attract new residents and business and industry to the community. As Paul stated, “The college is about the growth and the future of this community.” This perception aligned with Austin’s (2012) statement about the importance of post-secondary institutions to communities: “As place definers, learning institutions... enhance their communities’ attractiveness, making them magnets for talent” (p. 23).

The current study’s findings also linked with Miller and Tuttle’s (2007) research that identified ways that rural community colleges impacted local community self-identity: by developing community inclusiveness and community pride; by creating a value-added community lifestyle, and by being the central defining component of the community. In this same vein, Miller and Deggs (2012) asserted that community colleges have an unacknowledged role of developing community identity. “These colleges play an important role in promoting community change and growth, and thereby, have a strong voice in establishing community expectation” (p. 335).

With regard to the community's optimistic outlook, this finding intersects the research of Hicswa (2003) that maintained a rural community college president's leadership and social capital can contribute to a community's vision and its hopefulness. Also, this current finding, coupled with the previous two findings describing the results of college-community engagement, aligned with the literature that looked at community change from a systems perspective (Emery, 2008; Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013; Jacobs, 2011). The forward-looking optimism and geared-for-opportunity premise that the study participants described was a holistic, albeit intangible, result that was borne from the previously discussed improvements in the community's workforce and economy, its social, cultural, and political capital, and its improving assets in built and financial capital. The sense of this community being a "higher-outcome" community and having experienced a period of "transformation" was represented in the literature as a community with "capacity" having undergone a "spiraling-up process" due to the cumulative investments in and interactions of community assets, or community capitals (Emery, 2008; Emery & Flora, 2006). This notion of a community with capacity was echoed in the literature on community engagement in higher education, which advanced that genuine mutuality between community and college would build capacity and competence in both (Ramaley, 2005).

The community leaders' opinions that an enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook were a public benefit from having a community college in the community connected with the literature on the public agenda of accountability in higher education where studies such as *Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher*

Education for Individuals and Society cited both tangible and intangible societal benefits resulting from post-secondary education (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). It also aligned with Parker's (2010) research which found that the community college contributes to the overall quality of life of the community. Bowen (1974) observed that the public or social benefits of higher education are often subtle and difficult to evaluate. The subtle results of hope and pride identified by these community leaders may be difficult to formally assess and report, but the findings aligned with Bowen's (1974) declaration that societal benefits as collective outcomes of higher education's role in communities were undoubtedly present. As well, these study participants' statements that an enhanced community image and optimistic outlook were results of the college's presence and engagement in the community aligned with Harbour, Davies, and Gonzales-Walker's (2010) premise that an informal dialogic accountability network between a college and its community is a necessarily important dimension of institutional accountability. Finally this finding pointed back to the literature on post-secondary accountability represented by Mellow and Heelan (2008) who, in commenting on the existing metrics for community college performance, wrote that in these metrics, "The real value a community college adds to its locality is missed" (p. 67). As well, this finding on perceived public benefit intersected with Ewell and Jones' (2006) observation that "the focus of accountability is not on what institutions do, but instead on how the state and its citizens benefit" (p. 12).

In summary, the results of college-community engagement reflected in this study were an improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce; a community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets,

and efficacy in community development; and an enhanced community image and optimistic community outlook. These three significant findings were identified by the study participants as positive community changes – and the community college’s contributions to those positive changes were cited as a public benefit. As well, these significant findings highlighted the importance of the investments in the seven community capitals, and interactions among them.

Summary. In keeping with the logic-model design of this study, all three parts of the study have now been presented together with their corresponding significant findings. This study examined a community college in its community, and its impacts on community development, from three angles: context, process of interaction and engagement, and results. The context of the study was revealed as a rural community wherein the community leaders viewed themselves as interconnected with the place, the culture, and the history of the region. Within this context, the community college was viewed as an integral part of the whole of the community. The process of college-community engagement was represented in the finding: The college and the community invested in reciprocal relationships and collaborated on mutually beneficial pursuits. Finally, in this third section, the results of college-community engagement were represented by three findings: (a) an improved regional economy and skilled-up workforce; (b) a community leadership network with increased confidence in collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development; and (c) an enhanced community image and an optimistic community outlook.

The study participants' personal experiences with new college training programs which promoted the skilling-up of the local workforce, as well as their views on the improved regional economy, contributed to their citing these as positive community changes and recognizing the college's contributions to those changes as a public benefit. As well, the study participants' personal experiences with the community leadership network, including their observations of the network's increased collaboration, understanding of community assets, and efficacy in community development efforts, contributed to their citing this as a positive community change and recognizing the college's contributions to that change as a public benefit. Finally, the study participants' personal observations that the community was enjoying an enhanced community image and optimistic community outlook contributed to their citing these indicators of positive community change and recognizing the college's contributions to those changes as a public benefit. These significant findings aligned with the literature on community engagement and the public benefit of higher education; the literature on rural community colleges and economic and community development; the literature on rural development; the literature on assets-based community development models, especially the Community Capitals Framework; and the literature on mission, role, and accountability of community colleges. These findings also highlighted the importance of investing in the development of human, social, political, cultural, natural, financial, and built capitals as systemic assets that each contribute to a community's development.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to the personal disclosure that I addressed in the third chapter of this study, I have identified two limitations of this study.

The first limitation is inherent in the choice I made to conduct a qualitative study and utilize a single case study design. The unit of analysis is one community, and 11 study participants participated in the study. Thus, the findings from this study are not generalizable to other communities or other colleges. Although the findings of the study are not generalizable, my decision to utilize an interpretive research paradigm did align with the emphasis of my research: to understand contexts, processes, and complex relationships within a single bounded system. In this regard, readers of this case study account may determine the applicability of this research to their own reflexive practice or future research.

The second limitation of the study has to do with the absence of ethnically-diverse study participants, thus the study participants did not represent the overall ethnicity of the community. Specifically, I initially selected study participants utilizing a criterion sampling approach, based on pre-identified community leader roles: elected officials; business and industry executives; health, education and human services leaders; and community cultural leaders. At that point, no minority leaders were identified as serving in roles of elected officials, business and industry executives, nor health, education and human services leaders. I then identified two community cultural leaders of minority ethnicity from the community document review, and I identified an additional minority community cultural leader through opportunistic and chain sampling strategies, but I was

unable to secure these culturally diverse community leaders as study participants. While I feel the findings of this study do accurately reflect the perceptions of the community leaders in the leadership roles described at that time, I recognize that the literature on community development discusses the importance of involving a broad-based band of community members, which would allay the possibility of biasing development efforts away from under-represented groups (Flora & Flora, 2008, 2013). Future research could assess the views of more ethnically diverse community leaders.

Considerations for Practice and for Further Research

The purpose of this research study was three-fold: to better understand community college impact on local community development in the rural setting, to contribute to the scholarly literature on community engagement in higher education, and to inform my own practice as a community college leader. At the center of this research study was the question about the community college's relationship with the community it serves. The question was driven by the desire to more fully understand the public benefit of the community college, or said another way, how the college contributed to the community's development.

A key aspect of this study was the consideration of context or place, in recognition of the fact that rural community colleges and rural communities are intricately linked by a shared location, and by a shared providence, to some extent. Another important factor was to consider these questions from an outside perspective, and more to the point, from an outside perspective of local decision-makers, local community leaders. At the end of the current study, just as at the beginning, the

challenge remains that measuring community impact is a complex endeavor. That said, from that complexity emerged several elements for the reader to consider for professional reflection, practice or research. I offer a few of those considerations below.

1. *Regional Collaboration, Regional Leadership.* The emergence of the regional theme in this study provides fodder for practice and for research in many directions. The current study and the literature suggested that the concepts of regional development approaches and regional leadership practices are popular, emergent policy considerations, especially in rural communities. As well, the current study and the literature demonstrated that best practices in regional policy may include local/regional decision-making, leadership, and vision; a strong base of social and political capital; engagement by higher education; and attention to natural capital and place-based assets. Community college leaders might assess their own opportunities for expanding community connections and development strategies to a regional approach. Community college scholars might examine communities of place which have chosen to collaborate beyond their traditional boundaries, including how a college or university participates in such an expanded or regional collaboration.
2. *Social Capital and Social Networks within the Community.* The current study revealed a significant effort by both college and community leadership to invest in social capital and partnership opportunities. Their mutual effort was perceived as creating a positive advantage in the community; that opinion was also prevalent in the literature. Assuming that authentic social capital and social networks within

the community are fundamental to broad-based community success, a consideration for community college leaders may be to conduct an audit of the working relationships among community and college leaders within the community to determine areas where bonding and bridging social capital exists and where voids may need to be filled. This could be as simple as a reflective personal activity or as involved as a social network mapping activity or an action research study. A related question might be: Are there community constituent groups, diverse voices, or ethnic minorities whose voices are not being heard within community leader networks? This activity could lead to considerations of an expanded community leader group, a new college policy on community engagement, or intentional institutional goals or dedicated resources to strengthen the college's presence in the whole community. If social capital has value, then how do we increase that value in our community?

3. *Community Engagement.* This study revealed a large volume of literature on community engagement in higher education. Universities were well-represented by way of research, policy papers, and emerging institutional infrastructures. Within the literature, community colleges were comparatively absent. In contrast, the current study revealed a large volume of activity related to community engagement by the local community college. The college was well-represented in the community by way of community-based partnerships and community-based instructional programs. Within the community of this study, universities were comparatively absent.

With respect to this situation, a question to ask might be: How does our institution align with the tenets of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application? If the documentation is deemed a good indicator of engagement, in what areas do we need to improve our collaboration efforts? Perhaps a second question might be asked: Why does the Community Engagement Classification matter? And if it does, should this institution apply for that designation? Third, some communities are fortunate enough to have both a university, public or private, and a community college in their midst. A question for community college and university leaders in this situation might be: Are we partnering in all ways possible to better serve our local community and leverage our respective resources? A question for research could revolve around how the university and college collaborate within a community or perhaps a comparative study of the ways the college and the university engage with the local community.

4. *Accountability Measures and the Public Trust.* The public agenda of accountability in higher education was a key element of the conceptual framework of this study. It has become a driver for state-driven reporting requirements linked to public funding and public judgments of institutional effectiveness. Inherent to this accountability challenge for community colleges are considerations such as: How do we enrich the accountability conversations held among legislators, educators, and the community? How do we consider existing frameworks and ask what outcomes are missing from the metrics we are using? How do we advocate a *both-and* conversation – recognizing the merits of student-

achievement data and also recognizing the merits of a broader framework to reflect the community benefits from post-secondary education? Continued experimentation with holistic assessment models such as the Community Capitals Framework may be considered for professional practice and for further research.

5. *Rural Community Colleges' Role in Rural Development.* This study and the related literature indicated that rural community colleges are well-connected to the rural communities they serve. The literature also indicated that the U.S. Department of Agriculture supports Regional Rural Development Centers at land-grant universities. The current Western Regional Rural Development Center serves 13 Western states and four Pacific territories. A consideration might be: How could community colleges in the Northwest partner with the WRRDC to better serve local communities? Could the universities' focus on research and information dissemination be paired with community colleges' local infrastructure to provide deeper support for communities? As well, the literature advanced the notion of rural community colleges becoming eligible recipients for rural community development funding. Could community colleges provide local leadership or become eligible grantees to federal agencies with community development responsibilities? What policies might need to change in order for that to happen? Is it even a reasonable idea?
6. *Place as an Asset.* The current study and the related literature indicate that *place matters*. Being cognizant of, demonstrating pride in, and being good stewards of the community's natural location and related capital are deemed important for a

college and for a community. Considerations for practice may include a simple reflection, in-house discussion, or community mapping of how the community, including the community college, supports, protects, and leverages place as an asset and a resource. A research study might examine the various ways in which communities and community colleges are closely linked with their unique localities - how “place” plays a role in defining various community colleges.

7. *Communication and Community*. The topic of communication appeared in various places in the current study. The study participants placed high importance on communication with one another, and the literature echoed this finding in the context of building trust and social capital. The literature underscored the importance of public communication with regard to post-secondary accountability and building the public trust. And also, the current study revealed that leaders’ language helps to create vision and meaning for regional collaborations. Considerations for practice or research may reside in questions such as these: How can community colleges hone their semantics and expand their communications to include a broader description of their efforts, purpose and value? Could community colleges move their stories and core language from economic and workforce development to community development? Could community colleges adopt a broader, more holistic statewide annual reporting framework so that the replication of the report becomes a branding of sorts and so that the community reports could be aggregated statewide? Could community colleges adopt a framework similar to the CCF so that the report addresses

community-based outcomes, in addition to student-performance outcomes? And with regard to public communication, a research study might focus on how community college leaders today use language to convey the college's vision, mission, and outcomes to the community.

Final Thoughts and Researcher Reflections

We often think that when we have completed our study of one, we know all about two, because “two” is “one and one.” We forget that we still have to make a study of “and...” (Eddington, 1953, p.103).

Many years ago, I departed a late-night board room discussion on institutional effectiveness, intrigued by the swirls of complexity inherent in assessing and communicating community college performance. Many late nights, meeting rooms, and discussions later, I had an opportunity to choose a doctoral research topic. I finally chose to pursue an interpretive study about the relationship between a community college and its community, in order to better understand how others perceived the performance and impact of a community college within its local context.

This evening, I depart a late-night meeting between myself and my nearly-completed research study, holding a much deeper view of the impact of a community college on its community, informed by the perspectives of researchers and myriad professionals, and the lived-experience of community leaders. That said, I remain intrigued by the swirls of complexity inherent in assessing community college performance, for I realize as Arthur Eddington (1953) suggested: “We often think that when we have completed our study of one, we know all about two, because ‘two’ is ‘one and one.’ We forget that we still have to make the study of ‘and’” (p. 103).

It is certainly true that more study will follow, and it is also true that the understanding I seek is to be found through that systems lens where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, where the ‘and’ must also be considered. In that vein, I come away from this research study, with several insights.

First, while I recognize that this study was largely an appreciative inquiry, I was still struck by the overwhelming positivity of these community leaders toward their local community college. Their narratives about the contributions of this college to the community and about the symbiotic reciprocity between the two were authentic and concrete. I was encouraged to continue the pursuit of ways to understand and communicate the holistic meaning and impact of a community college’s presence in a local community.

Second, I am more aware than ever of the influence of ‘place’ on individuals, on communities, and on organizations, such as the community college. I was impressed with the study participants’ strong ties to the region’s rural geography, natural environment, and cultural history and how those ties appeared again and again throughout the interviews and the literature on this region. This experience reinforced my inherent inclination toward seeking place-based and regional nuances in working with individuals, communities, and organizations, and it emerges as an important lens to keep focused with regard to the work of each unique community college.

The third insight I gained was the value placed on purposeful relationship-building within this rural community. I was once again impressed by the study participants’ clear and unwavering identification of their affective connections. Their

citations of trust and their enthusiasm for collaboration were genuine, and my discovery of literature that also underscored the importance of taking the time for conversation, connection, and relationship-building remains relevant to my own professional endeavors as a community college leader.

Finally, I close this research study with a brief reflection on the scholastic endeavor itself. Coming to understand my personal worldview and to articulate a social constructivist perspective has served me not only throughout this research study, but also in my daily work as a community college professional. The guidance I received in expanding my interpretive ways of thinking, my discernment of connections and contexts, and my personal penchant for systemic approaches has enriched both my professional and personal life. The completion of a dissertation manuscript may be an objective correlative of a successful scholastic endeavor, but I suggest in closing that the real success may just be that my mind is still intrigued by the swirls of complexity inherent in assessing and communicating the relationship between a community college and its community.

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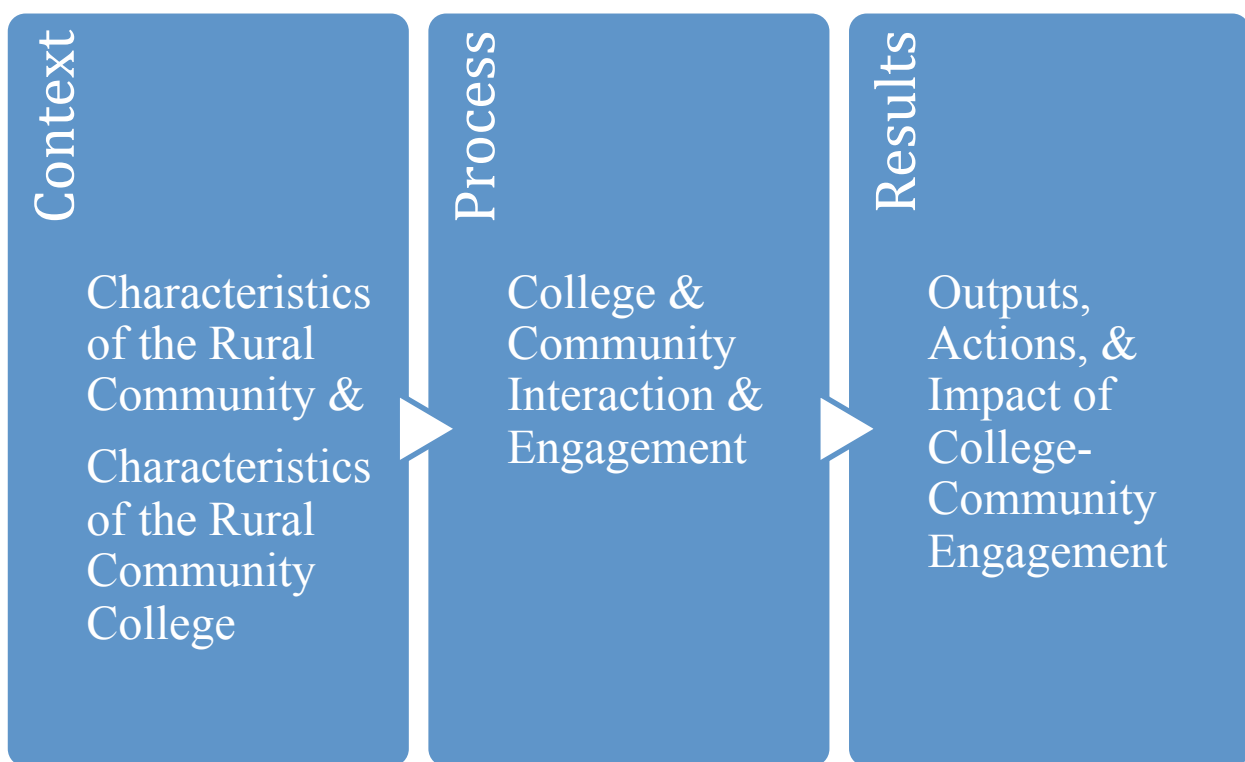
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Logic Model for Research Design: Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation:
How does the rural community college impact the development of the rural community?



Appendix B

Test Instrument: Interview Protocol

Project Title: Community Leaders' Perspectives of a Rural Community College's Impact on Community Development

Principal Investigator: Dr. Darlene Russ-Eft, Department of Adult Education & Higher Education Leadership, College of Education, Oregon State University

Student Researcher: Reine Thomas, Doctoral Student, Community College Leadership Program, College of Education, Oregon State University

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Researcher/Interviewer:

Study Participant Identification Code:

Thank you again for consenting to participate in this study. I will record the interview so the data I gather will be as accurate as possible. Remember that you may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point in the interview. (If the participant has not agreed to audio-recording, then say: I will be taking notes during the interview so the data I gather will be as accurate as possible.)

Semi-structured open-ended interview questions include:

A. Understanding the Context of the Community and the Community College:

To begin, I want to ask you some questions about the community.

1. First, what is your position and your role in the community? How long have you lived in the community?
2. How would you describe this community?
3. Tell me about what you see as strengths, opportunities, and strategic directions of the community today.
4. What are the community's challenges, problems, or needs today?

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the local community college.

5. Describe your perception of the characteristics of the local community college.
6. What do you see as the college's mission and purpose?
7. How important is the community and this unique locale is to the college? How is that importance demonstrated in the college's planning and programming?
8. What do you see as the strengths, opportunities, and strategic directions of the college today?
9. How would the general public describe what the community college does?
10. What are the usual ways that you, as a community leader, learn about the community college in this community? What are the ways that the general public learns about the community college in this community?

B. Understanding the Process of College-Community Interaction/Engagement:

Next, I want to ask you about college – community interaction.

11. In what ways do the community college and the community partner?
12. What is your personal experience or interaction with _____ Community College?
13. From your perspective, in what ways have _____ Community College leaders worked with other community leaders in community development efforts?
14. You've mentioned various examples of college-community interaction or partnership.
If you were to think about the community as having these seven resource areas [Refer to/describe *Community Capitals Framework* visual aid], in which areas have community college-community partnerships invested? How?

C. Understanding the Results (outcomes, impact, positive change) of Community College-Community Engagement on Community Development and Sustainability:

The last set of questions is about the results of community college – community interaction, about the impact on community development.

15. To begin, what positive changes have you seen in this community in the past 5-10 years?
16. Now I'm going to ask you to think about positive change that has occurred in the past few years in each of these seven areas of community resources or assets.
[Refer to *Community Capitals Framework* visual aid.]

Closing Questions: I have two more summary questions for you.

17. Is there a specific, critical investment by the college that has gone on to promote other positive results in the community?
18. Overall, in what ways does the public benefit from having a community college in this community?

That concludes my interview questions. Do you have any additional comments you'd like to share? Do you have any questions regarding the study?

Thank you for participating in this interview. The next steps are:

1. I will transcribe the interview and deliver the transcription to you so that you can review it for accuracy and completeness. I will deliver it marked as 'Confidential.' I will include directions for your response.

2. Next, if you would like the opportunity to clarify, modify, or expand the transcribed information, I will happily schedule a follow-up meeting with you. As well, if I have follow-up questions, I will ask them at that time.

Thank you again for participating in this interview. Your perspectives as a community leader are very important for this study. And I appreciate the time you have dedicated to this interview.