

## ABSTRACT

FOSTER, DANIEL RUSSELL. Roles and Practices of Community College Presidents in the Governance of the North Carolina Community College System. (Under the direction of John S. Levin).

This qualitative study examines the collective intentions and decisions of North Carolina community college presidents relative to state-wide governance. Collected data include documents, observation, and interviews pertaining to the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents [NCACCP]. In the analysis of collected data thematic category labels and descriptions were elicited from both network theories and Mintzberg's (1983) description of power. Additional themes were developed through content analysis.

The findings indicate that, as a network, the NCACCP has a formal statement identifying collective presidential intentions. As well, there are informal intentions expressed by the individual presidents. Informal individual intentions and actions may circumvent the formal intentions expressed by the NCACCP, thereby revealing potential for inconsistency between NCACCP intentions and individual presidential decisions. Presidential intentions are brought forth for collective discussion and possible decision by presidents representing the standing committees of the NCACCP or by System Office personnel via contact with the State Board of Community Colleges or legislators in the General Assembly of North Carolina. The NCACCP decision-making process involves building consensus amongst the presidents, but presidential consensus in the decision-making process does not equate to commitment by the members. The rationale for particular NCACCP decisions can be traced to the needs as expressed collectively by the NCACCP and to the demands placed upon the NCACCP by external community college networks. The data do not indicate that the collective intentions of the NCACCP or the external networks regarding state-wide

governance are incongruent or inconsistent with the democratic mission of the community college system. Finally, the NCACCP works within larger networks, such as the System Office, the State Board of Community Colleges, and the state legislature; and, the power of the NCACCP is limited by its position within a larger network of community college actors also responsible for governance decisions. Given this investigation, further research is needed to examine the influence of other networks or individuals in the governance of community colleges in North Carolina, and to examine the influence of networks in the governance of community college systems in other states.

**ROLES AND PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS IN THE  
GOVERNANCE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
SYSTEM.**

By  
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## BIOGRAPHY

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While enrolled at James Madison, Foster applied for Teach for America with the hopes of becoming a teacher. After three years of teaching high school in Baltimore and two years teaching in Prague, Foster returned to North Carolina. He began his community college teaching career in 1999 at Blue Ridge Community College.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Nature and Purpose of the Study

#### *Introduction*

Deliberative democratic governance has been a fundamental American ideal since the creation of the republic (Wood, 1969). A commitment to personal liberty and individual responsibility, a commitment to popular sovereignty and political equality, an emphasis on human reason, and an emphasis on the regulation of arbitrary power are essential elements of democracies (March & Olsen, 1995). These elements, ideally, are reflected in government institutions that serve the public good. The public good is not to be understood solely in a consumer's sense with economically competitive themes, but in the sense that the public good is the protection and extension of the essential elements of democracy (Buchanan & Musgrave, 1999; Mathews, 2005).

Theoretically, public academic institutions have been created and operated to serve the public good (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; London, 2002). Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt argue that higher education commitments to serving the public good “have helped create a better society and are essential to a healthy deliberative democracy” (p. xiii). Along with serving the public good, higher education has been identified as a public good in itself. Quaye (2005) states, “Higher education is a public good when it connects its mission with the ideals of democracy” (p. 299). Although socially democratic ideals continue to be expressed in higher education, recent consideration of democratic governance in academic institutions has adopted a more critical perspective. Democratic governance and organizational ideals have been superseded by the exchange of self-interests (such as revenue generation) and the pursuit of individual intentions (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt; March

& Olsen, 1995). Organizational operation appears competitive and political rather than socially democratic. Quaye offers further explanation of how the socially democratic ideals of public institutions may be replaced with the ideals of self-interest. He states, “Our current capitalistic society and our ideals of democracy often run counterintuitively to each other, for the very notion of capitalism means that some individuals will be ‘losers’ and others ‘winners.’ Competition and individualism drive capitalism, not the public good” (p. 298). However, according to March and Olsen, the public good can still be achieved through democratic governance, but complications—such as social forces—arise in the pursuit of this ideological goal.

The determination of the public good is predicated upon existing social forces (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Mathews, 2005). The American community college, one such public institution, espouses the ideology of social democracy, and social forces have contributed to its development (Cohen & Brawer; Ratcliff, 1994; Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

The social forces that originally contributed to the rise of the community college included: the need for vocationally/industrially trained workers; the promotion of the ideal of social equality, which hypothetically results from access to higher education opportunity; and, the need for further development of the growing adolescent population (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, Ratcliff, 1994; Roueche & Roueche, 1993). Although critics of the community college have indicated that these socially driven functions have been conducted to perpetuate the *status quo* (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Zwerling, 1976), the espoused institutional mission has been to broaden the base of higher education (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Levin, 2001; Vaughan, 1983). As a result of this socially driven mission, the community college has assumed multiple roles. Social forces continue to challenge the community college to

accommodate the various educational needs and demands. Some authors, such as Brint and Karabel (1989), Cohen and Brawer (2003), Levin (2001), Levin and Dennison (1989), Grubb (1999), McGrath and Spear (1991), Raisman (1990), Roueche and Baker (1987), and Summers (2001) have addressed these challenges from a variety of perspectives.

Regardless of the theoretical perspective, in an effort to open the door of educational opportunities to a growing, changing, and underrepresented population, community college decision makers find themselves in an ideological battle in which they must continue to add or alter present roles to their mission, place precedence on a particular role, or attempt to balance the diverse existing roles (Breneman & Nelson, 1980; Roueche & Baker, 1987; Frye, 1994). These challenges raise questions about the role of presidents in the pursuit of a socially democratic mission espoused by the community college.

The issue of presidential power in organizations and organizational systems has shaped, in part, the present condition of the community colleges in North Carolina. The community colleges in North Carolina have a predominant focus on vocational/occupation education; the community colleges compete for limited resources; and, the colleges are at the bottom of the prestige hierarchy among higher education institutions in the state (*A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2000; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Frye, 1994; John S. Levin, personal communication, May 29, 2003). If democratic governance is indeed desirable for those individuals involved with the community college system, further examination of governance roles by community college presidents offers greater understanding of what groups and which individuals influence current conditions and practices.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Current practices by individuals involved with governance potentially hinder the expression of socially democratic ideals espoused by higher education institutions. Specifically, power networks interfere with the higher education objective of serving the public good (Fridena, 1998; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Slaughter, 1990). In North Carolina, community college presidents are integral to the governance operations of individual institutions, and participate in the governance operations of the state system (*A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2005; North Carolina Community College System, State Board Minutes, 2005, October 21). However, individual presidents and the collective body of presidents are not immune to or inexperienced in the competitive political practices that occur while executing governance responsibilities.

Decision-making on the institutional level and beyond has been identified as a governance responsibility; it is also a responsibility associated with power (DiBiaggio, 1996). As well, other roles and practices—such as policy formation and the maintenance of institutional relationships—involve decision making and have been connected with power (Kotter, 1985; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992a; Scott, 1995; Zald, 1970). Thus far, the scholarly attempts to understand how individuals function with power or within the structure of organizational power have often adopted a common thematic approach—examination of personal characteristics, socioeconomic profile, formal position, attitudes and values, and control over resources of those involved with an organization (Nohria, 1992).

Although these are worthwhile studies, the examination of networks is not part of these, and such a focus would further enhance understanding of power. Along with

individuals influencing organizations, networks influence individuals who are components of larger organizations (Mentor, 2004). Network theories explain how different organizations or institutions, such as community colleges, appear the same (Law, 1999, p. 8; Mentor, 2004). The study of networks also involves power and the exchange of power along lines that construct networks (Law, 2001; Lucas, Younts, & Lovaglia, 2001; Willer, 1999a). As the principal symbolic leader of the community college at the institutional level (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan & Weisman 1998), presidents are subjects and agents of power along the lines of networks.

In a discussion of community college presidents, Vaughan (1994) stated, “The use of power is complex” (p. 76). Others not only support this statement, but indicate that community college presidents are not solitary actors with singular roles who operate in a vacuum. Presidents exist and operate within larger networks of power. Some of these networks have entry barriers based upon position and knowledge power, which presidents possess. In the context of community college governance, the practices by presidential networks potentially handicap the efforts of the system to serve the public good; competitive political practices are incongruent with the socially democratic mission espoused by the North Carolina Community College System.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

Research is needed to determine how elite presidential networks operate in an environment in which practices are competitive and potentially incongruent with the mission of the community college system. And, although the presidency continues to be a focal point of community college research and news reports, there appears to be little understanding of influence and power held by presidents. Existing studies on community college presidential

influence contribute to the understanding of presidential characteristics, institutional culture, and organizational change occurring within colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Fridena, 1998; Gonzalez Sullivan, 2001; Levin, 1998; Vaughan, 1986). However, while these studies and reports address the roles and relationships of the president at an institutional level, limited understanding of collective presidential influence and power on state governance exists in the body of literature.

From a national perspective, Slaughter (1990) examined a shift in policy formation at public research universities resulting from a business agenda held by a collective body of university presidents. Fridena (1998) examined the collective influence of community college presidents on decision-making in Arizona. A study of the governance roles and practices of community college presidents in North Carolina—a state with a highly centralized community college system—would contribute to the body of literature.

This examination of the governance roles and practices of community college presidents leads to conclusions about whose interests are being served in the North Carolina Community College System, and opens discussion to whether socially democratic practices prevail in the system. Thus, it is not the intent of this research to explain internal institutional governance at a single college in North Carolina; nor is it the aim to measure presidential influence on governance at a single institution in the state; and, this is not a case study of the North Carolina Community College System or the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents. North Carolina and its system of community colleges is the site for investigation into the potential problem of presidential networks hindering socially democratic governance of a public institution. Therefore, the broad purpose of this interpretive qualitative study is to study power and networks of presidents, using North

Carolina as an example. Specifically, the purpose is to identify and explain the collective role and practices of community college presidents in the governance of the North Carolina system of community colleges.

This study examines group composition and group decisions made by community college presidents as a means to influence the management of the state's community colleges. Presidents operate within a larger organization of presidents, legislators, faculty, and students, and, they work collectively as a network. Studies of networks operating as influencers of policy add dimension to the understanding of community college presidential power and influence on state governance.

### *Research Questions*

Grounded in frameworks elicited from management science, political science, sociology, and higher education literature, this study examines community college presidents and networks that attempt to influence the governance of the North Carolina Community College System. In doing so, two questions guided the research.

1. What evidence is there that North Carolina community college presidents have organized into a statewide power network?
2. How does the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents (the formal organization of community college presidents) operate?

### *Significance of the Study*

Congruence of philosophy and practice has been a concern of educational researchers and practitioners (Argyris & Schön, 1974). A broad focus of this study of community colleges involves the examination of organizational mission and governance roles and

practices. Specifically, this study examines community college presidential practices (of an elite group) as they pertain to the governance of the community college system in one state.

Bureaucratic organizations, such as state college systems, are multilayered entities that perform multiple tasks such as policy formation and resource management (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Each level of the academic hierarchy requires policies and rules that delegate responsibility for performing the tasks. State-funded bureaucratic structures, such as community colleges, require these assigned duties and the corresponding regulations for proper and efficient functioning (Kater & Levin, 2005). Governance is the label assigned to this aspect of organizational hierarchy. Although multiple authors have defined the term governance in different ways, the concept nonetheless encompasses a variety of administrative duties that are individually distinct (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Various individuals and groups perform the individually distinct duties. In addition, these duties and those responsible for enacting them must react and respond to the environment. The ever-changing environment stimulates new management practices and ideas. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), multiple areas of community college governance and administration “change continuously as new ideas for managing these institutions become popular” (p. 103). In addition, the community college, rooted in an open admissions and community-oriented philosophy, increasingly faces the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse individuals and constituencies (Levin, 2001; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Governance officials constantly confront the various forces affecting their administrative duties.

Although governance challenges continue to exist and new ideas emerge, thus far, political or bureaucratic models have offered the most accurate interpretation of community

college governance, with few exceptions. Indeed, the early work of Richardson, Blocker, and Bender (1972) as well as the continuing scholarship of Cohen and Brawer, from the early 1980s to 2003, categorize the dominant governance mode at community colleges.

Bureaucrats and bureaucratic groups assigned the challenge of addressing multiple and varied governance tasks have been viewed as authoritarian or autocratic; elite groups dominate the governance process (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; John S. Levin, personal communication, October 18, 2004; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Community colleges have adhered to the belief that people cannot be educated “unless some institution sanctions that aspect of their being” (Cohen & Brawer, p. 1). Therefore, until recently, community colleges have relied on elite governance officials—such as presidents—to decide the interests and courses of action of the institution or system.

In this study, I examine the collective and individual intentions and decisions of community college presidents in their attempt to influence state-wide governance. Power theories and network theories frame the examination. These theories, discussed in the subsequent chapter, offer description of the context of power, the limitations of individual and collective power, and the transmission of power. In other words, guided by these theoretical frameworks I describe presidential practices and analyze collective presidential power in the governance of the state’s community colleges. Finally, the findings of the study lead to conclusions about the consistency between presidential practices and the socially democratic mission of the community college.

### *Conclusion*

Argumentative in nature, qualitative research is contextual. This study does “have some demonstrable wider resonance” (Mason, 2002, p. 8) but this condition does not equate

to quantitative generalizability. In other words, there exists a broader reason for this qualitative study, but the study may not apply to a mass population. Research is restricted to one group or network of individuals in one state's community college system instead of all persons involved with the phenomenon under examination.

The study is also contextual regarding time. Past and current practices are the points of emphasis. Future practices are part of the broader resonance but were not a research aim. The examination of presidential practices in the governance of North Carolina community colleges is a "mechanical puzzle" rather than a comparative or predictive puzzle (Mason, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, this study does not compare similarities and differences of presidential actions; nor does it predict future actions by community college presidents or presidential networks.

Subsequent chapters report the research, beginning with chapter two where the literature is reviewed, including the literature that explains the theoretical and analytical frameworks. Chapter three details the methodology and methods that guided this investigation. Chapter four presents the analysis of data and findings of this study. Finally, chapter five reports the conclusions of this investigation and offers a discussion of the implications of these conclusions for both research and practice.

As described in chapter three of this study, the collection of data was selective and purposeful. As a North Carolina community college faculty member, my bias affects the types of data collected and the manner of data analyses. I collected three types of data—document, observation, and interview—to which I had access. Qualitative researchers must acknowledge "the privatization of this type of analysis" (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 28). Consequently, the selection of data for analysis indirectly determined which themes

were selected or identified; and, more directly, themes were developed through content analysis of the collected data. However, the theoretical framework through which the data were managed and coded was drawn from the literature. Thus, a review of the literature identifies the theoretical foundations from which the study is based.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Related Literature

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this literature review is to identify gaps in the scholarly research on the community college presidency and power, and to identify the theoretical foundations of this study. Presidents frequently have been the focal point of researchers interested in the community college. In the existing literature addressing presidents, a variety of themes have been developed and explored: access to the position (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Moore, 1998), duties associated with the role (Anderson, Murray & Olivarez, 2002; Beehler, 1993; Fisher, 1994), and characteristics of the individuals who attain the position (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2001; McFarlin, 1999; Vaughan, 1986). Although interesting and beneficial for developing a greater understanding of the position, these and other works do not directly address power and influence held by college presidents. Therefore, for this literature review of the community college presidency, scholarship pertaining to organizations, power, networks, and higher education governance serve as the topical forums of discussion. Through this review of the literature, alternative directions are pursued so that the topic of collective presidential influence and power is addressed appropriately.

In this review, specific questions are asked in the pursuit of a more thorough comprehension of power and the community college presidency. What frameworks provide useful analyses of power? What disciplines illustrate or explain power? What ways have presidential influence and power been examined from an individual or collective perspective? What descriptions of power exist in the context of university and community

college governance? Although there are additional questions concerning the focus of this study and knowledge gaps will continue to exist, the intent of this review is to offer analysis of selected literary works while providing further analytical insight on the topic of community college presidential power.

In the attempt to review the ways in which presidential power can be examined, both individually and collectively, literary works are organized topically. The topics are not exhaustive, and the selected works address multiple topics. To approach the body of literature in this manner does not represent a total review of all related works. In other words, not every source, discipline, analytical framework, or theme can be examined; nor can all sources be categorized neatly by a single research topic. However, this method organizes selected works for thorough analysis, leads to the development of a conceptual framework, and illuminates potential research queries (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

#### *Individual and Collective Power*

Discussion of the literature first demands description of individual and collective power. Individual power concerns how presidential influence can be examined singularly, as opposed to the examination of a union of presidents. Examination of individual power involves the description of the roles and practices of a specific president or bureaucrat. However, the study of individual influence of community college presidents does not necessarily equate with the examination of a particular president existing in a vacuum (Watts, 2003). An individual president makes administrative decisions, but does so in an environment of other individuals and groups (Anderson & Davies, 2000; Kuss, 2000; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). The examination of presidential influence from an individual perspective includes discussion of sources that address the influence of a president within a

greater system or organization—a larger network of actors, structures, and forces. For example, in the examination of influence of individual presidents in higher education institutions, researchers such as Robert Birnbaum, Estella Bensimon, and Anna Neumann (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Birnbaum, 1992) consider the institutional constituents, such as faculty, and executive teams.

As the literature (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Levin, 1998c; Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1987) concerning individual power of community college presidents illustrates, college presidents are units within an organization. However, this review also concerns the power and influence of presidents working within presidential organizations. In other words, the examination of collective presidential power involves the review of works that study presidents working or acting as a presidential group.

### *Organizations and Power*

In the body of literature pertaining to organizations and institutions, there is no doubt that power is considered a significant dynamic (Kotter, 1985; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992a; Scott, 1995; Zald, 1970). But, how have organizations and the dynamic of power been defined or described? The answer to this question depends upon the perspective. For this review, management, political, network, and higher education perspectives are addressed in the discussion of community college organizations and power. These different perspectives of organization and power can be compared, contrasted, or linked. Thus, along with defining terms, literary works and the corresponding lenses or frameworks provide a structure for pragmatic analysis of power. (Creswell, 2002; Hart, 1998). In addition, frameworks assist in linking individual studies to a larger context. For example, in their study of five American community colleges Rhoads and Valadez (1996) rely “on a number of theoretical constructs

derived from organizational theory” to connect the site-specific findings to the broader community college context. The researchers present a framework that incorporates “theories of culture and identity deriving from critical multiculturalism” (p. 52). According to Rhoads and Valadez, their study “offers solutions to the authoritarian emphasis of the community college,” and represents “an effort to move the community college as an institution toward the creation of multicultural colleges” (p. 45; p. 51).

### *Organization Theory*

Scholars have used organization theory to link studies to a broader context, or to additional theories. The study of organization theory, and subsequent adaptation and application, draws from multiple disciplines, such as management science, political science, and sociology (Shafritz & Ott, 1987; Zald, 1970). Shafritz and Ott (1987) have even emphasized the central role of organizational theory in explaining power: “it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the world is ruled by the underlying premises of organization theory” (p. 1). Moreover, due to the diverse applications of organization theory, there are different frameworks within the study of organization theory (Morgan, 1997).

Regardless of the framework or discipline, research studies on organizations and organization theory have traditionally relied upon metaphors to illustrate organizational structure and functioning. Smircich (1983) has synthesized various studies using metaphors in the research of organizations; two common metaphors are machine and organism, but other social metaphors, such as theater and political arena, have been used (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Smircich, 1983). In her study of organizational culture, Smircich attempted to link organization theory and culture theory. Other scholars have approached the study of organizations and organization theory differently (Shafritz & Ott, 1987), but have

nevertheless relied upon metaphors to some degree in describing the structure and functioning of organizations. In her examination of organizations from a chaos theory perspective, Wheatley (1999) suggested nature should serve as a proper model for examining organizations. Others (Morgan, 1983; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982) have expressed concern in misusing metaphors. However, as Smircich (1983) argued, regardless of the metaphors used or misused by various scholars, research that relies upon organization theory works from the premise that what is studied is “the experience of collective coordination and orderliness” (p. 341). For example, in his discussion of organization theory relative to higher education Peterson (1985) indicated that the challenges of colleges and universities are to accomplish “mutual educational and academic purposes and to make each college or university more effective” (p. 5). Furthermore, Peterson did not differentiate organization theory and organizational behavior (Baker & Paulson, 1991).

#### *Management Perspective of Power*

Rather than providing a metaphor for organizations, Mintzberg (1983) has offered an analogy for structures of organizations (a banquet) and an analogy for power (Mintzberg, 1979). It is his analogy of power (a play) that is most critical to this research (Mintzberg, 1983). Not the first to analyze organizations or the concept of power, Mintzberg worked from the premise that too many scholars struggle with defining the concept of power rather than concentrating on the more important issues involving the concept and its relationship with and to organizations. In reference to other scholarly research, he stated, “An expert has been defined as someone with no elementary knowledge. Power seems to require a good deal of elementary knowledge. That is perhaps why everybody seems to know what it is except the experts” (p. 1). He did, however, provide a definition. Mintzberg defines power as “the

capacity to effect (or affect) organizational outcomes” (p. 4). Along with acknowledging the link between power and politics, Mintzberg suggests that power and influence are synonymous. In the higher education literature such a connection of power and influence is implicit rather than explicit (Birnbaum, 1992; Levin, 1998c; Neumann, 1995).

Unquestionably, Mintzberg addressed political and sociological themes associated with power, but he primarily examined power and influence from both an organizational and managerial perspective. His theory of power configurations attempts to assist in the understanding of power in and around organizations. Mintzberg labeled six arrangements within which organizations could be categorized. Each configuration possesses different characteristics. Acting as predictors of organizational behavior, the six power configurations for Mintzberg’s theory include: Instrument, Closed System, Autocracy, Missionary, Meritocracy, and Political Arena. These configurations help to explain the influence behind organizational functioning, structure, and change; and, indirectly attempt to explain the actions of the leaders of those organizations (Levin & Dennison, 1989; Mintzberg, 1983).

With his theory of power configurations Mintzberg (1983) has described organizational power and offered an applicable framework for analysis. Individual power can be explained through the different configurations. Similarly, the theory explains collective power of an organization. Mintzberg’s configurations result from four hypotheses. Three of these hypotheses are considered to be “the natural combinations of the two coalitions [Internal and External],” which indicate harmonious rather than conflicting combinations of the coalitions (296). Harmonious combinations of coalitions exist “when there is one central focus of power” (303). Conflict arises in the absence of a focus of power or in the presence of multiple foci of power. The fourth hypothesis addresses the combinations that “are more

likely to generate conflict” (305). Conflict may be more natural than harmony in a practical setting, such as a community college or community college system. Mintzberg acknowledged that “no real power situation will exactly match any of these types [configurations]” (p. 319). Therefore, there is good reason to supplement Mintzberg’s configurations with additional frameworks as these will offer further explanation of power and influence associated with organizations and organizational leaders.

Similar to Mintzberg, Handy (2000), in his management-related discussion of organizational power, argued that “power is not a good word” (p. 90). Although he too cited words such as influence and authority as masks for the concept of power, Handy classified three types of power. The categories are Resource Power, Position Power, and Expert Power.\* Handy worked from the premise that the three selective types of power—similarly phrased to Mintzberg’s—must be possessed by an organization, and an individual to a lesser extent, in order “to make something happen.” From this framework, control or manipulation is directly connected with power.

Although valuable for the review of additional literary works, Handy’s perspective is incomplete when collective power is associated with organizations.

Most of us have to make do with what resources and positions we have to get things done that we want done. It makes sense, then, to have friends in the right places (increasing position power), to build alliances with other departments (more resources), to collect as much information as you can (information is a resource), and to trim proposals to what is likely to be acceptable (a compromise attracts less negative power). (Handy, 2000, p. 95)

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\* Mintzberg (1983) also identified “prime bases of power.” In Mintzberg’s discussion he described three of the bases of power as “control over (1) a resource, (2) a technical skill, or (3) a body of knowledge” (p. 24).

Other scholars who examine modern organizations have identified the possession of information, or information technologies, as the possession of a resource as well (Kotter, 1985; Middleton, 2002), but Handy offered no sufficient explanation as to why the possession of information is not also considered Expert Power. Munduate and Gravenhorst (2003) acknowledged a need for this distinction of power. In addition, the measures Handy suggested for organizations and organizational leaders align with the perspective that a hypercompetitive, political atmosphere is the only functioning state of existence for an organization. The perspective does not offer an explanation of power in an alternative organizational environment. In other words, organizations are viewed to work within a closed system (Scott, 1987). There is no consideration of the idea that each organization works within a broader context, the broader organization of society, which is linked to organization theory (Mintzberg, 1983). A collective body, such as an association of community college presidents, would work with the broader contexts of a state educational or community college system, and a state governing board, as well as global trends. Consequently, Handy's research offers useful insight for a narrow analytical perspective, but does not provide a comprehensive method or structure for understanding power, particularly in the examination of collective power.

#### *Political Perspective of Power*

In contrast to Handy's classification of power types, Pfeffer (1992a) examined power in conjunction with politics. Metaphorically, political theorists and management theorists frequently tread common ground. Jay (1987) even called the two theoretical perspectives "very similar branches to the same subject" (p. 345). The political perspective theoretically resembles a management perspective in that both approaches address power relative to

outcomes. However, analysis of power from a political perspective is no less complicated than analysis from a management perspective. Pfeffer (1987) noted the problematic nature of power “in much of the social science literature,” (p. 310) but focused primarily on how power relates to governance and decision making in organizations. Pfeffer (1992b) defined power as a concept that involves the manipulation of behavior; and, politics are the means by which power is realized and used further.

[Power is] the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do. Politics and influence are the processes, the actions, the behaviors through which this potential power is utilized and realized. (Management Process section, ¶ 6)

The competitive themes of the political perspective, also described by Bolman and Deal (1997), suggest that there are contests involving the distribution and use of power. Therefore, contests with winners and losers exist in the discussion of power associated with organizations.

Discussion of power in the social sciences has elicited references to the famous Renaissance politician Machiavelli. Citing the Florentine statesman, Jay (1987) argued that modern organizations resemble modern states so much that organizations “can only be understood in terms of political and constitutional history” (Shafritz & Ott, 1987, p. 349). In a Machiavellian monologue Julius, Baldrige, and Pfeffer (1999) offered leadership and governance advice to individuals who seek to be effective leaders of higher education institutions. Build a team, know when to engage in conflict, and use strategic planning are three of the politically oriented labels the authors identify as necessary for effective leaders (pp.113-129).

Pfeffer (1992a; 1987) and others (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Jay, 1987; Julius, Baldrige, & Pfeffer, 1999) have added to the discussion of power, but this perspective also works from the premise that organizations veer towards the adoption of a political character. Once the political, competitive character is adopted by an organization, there is minimal chance the organization will assume a different character (Pfeffer, 1987). In other words, the political perspective will come to dominate the understanding of power associated with organizations. Power can be studied without suggesting—directly or indirectly—that a political contest exists. In addition, explanation of collective power is limited. Subgroups that work within a larger system—such as an association of community college presidents—possess competitive qualities and capabilities, but these may not describe the power of the group fully. Certainly, an examination of power must include discussions of competition, but the lack of consideration of other frameworks limits additional analysis of power.

### *Networks*

Along with the examination of management and political themes in a literature review, the analysis of the social connections of an organization contributes to the analysis of power. Specifically, an explanation of the distribution of power from a network perspective contributes to the interpretation of community college presidential power. However, the scholarly attempts to describe how individuals function with power or within the structure of organizational power have often adopted a common thematic approach—examination of personal characteristics, socioeconomic profile, formal position, attitudes and values, and control over resources of those involved with an organization (Nohria, 1992). Although no doubt worthwhile, these studies leave room for additional explanation of power from a theoretical perspective.

### *Actor-Network Theory*

Similar to power, the concept of networks is dynamic and difficult to define (Fountain, 1999; Watts, 2003). Watts (2003) has defined a network “as an integral part of a continuously evolving and self-constituting system” (p. 29). Others have defined or described the concept according to their theoretical premise. In her description of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Fountain (1999) described a network as a web that does not require sequential movement from its collective members or points.

A network is a series of connected points. As such it is a web, not hierarchical structure. A network *changes* [italics in original]; it is fluid, not static. Its non-linear form invites *various points of entry*; one can enter a network anywhere. In a network, anything can be a point. (p. 348)

These points, from an analytical stance, include both people and objects, such as machines (Law, 2001). Consequently, the study of networks has used various ideas from diverse disciplines to understand the distribution of power among an organization’s social structures. Fountain (2003) added that ANT “adopts a political, rather Machiavellian model” (Important Points about Actor-Network Theory section, ¶ 3)—a significant quality in the analysis of presidential power. In his explanation of ANT, Law (2001) emphasized that this theory “is concerned with the mechanics of power” (p.1). Furthermore, this method of research is linked with organization theory. As Nohria (1992) has stated, “Questions about what accounts for the distribution of power in organizations have long occupied a central place in organizational theory” (p. 9).

ANT is a useful framework for examining social networks, such as community colleges and community college affiliations. This theory helps to explain how organizational

networks influence individuals and the institution or system in which the individuals act (Mentor, 2004). As Law (1999) has described, the theory helps to explain how different organizations or institutions, such as community colleges, appear the same (Mentor, 2004). Even though ANT may resemble social reproduction theory in this effect, the theory really is “all about power—power as a (concealed or misrepresented) effect, rather than power as a set of causes” (Law, 2001, p. 6). ANT has been criticized for “the inadequacy of the analysis which it offers in respect of the actor” (Callon, 1999, p.181). Latour (1999) argued otherwise. If ANT emphasizes the network component of the theory more than the actor, then a more complete explanation of individual power requires additional theoretical lenses.

### *Network Exchange Theory*

As with power, the theme of competition is used in the study of networks. Exchange and competition for exchange occur between interconnected relationships (Burt, 1992; Lucas, Younts, & Lovaglia, 2001; Walker, Thye, Simpson, Lovaglia, Willer, & Markovsky, 2000). Another recent theoretical perspective related to power, labeled Network Exchange Theory (NET), explains social connections that incorporate the theme of competition. Discussing NET, Willer (1999a) did not define network explicitly, but treated a network as a connection of multiple social structures. According to Willer (1999a) and Walker, Thye, Simpson, Lovaglia, Willer, and Markovsky (2000), NET has its origins in Elementary Theory, which “describes the mechanics of exchange, conflict and coercive relations, and hybrid combinations of the three” (p. 324). This structuralist perspective—NET—has been defined as “a structurally determined potential for obtaining relatively favorable resource levels” (Lucas, Younts, Lovaglia, & Markovsky, 2001, p. 186). How is this theory connected with the discussion of power? The exchange networks existing in organizations, such as

educational institutions and systems, “are composed of lines of power advancing outward from each network position” (p. 186). Lines connect the different positions and the lines are formed by exchange relationships; power transmits along the lines (Willer, 1999a). Willer (1999b), who considers NET a “tested theory” (p. xiv), attempted to distinguish it from a social exchange perspective, which he (1999a) claimed “denies the efficacy of structure ...[which] leads directly to self-contradictory ideas like power based on least interest” (p. 21). An explanatory and predictive framework (Thye, Lovaglia, & Markovsky, 1997), NET offers further description and explanation of power, but has limitations because the theory does not consider history or tradition in the transmission of power.

Proponents of NET asserted that, in the analysis of organizations, this theory is “not limited to the laboratory.” Investigations using the theory can be conducted outside of the laboratory environment. Models outside of the lab correspond to historical and social structures of organizations (Willer, 1999b). How is this theory applied to newly created organizations such as an association of community college presidents? Recently established groups lack historical precedence; social structures may fluctuate with changing personnel (presidents). However, NET offers one approach to examine state presidential groups.

#### *Higher Education Governance*

Although they did not discuss networks directly, Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) have examined the general theory of social exchange in their study of higher education and leadership. For a comprehensive examination, the authors indirectly suggested using network perspectives along with power and influence theories. In their discussion of a social exchange framework, the authors stated, “Even though exchange theories are more relevant to the understanding of leadership in academic organizations, works that consider

leadership from the perspective of power and influence theories tend to emphasize one-way, leader-initiated and leader-directed approaches” (p. 222). Bensimon (1989) addressed the need for organizational leaders (university presidents specifically) to adopt a leadership perspective that uses multiple frames. The “turbulent environment” of higher education governance is better suited for an analytical framework incorporating multiple analytical frames (p. 121). Bensimon’s work is beneficial, but she does not consider community colleges and their unique context.

In the study of the university or community college, governance is a research topic directly related to the concepts of power and networks. In addition, educational governance is a broad concept on multiple levels—national, state, or institutional. Governance involves administrative roles and managerial actions. “The terms governance and administration or management are not discrete. They overlap and are often used interchangeably, not clearly depicting either institutional functions or precise activities” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 103). Others have added to the description of governance. Lovell and Trough (2002) offered a definition of state governance for community colleges by stating, “Governance is the decision-making authority for an organization, which is typically controlled by boards” (p. 91). Policy formation, decision-making, and institutional relationships are the subtopics related to governance included in this discussion of presidential power.

### *Policy Formation*

Governance, specifically the formation of policy, impacts and is impacted by multiple participants of an educational organization or system (Blackwell & Cistone, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Eddy, 2003; Levin, 1998a; Levin, 1998b; Slaughter, 1990). Although Slaughter (1990) examined national higher education policy formation (for research

universities), her work offers valuable discussion of presidential power, especially with regards to collective power. By using multiple analytical lenses—pluralism, neo-Marxism, and corporatism (p. 4)—Slaughter determined that pluralist theory “sees individuals as able to influence the policy process.” Influence could emanate from an individual or a cohesive interest group (p. 138). A neo-Marxist interpretation, according to Slaughter, would also support the notion that presidents influence policy through partnerships “because they [presidents] lack the power to realize their own agenda and are resource dependent” (p.139). Thus, presidents assume power through a group of common actors. Slaughter acknowledged the limitations of her selected theoretical perspectives, including corporatist theory, but identified and analyzed the collective power associated with presidential groups in shaping policy. It follows from Slaughter (1990) that research is needed to explain how presidents operate within a single state collectively to achieve a common agenda, and thus influence state policy.

Rather than national policy formation, Blackwell and Cistone (1999), in a quantitative investigation, examined individuals and groups who held power in state-level higher education policy formation. Constructing “a hierarchy of power and influence among principal policy actors” (p.112), the researchers’ primary focus concerned patterns of governance beyond the institutional level. However, exclusive attention to presidential power on state governance was not an aim. Nevertheless, Blackwell and Cistone concluded that their study “raises questions about the less than influential role that is played by [institutional] administrators ... in shaping higher education policy in Florida.” They also note that administrators—not distinguishing individuals or groups of presidents from all administrators—“are perceived as Sometime Players” in the policy arena (pp. 121-122).

Although few details concerning presidential influence were addressed, their case study aids in understanding a system in which presidents, individually and collectively, work.

In her personal reflection of presidential leadership, university president Martha W. Gilliland (2005) offered firsthand commentary on the governance process from a state level as well. In her deposition, Gilliland emphasized the role of serving the public good from a university president's perspective. She even extended the commentary to solicitation.

A rekindling of higher education's distinctive and honorable call is needed—a call that summons leaders to deliver a bold response. That response centers in a movement of transformation for public universities as we serve the public good in our communities, our states, this nation, and the world. (p. 308)

Gilliland presumed that university presidents hold a level of power capable of transforming universities, communities, states, the nation, and even the world; she excluded community college presidents in the discussion. Although not entirely without merit, her argument fails to discuss the necessity of collective power in this pursuit adequately. She commented on her personal successes, but did not mention any efforts to work with other presidents in a comparable pursuit elsewhere, such as the state, nation, or world.

Longanecker (2005) examined public policy in higher education at the state level as well, but did so in a broader, non-site-specific manner than Blackwell and Cistone or Gilliland. In his study of state governance, Longanecker primarily discussed the balancing act currently performed by state policy and governance officials. These officials attempt to maintain a balance between the higher education tradition of serving the public good and the current practice of institutional leaders pursuing private interests. Longanecker's discussion of state governance and policymakers adds to the understanding of collective power held by

presidents in creating policy. His commentary further exposes the types of ideological conflicts presidents encounter when they create and debate state policy. He also named state policymakers as the key players in preserving higher education's emphasis on serving the public good. According to Longanecker, without higher education policymakers preserving this service of public good, "the very fabric of our civilization will erode" (p. 69).

Longanecker's discussion is normative and based on potential. In other words, he projects a standard by which he believes policymakers will follow to uphold the higher education tradition of serving the public good.

Though this danger [losing sight of serving the public good] exists, I believe the longer term holds a different and more optimistic outcome. Most state policymakers do, in fact, know the difference between the public good and private gain, and they appreciate the difference. When it becomes obvious that chasing the private gain has jeopardized our ability to support the public good, public policy will come alive again to protect the public good. Access to higher education will be protected. Quality will be assured. Research in public interest will be supported....I trust that the states and their policymakers will protect the true public good. (p. 69)

Longanecker's trust and analysis are based upon state policymakers possessing and wisely using collective power.

Trust in policymakers is the premise from which Musgrave (Buchanan & Musgrave, 1999) worked in his discussions of public finance. Although an economist and not strictly concerned with higher education, Musgrave's work contributes to the understanding of collective power and policy formation at the national, state, and local bureaucratic levels because the concept of power is integral to the discussion of public finance and public good.

James Buchanan, with whom Musgrave published writings and thoughts from a 1998 conference, described Musgrave's position towards democratic policymakers as optimistic. According to Buchanan, Musgrave entrusted in those individuals who implement public finance policy the responsibility of providing the public good—in a consumer's sense—and not creating policy to benefit their economic self-interests (Buchanan & Musgrave).

### *Decision-Making*

Closely associated in policy formation is decision-making, which occurs on all levels of governance, and has been studied from various perspectives. Multiple researchers (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Birnbaum, 1992; Vaughan, 1994) have examined the roles and responsibilities of the university or college presidency. However, there have been few comprehensive studies of presidential decision-making in a community college context at the state-level. Fridena (1998) examined decision-making and community college presidential influence on state-level governance in Arizona. His work “is a case study of one state's community college presidents as an organized power network” (p. 13). Fridena attempted to illustrate that the designated state's community college presidents comprise a distinct class based upon its interests and ideology. Using social reproduction theory as a theoretical basis, Fridena argued that the presidents (including those who are minorities and women) lose distinctiveness when they join elite groups (p. 52). A network theory also helps to explain the homogeneous nature of community college organizations, such as the NCACCP. He concluded that presidents, organized into elite power networks, are powerful in shaping “institutional decisions across individual community colleges” (p. 14). Fridena did offer an explanation of collective community college presidential power in decision-making, but he did not use network theories for his explanation of collective presidential power. In addition,

Fridena's work illustrates the complexity of collective decision making in community college governance.

Decision-making is complex, in part, due to the organizational characteristics of higher education institutions. Within colleges and universities, goals may be vague and contested; and, the clients of colleges may seek involvement in the process of making decisions (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1991). In their study of higher education governance Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley asserted that "organized anarchy" rather than bureaucracy most accurately describes the organizational system within higher education (p. 33). The premise of their argument is that bureaucracy "suggests a cohesive organization with clear goals" and that "academic organizations are characteristically fragmented with ambiguous and contested goals" (p. 33). In this type of organizational setting institutional leaders behave as negotiators and lack strong coordination in the process of decision-making. Decisions are unplanned, and leaders make the decisions individually. These scholars did acknowledge potential criticism of their argument. "Some may regard 'organized anarchy' as an exaggerated term, suggesting more confusion and conflict than really exist in academic organizations. This is probably a legitimate criticism" (p. 34). Others (Richardson & Wolverton, 1994; Vaughan, 1989) indicate that community colleges differ from other types of higher education. Community colleges have highly bureaucratic traditions (Richardson & Wolverton, 1994; Birnbaum, 1988). Along with their limited distinction between community college and university governance, Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley failed to consider fully the nuances of collective presidential decision-making in the pursuit of a socially democratic mission. Claiming decisions are individual acts and "often by-products of unintended and unplanned activity" (p. 34), collective, team decision-making is improbable.

Although descriptive of organizational characteristics in higher education institutions, the work of Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley relies heavily upon a political frame for analyzing presidential decision-making. As Bensimon (1989) suggested, multiple frames or cognitive lenses offer greater breadth of analysis. Collective, team decision-making was examined by Bensimon and Neumann (1993), but their focus was limited to internal institutional team decision-making of single institutions rather than collective action external to the college or university.

The governance role of decision-making is also complex due to the multiple actors involved with or seeking involvement in the decision-making process. Institutional presidents normally consider more than their own agendas when making decisions; they also consider multiple people and factions, internally and externally to their respective institutions. In his study of presidential stress Selman (1990) claimed that “every community/junior college president is not only a personal decision-maker, but is also a social decision-maker. The alternatives that administrators face exist not only in relationship to themselves, but also in relationship to others” (p. 23). However, Selman did not examine collective decision-making. In his study of academic leadership, Birnbaum (1992) emphasized the presidential advantage of collective influence in decision-making. He proposed that collective influence in decision-making may yield the perception of strong leadership for institutional presidents.

Our culture has led people to ascribe leadership to persons in formally designated leadership roles, such as presidents. But it is often the case that the ideas, decisions, and behaviors of many campus participants come together to influence others and help shape a college’s common perception of reality. (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 105)

Birnbaum's position and remarks, however, address internal institutional actions; and, the community college is not considered exclusively.

### *Institutional Relationships*

Collective processes involve relationships, which are discussed in the context of governance and presidential power as well. In particular, campus relationships have drawn the attention of higher education researchers. "The issue of participation is important in an era when empowerment and involvement of all campus constituencies has become a guiding principle of administration" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p.111). The study of these various constituencies, or networks, that a president maintains offers insight on presidential power. Practitioner and current president of the American Association of Community College George Boggs noted that, "Relationship building is an important part of a leader's responsibilities. To advance the mission of the college, it is essential to have the active support of all college constituencies" (2003, p. 19). The argument is that presidents need positive relationships and groups of supporters to serve as potential administrative influencers. Julius, Baldrige, and Pfeffer (1999) suggested that the creation and maintenance of relationships are crucial acts for presidents. "Good politicians know that much of their job is not influencing decisions as much as it is building a political base for influencing decisions" (p. 118).

Social relationships demand participation from multiple actors, and in the governance literature several scholars (Birnbaum, 1988; Kater & Levin, 2005) have examined the significance, or at least perceived significance, of faculty involvement with governance. In examining shared governance in 301 community colleges across 22 states, Kater and Levin (2005) found "faculty are expected to take a participatory role in decision-making in a

number of defined areas within the institution” (p. 2). It is in this setting (one of collective bargaining and internal governance) that the president establishes and maintains an open relationship so that these decisions are acknowledged, accepted, and negotiated. What does this mean with respect to community college presidential power? At least in the findings of Kater and Levin, not all community colleges—from their study—were so bureaucratic or autocratic that the president had total power in making decisions. Thus, their study suggests further analysis of presidential power.

Not all community college presidents have total control over the entire administrative process, but the establishment of relationships by presidents within governance structures does involve political maneuvering. Presidents need political skills to govern, and these skills adhere to descriptions of power. In his personal commentary on university governance, DiBiaggio (1996) offered political advice to higher education and community college practitioners: “Good governance involves listening to constituents, incorporating their work in the final decision, persuading them through the power of the office and through experience and trust, and then coming up with a new high-quality decision that is well accepted” (p. 24). DiBiaggio’s persuasive advice matches Pfeffer’s (1992b) description of power—“get people to do things that they would not otherwise do” (Management Process section, ¶ 6). DiBiaggio’s advice could also be interpreted from a network perspective, with the president at the center of a social web transmitting power.

As a result of insufficient finances in community colleges over the last decade (Sundberg, 2002, p. 13), community college leaders (presidents) establish or attempt to establish relationships with businesses and entities beyond institutional or state funding (Spangler, 2002, p. 77). Presidents positioned within a network of community programs and

businesses possess potential bargaining and resource power. Select writers and community college practitioners have attested to the increasing significance of acquiring external resource support (Jackson & Keener, 2002; Pierce & Pedersen, 1997; Sink & Jackson, 2002; Boggs, 2003). According to Julius, Baldrige, and Pfeffer (1999), “the potential power of external constituencies must never be neglected” (p. 118). These pursuits, viewed from a university perspective, suggest changes even in presidential vocabulary, as Slaughter (2001) has noted. She illustrates the recent trend of presidents identifying themselves as chief executive officers instead of *primus inter pares*, “a faculty peer first and a leader second” (p. 23). For those individuals, similar to college presidents, who seek to increase institutional resources, power, or at least the perception of it, is a central concept in this pursuit.

### *Conclusion*

Analysis of community college presidential power should continue for good reason. These individuals or groups of individuals—presidents—are agents and subjects of power within the community college system. “The president is in the position of being the nexus between the forces within and outside the college” (Beehler, 1993, p. 18).

A review of literature allows for further interpretation of presidential power within and outside of the community college; it enhances comprehension of the concept of power and exposes potential research topics associated with the community college presidency. In addition, a review limits the likelihood of a researcher from falling into a “conceptual prison” (Townsend & Twombly, 1998, p. 78). In other words, an original conceptual framework potentially can be developed from the perusal of literature.

Ideas elicited from management science, political science, sociology, and university and community college education compose a conceptual framework useful in the analysis of

community college presidential power and influence. Scholars from a management or administrative perspective provide a more thorough understanding of the structure within which power and presidents exist and operate. Specifically, Mintzberg's (1983) power configurations offer structure in the examination of power expressed by institutional leaders. Political perspectives assist in understanding the competition involved with and surrounding the concept of power. A theoretical examination of networks offers the opportunity to interpret the distribution of power. Also in the context of the community college presidency, aspects of governance—policy formation, decision-making, and institutional relationships—are research topics that adhere to scholarly explanations of power. Finally, the presidency is a topic frequently examined by community college researchers, but limited explanation of collective presidential power exists within the current body of literature.

The recognition and subsequent analysis of power enhance the discussion of presidential roles in statewide community college governance. While some analytical discussions may address both individual and collective power, alternative and inclusive approaches are needed to offer a comprehensive explanation. Social network theories offer promise in this pursuit, but concepts from management and political approaches can be included as well. In the context of the community college presidency, social network theories in conjunction with management and political science concepts present research opportunities to describe and analyze the existence and status of state presidential networks, the operations of presidential networks, and the influence of presidential associations on governance of a state's community college system.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

The community college was created with a socially democratic mission. Serving the public good continues as a motive of the community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005), but some researchers have indicated that ulterior motives may supersede socially democratic motives of institutional decision makers (March & Olsen, 1995). Rather than conducting a case study or national study of the community college, I selected one state community college system to examine the collective governance practices of community college presidents and to discuss the potential incongruence between practices and the community college mission.

North Carolina was selected as the site because it has a large community college system and serves a proportionally large number of students. As well, North Carolina's system is highly centralized and bureaucratic (*A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2000). Additionally, North Carolina was selected as the site for investigation because it is the state in which I work as a community college instructor. This situation gives me knowledge of the community colleges of the state and has led to my knowledge of the presidents' association as well as its leaders. Of significance is the level of access that I have to sources and data from North Carolina.

Questions about power, networks, and the community college presidency in North Carolina were identified following a review of literature. These then are the investigation's two research questions. What evidence is there that North Carolina community college

presidents have organized into a statewide power network? How does the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents operate?

### *Research Design and Rationale*

This research study is constructed around a “mechanical puzzle” (Mason, 2002, p. 18). I describe and explain how community college presidents collectively function in the governance of the North Carolina community colleges. Therefore, the strategic design of this study incorporates research methods that examine the operation of presidential organizations or networks connected with North Carolina community colleges. Field study—a qualitative research strategy—describes and explains structures, beliefs, and practices occurring in or with the phenomenon examined (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 41).

A qualitative research design with a field study emphasis is beneficial for two reasons. First, examination of collective presidential roles and practices in the governance of community colleges in North Carolina is contextual. The study is restricted to the examination of one state’s community colleges and how the presidents operate collectively in the system that governs those colleges. Qualitative research affords the opportunity to examine variables in the actual setting of operation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Qualitative research leads to existing documents and artifacts, requiring the researcher to visit, observe, and study the phenomenon in the natural setting (Merriam, 1998). In this setting, document analysis involves inductive logic rather than deductive logic. Second, this research study examines the complexities of practices and examines “real, as opposed to [only] stated, organizational goals” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 43). The lived experiences of individuals experiencing the phenomenon are of primary importance to the study (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Marshall & Rossman; Patton, 2002). In other words, an emic perspective enables the

phenomenon to be examined from an insider's view rather than an outsider's view (Gall, Borg, & Gall; Merriam; Patton). Naturalistic inquiry allows a researcher to acquire an internal experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2002).

### *Sample Selection*

The primary sample population in this investigation includes community college presidents and power networks within the community college system of North Carolina. Although presidents and presidential groups are the core of the sample population, they exist and operate in the context of other elements, such as legislators, governance officials, and environmental actors.

The North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS] includes 58 state-funded colleges, which serve over 750,000 people each year (North Carolina Community College System, n.d.). The community colleges of North Carolina are governed by the State Board of Community Colleges [SBCC], which was established by the 1979 General Assembly and assumed governance of the 58 community colleges and one technology center on January 1, 1981. This governance body, consisting of 21 members, adopts all the policies necessary to operate the System and the Department of Community Colleges. Using a committee structure, the SBCC has five committees (North Carolina Community College System).

This study does not focus exclusively on the NCCCS or the SBCC, but on the collective and individual intentions and actions of community college presidents in the context of those organizations. The North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents [NCACCP] includes “all present, former, and retired community college presidents and Industrial Education Center directors,” (Sink, 1999, p. i). As an exclusive body—including former and current presidents and directors—the NCACCP is most critical

for this study. In the examination of presidential governance roles and practices of the state's community colleges, the NCACCP is a group that operates and has operated in the context of the NCCCS and the SBCC. Therefore, the composition and operation of this organization in the context of state organizational system is the focus of this study.

The participants of the study were selected purposefully among active members of the NCACCP. Gender, age, and racial distinctions were considered in the selection of the participants so that consistent patterns could be identified from this diverse and exclusive group.

#### *Role of the Researcher*

As the instrument in a qualitative study, the researcher must attend to technical and interpersonal research issues. The technical issues involve the researcher's access and efficiency; the interpersonal issues involve ethical concerns and personal dilemmas (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I am a community college faculty member, and I received permission to study the minutes and records of the NCACCP. My level of participation is as a student of history who examines legal documents, observes organizational protocol, and elicits description from interviewees. Reliance upon inanimate documents minimizes trust concerns. Furthermore, the identification of research intent and rationale for questioning enhances trust between the presidential participants, such as interviewees, and me, the researcher (Marshall & Rossman).

#### *Assumptions*

Establishing trust in qualitative research also involves exposing known biases and assumptions in the research process (Mason, 2002). I believe qualitative research offers valuable evidence to support or refute various theoretical orientations. My experience as a

community college instructor has provoked my interest in diverse research topics pertaining to the community college, especially in North Carolina. I believe that the community college was created and operates for the public good; it functions to protect and extend essential elements of democracy such as personal liberty and political equality (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; March & Olsen, 1995). The community college also functions to assist individuals in economic pursuits, but this is not the public good for which the community college solely works. However, like other public and private organizations, community colleges may operate in a competitive, political environment (Bolman & Deal, 1997), and seek economic advancement without fully serving the public good. I began my examination of power and the community college presidency in North Carolina with these assumptions and biases.

#### *Data Collection and Preliminary Data Processing Decisions*

Data collection was conducted from March, 2005 until December, 2005, and data were collected from three different sources—documents, observations, and interviews—for contemporary and subsequent analysis. Although more detailed discussion of data analysis and findings follows in chapter four, decisions about the types of data collected offer preliminary descriptions of data management (Patton, 2002).

*Document data.* I first collected and arranged document data. The collection of documents includes minutes, handouts, memos, and announcements pertaining to the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents [NCACCP]. The documents were collected and are held by a North Carolina community college president. This president offered and agreed to let me borrow the documents with the understanding that I was attempting to complete a research project. His only requests concerning the handling of the

documents were that I not photocopy these documents, and that I not allow them to leave my possession. The president lent the collection of documents to me for a period of approximately one year. The documents under examination span a four-year period—2001-2005. A four-year period extends far enough in the past to identify patterns of behavior and change yet is short enough in duration for me to examine a concentrated period of time. Furthermore, this period of time ensures correspondence between my theoretical framework and the data (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Hodder, 1994), but constricts the data to a manageable size without jeopardizing the coherence of the study.

The NCACCP website was consulted as well, which offered limited description of goals, purpose, or mission of the organization. I did not have access to the password-protected link that serves as an information point for NCACCP members. According to the site this link offers the following information: a place to post announcements, a calendar of events, a repository for Association meeting minutes, a repository for Association Executive Committee meeting minutes, a roster of the current members with photos and contact information, a "discussion forum" for the exchange of ideas, a "voting forum" to allow for the polling of members on issues of importance, and links to other agencies of interest to the NCACCP (North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents, n.d.). I requested access to this link from five community college presidents. Four of the presidents did not know or could not locate a username or password, and stated that they had never used the link for posting ideas or for seeking assistance. The fifth president did not divulge the needed access information.

Document data were decided upon because records and minutes provide information about previous collective presidential decisions that could not be observed or thoroughly

described via interview. These data are significant to this study not because written records are more important than visual observations or verbal utterances, but the social world is more traceable through written documents (Mason, 2002). Also, the analysis of documents has been considered to be a “more objectivist approach than other qualitative methods” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 85). These documents offer “a behind-the-scenes look at program processes” and their origin without intrusion of the natural setting by me as the researcher (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 2002, p. 294). Furthermore, these document data make it possible to examine a consistent structure (the NCACCP) and a consistent protocol of behavior (by the presidents) within a setting of changing actors and issues under discussion. In other words, document analysis enables categorization to occur in an environment of change (Gall, Borg, & Gall; Hodder, 1994). Finally, these documents act “as stimulus for [subsequent] paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (Patton, p. 294).

*Observation data.* Through examination of the NCACCP documents I discovered the location and dates of the NCACCP meetings. I attended and recorded observations from the year-end meeting of 2005, which was identified in the documents. This meeting was hosted by one of the North Carolina community colleges and was held from July 20 to July 22, 2005. I decided to attend this conference because year-end conferences provide the chance to observe the protocol of presidents discussing the previous year’s operational objectives and the upcoming year’s goals; the year-end conference also allows for observation of the exiting members of the association. In addition, the year-end conferences typically have greater attendance numbers for presidents (David Sink, personal communication, July 13, 2005).

In order to collect and analyze observation data at this NCACCP conference, I first needed permission to attend; a description of the process for requesting permission explains how the data were processed initially. One week prior to the conference, the president who extended the invitation met with me to discuss the logistics of the conference and my attendance. The year-end conference is normally one day longer than the other three meetings held during the course of one year; this was explained that more business items are discussed at this meeting, and it allows for retiring presidents to be recognized. This president suggested that there was no need to attend the first day because the first day would consist of registration, an accreditation meeting, and recreational activities—golfing, fly-fishing, or touring the local area. Therefore, according to this president, this first day would be unnecessary to attend for observing business matters pertaining to the NCACCP. I accepted his suggestion and decided to attend the second two days of the conference; the president provided a tentative agenda.

Along with permission for attendance, this preliminary meeting offered insight into how the observational data would be organized. Although there are no prescriptive methods in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), the categories for this study developed from my access to data, my analytical perspective, and the literature review. I entered the field of observation with a defined yet flexible method of organizing my observations; I constructed an observation record based upon the premise that observed and recorded behaviors are “purposive and expressive of deeper values and beliefs” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 79). Furthermore, I had minimal impact over what took place or what was stated by participants of the conference, reducing the factors influencing analysis. I was introduced to the group of study participants, and they were informed of my research intentions as well. Thus, I made

decisions concerning the collection of observational data and the manner in which they were to be collected prior to categorizing the data, but I had minimal control over the persons and events I observed. Finally, observation in field work is a significant component of data triangulation for this study (Patton).

*Interview data.* The third and final method of collecting data was through semi-structured interviews. After reading the NCACCP documents and observing the July, 2005 NCACCP conference, interviews were conducted with the intention of enhancing or supplementing previously retrieved data. Classification of this type of data presents unique descriptions of collective power and networks within the community college presidency of North Carolina. Although document data and observation notes were examined prior to and subsequent to the interviews, by conducting the interviews later in the data collection process, I could address the conceptual categories directly. In other words, transcripts of interviewed presidents provide additional description of the conceptual categories that emerged throughout the research project.

Interviews occurred during August, September, and October 2005. Presidents were recruited for participation via electronic mail and subsequent telephone calls. I established a list of presidential/institutional criteria prior to recruitment. In other words, I targeted certain presidents for interviews: presidents from rural and urban/suburban communities; presidents with varying lengths of service in the NCCCS; presidents of different races and gender; presidents who have served on the executive committee of the presidents' association; and, former, retired presidents. I targeted these presidents with these identifiable differences so that patterns involving power would emerge.

The interviews were one-on-one, semi-structured between myself—the interviewer—and NCACCP members. Marshall and Rossman (1995) have identified this as elite interviewing. “Elite individuals are considered to be the influential, the prominent, and the well-informed people in an organization or community and are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research” (p. 83). I was responsible for composing interview questions and conducting the interviews. In the semi-structured interviews I asked different types of questions including hypothetical, devil’s advocate, ideal position and interpretive (Merriam, 1998). Each interview session lasted no more than one hour. Finally, as the sole researcher of this study I transcribed the tape-recorded sessions, verbatim. Interviews were selected as a part of data triangulation, but, more specifically, interviews add depth to description and offer additional analytical perspective on identified themes concerning collective power and networks relative to the community college presidents of North Carolina.

### *Conclusion*

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are research concerns of qualitative studies. For this study, the methods of combating these potential errors include triangulation (multiple sources of data), an established chain of evidence, reflexivity, purposive sampling, prolonged engagement in the field, and thick description (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

In the presentation of findings, I employ these techniques in order to describe the actors involved with state-wide governance, the structure of the NCACCP, the collective presidential intentions, and the decision-making process in which presidents are involved. Cross-sectional coding and content analysis guided the identification of themes inherent to

the three data sources. These methods of analysis lead to my conclusions in chapter five regarding the collective role and power of community college presidents in the governance of the North Carolina Community College System.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA AND FINDINGS

#### Introduction

Interpretation of the collective role and practices of presidents in the governance of the community college system in North Carolina requires systematic management of the potentially massive collection of retrievable data. Preliminary decisions concerning collection techniques limit both data types and amount, at least initially. However, strategic and internally consistent organization of data must occur during and after the process of data compilation (Mason, 2002; Ritchie, Spencer, & O'Connor, 2003).

It is the purpose of this chapter to explain how the collected data pertaining to presidential networks and power in the North Carolina Community College System were recognized, read, sorted, strategically classified, and interpreted. The three data sources—historical documents, direct observation, and one-on-one interviews—offered different yet complimentary evidence relative to the two primary research questions.

The conceptual tools used to manage and categorize these multiple sources of data were drawn from the literature and from my access to the data. The review of literature suggests that the concepts of power and network encompass multiple research disciplines and topics, including those pertaining to community college governance. Selective studies have illustrated that community college presidents possess and display power at an institutional level (Blackwell & Cistone, 1999; Levin, 1998c; Richardson & Wolverton, 1994) and that networks exist at the institutional level (Breneman & Nelson, 1980; Fridena, 1998; Sink & Jackson, 2002). However, few studies with a state-level perspective have been done on the collective power of community college presidents; and the current literature does not contain

multiple studies on the operation of presidential networks within state community college systems. I gathered and organized data using characterizations or categories drawn from the disciplines of management science, political science, sociology, and higher education in order to address the research questions and the shortcomings of the literature in this area of community college research. As a North Carolina community college instructor I selected this state as the site due to my familiarity with this particular system and my proximity to the system. I also selected the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents [NCACCP] to examine both its centrality to the governance process in the community college system and because of my access to documents detailing that organization's proceedings. Ultimately, the analytical framework constructed and the data collected were linked in the analysis of data (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002).

#### Order of Data Analysis

The application of structure to a body of qualitative data involves decisions (Patton, 2002). This analysis chapter was structured so that the organized collected data and the findings corresponded with the original research questions:

1. What evidence is there that North Carolina community college presidents have organized into a statewide power network?
2. How does the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents operate?

The structuring (sequential presentation) of data analysis based upon the research questions ensured a systematic presentation of data, and identified the relevant data for each question. Further ordering of data by literary concepts ensured internal consistency. In other words, ordering the data by conceptual categories as well as by research question ensured that the processed data would offer depth to the description of power and networks relating to the

community college presidency in North Carolina and, as well, would address the individual research questions thoroughly.

The methods by which the data were collected also contributed to the order and presentation of findings. I first collected and arranged document data, which included minutes, handouts, memos, and announcements pertaining to the NCACCP during a four-year period—2001-2005. I attended and recorded observations from the 2005 NCACCP year-end meeting as well. Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the intent of enhancing or supplementing previously retrieved data. Ordering the data by collection technique ensured consistent treatment of all three data sources.

#### Data Analysis

These data (from three different sources) were organized, examined, and presented in the designated order to describe the presidents as a collective unit and to describe presidential decision making. The gathered and processed data provided descriptive accounts about the components and structure of the body of presidents represented in the collection of documents, the observation notes, and the interview transcripts. Along with a representation of collective presidential structure, description of organizational operation of the NCACCP resulted from coding the collected data. These descriptive accounts were necessary in order to address the research questions.

The coded data generated explanatory accounts as well as description. Key to the accounts were patterns that emerged from the data and the language used by participants—the “substantive content of people’s accounts, in terms of both descriptive coverage and assigned meaning” (Spencer, Ritchie & O’Connor, 2003, p. 214). Therefore, the readings of the data were both literal and interpretive. Although literal readings of the data were done to

discover both events and action, qualitative research fails to accept objective views of the world. Thus, interpretive readings of the data were conducted as well (Mason, 2002). These readings involved construction of data meaning as filtered by me, the researcher, and influenced by the literature.

The data were labeled according to the identified themes, and, most significant to analysis—and the research questions—was the organization of data into conceptual categories. Cross-sectional coding of data with multiple types of categories occurred (Mason, 2002). The categories generated to use cross-sectionally were done so for each research question. In other words, the cross-sectional coding was unique for each research question. These categories were labeled according to characteristics of networks as described by network theories and Mintzberg's characteristics of power. Ideally, multiple coders would have been employed to enhance reliability, but I was the sole coder. Thus, there may have been some limits on reliability, but the NCACCP document data appeared in a consistent format with consistent terminology throughout the duration of data under study; the NCACCP established this consistent organizational format.

Prior to the cross-sectional coding of the data, the NCACCP documents—the primary source of data—were arranged chronologically by year, by day, and by order of daily events. Exceptions to this pattern were documents discussed at NCACCP conferences or Executive Committee meetings but written and compiled prior to the gatherings; these documents were ordered according to the NCACCP conferences or Executive Committee meetings at which the documents were discussed. For citation purposes the NCACCP documents were designated as PAD (Presidents' Association Documents). As the sole method of data classification this sequential arrangement offered limited description of the unique individual

members of the association or the collective structure of the group; this processing method did not produce coded evidence of collective power. However, the chronological arrangement assisted in the literal indexing and produced a systematic way to elicit chunks of data for analysis. Finally, the cross-sectional coding offered “a systematic overview of the scope of data” (Spencer, Ritchie, & Lewis, 2003, p. 203).

#### Evidence of a Presidential Power Network

The first section of data analysis corresponds with the research question: what evidence is there that North Carolina community college presidents have organized into a statewide power network? For this question the data were organized to describe the collective body of North Carolina community college presidents, the individuals or groups involved with NCACCP, and the bureaucracy of the NCACCP. The selection of the NCACCP as the focal point for data analysis was done because the NCACCP is the only state organization created by and for community college presidents in North Carolina. Thus, in this section the document, observation, and interview data were coded as such: NCACCP Actors and NCACCP Structure. Data were indexed for each NCACCP category, and the category and index labels have “origins in social science theory, the research literature, or evaluation issues identified at the beginning of the study” (Patton, 2002, p. 456).

#### *NCACCP Actors*

For the first conceptual category, the collected data were organized to elicit description of the actors involved with the NCACCP. A description of the actors first required a brief examination of the history and exclusivity of the organization. According to the *North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents Directory, 1999* (Sink, 1999), Dr. Ben Fountain and Dr. Raymond Stone—two former North Carolina community

college presidents—founded the NCACCP in 1966 (p. 257; p. 1). The *Directory* indicated that all current, former, and retired community college presidents and Industrial Center directors of North Carolina are members of this association and eligible to attend association conferences (p. i). The *Constitution of the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents* (1996) indicated that eligible members must be elected by an institutional Board of Trustees and approved by the State Board of Community Colleges. The NCACCP *Constitution* further indicated that “membership in the organization shall be voluntary.” However, document, observation, and interview data revealed that other actors—community college representatives and guests—were involved with the NCACCP as well. Therefore, based upon community college position or affiliation, I classified all of the actors as Internal Influencers or External Influencers.

#### *Internal Influencers*

According to Mintzberg (1983), Internal Influencers of an organization are “full-time employees who use voice, those people charged with making the decision and taking the action on a permanent, regular basis; it is they who determine the outcomes, which express the goals pursued by the organization” (p. 26). Thus, the index labels for Internal Influencers included persons who served as presidents of community colleges in North Carolina and those individuals serving as substitutes, or replacements, for full-time presidents.

*Presidents.* Who were the community college presidents of North Carolina from 2001-2005? The total number of community college presidents was 58. Among those 58 in August of 2005 there was one interim president (PAD). Also of the 58 community college presidents in August of 2005, white males numbered 48; there were eight female presidents and two male African American presidents (NCCCS; personal communication, David Sink,

July 13, 2005). Observation data collected at the July, 2005 NCACCP conference confirmed the predominance of white males currently serving as presidents and members of the NCACCP.

The NCACCP document data did not reveal an exact number of retired presidents involved with or participating in the NCACCP from 2001-2005 (PAD); the observation and interview data also failed to identify participation by former community college presidents. Document evidence indicated that the lack of involvement by retired presidents does not end or prohibit those persons from membership into the association (Sink, 1999).

Interview data from a select group of presidents offered further description of individual presidents and the collective body of presidents. A total of eight presidents, both men and women, were interviewed. The institutions for which the presidential interviewees served were diverse in geographic location, community setting, and student populations. For each interview I indexed data according to length of presidential service (in the North Carolina Community College System), path to the presidency, and professional memberships. The length of community college presidential service in North Carolina ranged from six months to 19 years among the interviewees; the average length of service was slightly more than eight years. The path to the presidency was distinctive for each of the interviewees. Prior to achieving their respective North Carolina community college presidencies, the interview participants had served in a wide-range of positions including: administrative assistant, personnel director, marketing director, business manager, student affairs/services director, registrar, faculty, academic dean, continuing education dean, vice president of instruction/academics, vice president of administrative services, and college president. Two of the interviewees had served as a community college president in other

states. The common theme among the distinct paths to the presidency was that each individual had served multiple positions, primarily within the community college, prior to achieving the position of president. Aside from the NCACCP, the most common community college organization interviewees participated in was the American Association for Community Colleges. Two of the presidents also cited their membership in the Community Colleges for International Development. Other examples of professional affiliations cited by the interviewed presidents included: Women Administrators of North Carolina, the Presidents' Academy, Southern Accreditation Committee, and civic organizations.

The interviews also offered personal descriptions of the collective body of presidents. The interviewed presidents, or Internal Influencers, were asked to describe the NCACCP. The NCACCP was treated as the collective body of North Carolina community college presidents; and, the presidents' responses were edited for grammatical clarity. The presidents were numbered to conceal identity, and I numbered each president according to the order in which the interviews occurred—I interviewed President 1 first and President 8 last. President 5 described the NCACCP as “a group of presidents that lead the North Carolina system of community colleges and meet on a regular basis to discuss issues that are common to the various colleges.” Regardless of how the interviewees generically described the NCACCP, respondents ultimately gave positive descriptions of the group, using words such as “pride,” “valuable,” “beneficial,” and “great purpose.” Even the one participant who indicated reservations about responding to the query stated, “I have never had that question, describe the association...I may not be the right one. I'm not that actively involved any more. I think this is a group of individuals who are committed to the community college mission” (President 8). A second common theme in all of the responses to the question was that the

interviewees acknowledged the institutional diversity within the organization. The presidents identified institutional distinctiveness and individuality among the 58 presidents. President 2 described the group collectively and hinted at the diversity of the community colleges represented in the NCACCP:

It is basically an organization of presidents who jointly discuss, deliberate, sometimes take positions, and sometimes take action in variety of things that face all the campuses of the system. And, sometimes that's not an easy task because with the 58 institutions one size does not fit all.

Another respondent alluded to the unique personalities of the individual members of the NCACCP: "You are going to have personalities that come forward and are more aggressive than others. You are going to have some that come to the meetings and be perfectly content to collect data and go back home." (President 7) A final theme was evident from the descriptions of the NCACCP: the organization works with actors (individuals and groups) not identified as NCACCP members.

*Substitutes.* Other actors eligible to participate in the NCACCP—and classified as Internal Influencers—were an Industrial Center Director and individuals who served as substitutes for absentee presidents at the NCACCP conferences. Data indicated the existence of one Industrial Center in North Carolina, which was not identified as a community college but was directed by the same governing body—the State Board of Community Colleges. The director of this Industrial Center was a member of the NCACCP and eligible to attend NCACCP meetings (Sink, 1999, p. i). Data revealed no attendance or participation by this director (PAD). The conference substitutes were institutional vice presidents, or comparable positions such as deans—not all North Carolina community colleges have the title vice

president within the respective bureaucracies (NCCCS). According to the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996), only present members vote, thereby excluding the substitutes from official votes held by the NCACCP. However, substitutes were classified as Internal Influencers because their attendance was counted and opportunity for participation was open to them (PAD; personal communications, Earl Medlin & Edwin Bell, November 23, 2005). Furthermore, interview data indicated that some of the current presidents and members of the NCACCP had served as substitutes at the conferences prior to achieving the position of president and membership into the presidents' association.

#### *External Influencers*

While Internal Influencers constituted the numerical majority of the actors involved with the NCACCP, other actors not designated as members or conference substitutes were involved with the association (PAD). These actors were classified as External Influencers. Mintzberg (1983) defined External Influencers as “nonemployees who use their bases of influence to try to affect behavior of the employees” (p. 26). Examination of the NCACCP conferences yielded description of the External Influencers. The NCACCP conferences were selected for analysis because these meetings were the events where North Carolina community college presidents and others gathered and acted collectively. To elicit further description of the External Influencers, the data were indexed according to the labels System Office Personnel and Guests; these labels were created based upon NCACCP conference attendance.

*System Office Personnel.* The most obvious External Influencers in attendance at the NCACCP conferences were individuals who serve as personnel for the North Carolina Community College System—identified and known as System Office Personnel. System

Office Personnel were indexed further by position: System President, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Vice President of Academic and Student Services, Vice President of Administration, Vice President of Business and Finance, and Vice President of Workforce and Economic Development (PAD; NCCCS). Document data indicated that these individuals were counted in NCACCP attendance, and attendance by the president and vice presidents was consistent. At each conference, the System Office Personnel presented reports in their respective fields of specialization. Associate vice presidents of the System Office attended quarterly meetings as well. Their recorded attendance may have been to serve as substitutes for the System Office vice presidents, but the associate vice presidents also served as information resources for the community college presidents at the NCACCP conferences (PAD). However, the system president, vice presidents, and associate vice presidents did not hold voting privileges in the NCACCP (*Constitution*, 1996).

Although document data did not reveal that attendance was mandatory for System Office personnel, observation data and presidential interviews indicated that System Office attendance and participation was anticipated and appreciated. The interviewed presidents stated that the System Office Personnel identified issues that the presidents should discuss or address (Presidents 3 & 4). In addition, specific System Office Personnel were noted by interviewees as important actors in the NCACCP. For example, in describing the NCACCP conference in July 2005 President 7 stated, “The one who we were all there for was the Vice President of Business and Finance.” Other presidents offered additional comments concerning the relationship between the NCACCP and the System Office. President 2 stated, “I think that we work fairly closely. I would say that we have a collaborative effort with the

System Office Personnel; [and,] I think it is probably more collaborative than adversarial.” President 4 attributed a strengthening relationship between the NCACCP and the System Office “to the leadership of the association.”

*Guests.* Unlike the System Office Personnel, one group of External Influencers at the NCACCP conferences had no direct affiliation with the NCACCP. These individuals and groups, labeled Guests, attended to solicit business opportunities amongst the community college presidents, or to offer management advice. For example, at the July 2005 conference there were presentations by entrepreneurs marketing a funding model, a telecommunications company marketing its supplies and services, and the Director for the State Energy Office offering suggestions on how to manage energy expenditures more effectively (PAD). These actors were not part of the NCACCP, and had the least involvement at the conferences.

#### *NCACCP Structure*

For the second conceptual category addressing network evidence the data were processed to describe the configuration of the presidents’ association. The document, observation, and interview data pertaining to NCACCP Structure were indexed and subsequently coded. Indexing was literal in that terms were identified directly from NCACCP data. The conceptual category labels were derived from Ibarra’s (1992) description of organizational networks. The two conceptual categories are labeled Prescribed Networks and Emergent Networks.

#### *Prescribed Networks*

According to Ibarra (1992), “In organizations, prescribed networks are composed of a set of formally specified relationships between superiors and subordinates and among the functionally differentiated groups that must interact to accomplish an organizationally

defined task” (p. 166). These formally sanctioned positions and relationships within the NCACCP were indexed according to the literal labels: Officers, Standing Committees, and Executive Committee.

*NCACCP Officers.* The *NCACCP Constitution* identified the organization’s officers as president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The NCACCP elected officers to serve one-year terms, and the terms corresponded with the academic calendar year. The officers were elected in July, and the Vice-President was recognized as the President-Elect for the following year (*Constitution*, 1996).

Document data identified the officers, but further description of the NCACCP Officers resulted from presidential interviews. Interviewees indicated that these yearly positions are demanding with respect to responsibility and time.

I don’t know that I would be one of the ones to volunteer to be one of the officers in the presidents’ association because it is quite an undertaking. It is a lot of extra responsibility and being a new president I have enough to do here locally than to take on at the state level. (President 6)

President 7 expressed comparable sentiments regarding the Officer positions:

There are four jobs that I would never want—the president of that association is one of them. I appreciate the folks who are trying to run it. They are doing an incredible job and it is a lot of work. You have some years that people are not satisfied with the job done or some years when people are not satisfied with the amount of work accomplished.

Along with an increased workload, a second theme in the interview data concerned the attainment of an Officer position. Interviewees indicated that NCACCP Officers were

obligated to work their way up the bureaucratic ladder of the NCACCP in order to achieve an Officer position. Although interviewees acknowledged the upward movement of persons who attained the top bureaucratic position, two interviewees hinted at the uncertainty of this process. In describing the attainment of the position of NCACCP President, community college President 4 stated, “You start out at certain levels and you move your way through. You may move from Secretary to Treasurer to Vice President. I’m not sure exactly what it is. You start at the bottom of the list.” President 7 offered complimentary remarks concerning the Officers but added, “Sometimes I wonder how the officers are elected...I think occasionally some people could say this person was elected because they are friends with so and so.” Although upward movement towards becoming an Officer was an evident pattern in the interview data, presidents also noted that some of the experienced presidents may yield to the newer presidents of the association. For example, President 6 stated, “Those [presidents] that have done their duty are not quite as involved as some of the newer ones. That role has been passed on down.”

*NCACCP Standing Committees.* According to the *NCACCP Constitution* one of the duties of the NCACCP President is to recommend the Standing Committees within 60 days of his/her election. The Standing Committees were identified in the document, observation, and interview data. These data were indexed according to the name of the individual NCACCP committees: Finance, Legislative, Personnel, Professional Development, Program, and Technology. Each committee had a Chair and two Vice Chairs who served one-year terms (PAD), and had at least seven members (*Constitution*, 1996). The purpose of the committees was to discuss and respond to topic-appropriate inquiries and suggestions from individual NCACCP members or the System Office Personnel. Data revealed that the

Finance and Legislative Committees were the most requested sources of information or points of inquiry.

You know finance has a huge impact and everybody's always interested in finance. Legislation has a huge impact. So there are always a lot of folks involved in both those committees. Those committees meet together because the delineation becomes quite blurry between a finance issue and a legislative issue; and, because this is where we get our money. (President 2)

Interview data further described NCACCP member appointment in the Standing Committees. President 7 offered positive remarks regarding the assignment process:

That's the good part about the association, the minute you become a president they assign you to a committee. And then after you've been there that first year, the following year, when they are planning committees, presidents email to identify their choices for committees. They [the individual presidents of the association] try to put you on the committee you want to be on.

President 2 described the dispersal of presidents among the different committees. This interviewee referenced the dispersal of presidents based upon longevity of presidential service, but added, "You are likely to find a brand new president assigned to the Finance Committee; you're likely to find a very senior president assigned to Personnel Committee or to the Professional Development Committee." Although other respondents (Presidents 1 & 7) disagreed on the absence of a hierarchy in the appointment of committee members, the President of the NCACCP held the responsibility of selecting the Chair and two Vice-Chairs of each committee. And, the interviewees indicated that the placement of these individuals

was based upon perceived strengths as well as interests. President 7 described the Committee Member and Committee Chair appointments as such:

When you become the leader of an organization it is just like a beaver dam. Some of the beavers gnaw the trees down; some of the beavers take the twigs back; some the beavers know how to pack the mud; and some know how to build the dam with all these bits and pieces. You have to sit and watch which ones are good at what task because if you take a person who wants to do a task that they aren't quite as good at doing then it becomes dysfunctional. It is the same thing with the presidents' association. There are some people who could not get up in front of a group of legislators and talk with them; it is just not their strength. It is very important in a leadership role to remember that. I think that this association is very good at looking at people's strengths and putting them where they will best serve the association.

Consequently, there has been some recycling of personnel within the committees; in other words, some individuals served on the same committee multiple years (PAD).

Because of my background as a finance officer I think the first year I immediately became the Chair of the Finance Committee and I have served as the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee almost every year of the 16 years I have been in the NCACCP, except for the years that I served as Vice President or President of the association. (President 3)

Through the discussion of committee assignment, type of committee involvement, and Chair appointments interviewees enhanced the description of the NCACCP Structure.

*NCACCP Executive Committee.* Along with the six Standing Committees, the data described an Executive Committee, which was the final level of bureaucratic structure. This

body serves as a subgroup of the NCACCP, and acts for the NCACCP when the association is not in session. During the time period under examination, the data revealed that the Executive Committee had its own separate Officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and an Immediate Past President—and had a total of 17 members (*Constitution*, 1996). Along with the five Officers, there was one elected representative and one appointed representative from each of the six geographical regions. Each region represents between eight and twelve schools (PAD). Even though the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996) stated that this committee “shall be called at the discretion of the President or at the request of at least four (4) members of the Executive Committee,” document and interview data revealed that this committee met monthly in Raleigh (President 2). Also according to document and interview data, the System Office Personnel have an open invitation to attend the Executive Committee meetings.

### *Emergent Networks*

Ibarra (1992) described an Emergent Network as one that “involves informal, discretionary patterns of interaction where the content of the relationship may be work related, social, or a combination of both” (p. 166). In an Emergent Network self-interests serve as the impetus for interaction between actors, and the patterns or relationships that develop among the actors are dependent on abilities and those self-interests. To elicit description of Emergent Networks in the NCACCP data were indexed according to the labels Work-Related Contacts and Social Contacts; the labels were literal in that select presidents used the terms “work-related” and “social” in discussing their contact with other presidents. Furthermore, even though Emergent Networks result from purposive action (p. 167), they can be coupled with a Prescribed Network or other Emergent Networks in a hierarchical

system (p. 173). Therefore, the index labels for Emergent Networks in the NCACCP did not have explicit distinctions at all times.

*Work-Related Contacts.* The informal nature of Emergent Networks limited the amount of retrievable data from NCACCP documents, but description of these networks was evident in interview data. Interviewees identified institutional or leadership queries as reasons for contacting fellow North Carolina community college presidents. Regarding his contact with other presidents, President 4 stated:

Normally when I contact another president it is to pick his/her brain about an issue that may be at my institution and I want a different perspective on it. So very seldom when I talk to a president outside of a meeting do I talk about the work directly related to the association.

Other presidents also identified the value of Work-Related Contacts in the NCACCP.

President 6 described the opportunity afforded presidents through the informal connections of the NCACCP:

I would say that I've been extremely impressed and pleasantly surprised at the willingness of the whole group collectively and individually being willing to help you on any situation. The people who've been at this a long time and who have had a great deal of success and have done a great deal of things are so willing to share their experiences, successes, and failures in order to help those of us that are new to avoid some of the pitfalls. At one of the quarterly meetings we had a share session, which was when people shared difficult situations or circumstances that had occurred on their campuses and how they dealt with it. They called it lessons learned. It was/is a

valuable learning opportunity...There are so many presidents that I wouldn't think twice about calling if I needed help.”

*Social Contacts.* The nature of Emergent Networks also handicapped the description of social relationships in the NCACCP. In other words, no description of the Social Contacts resulted from the document data. However, presidents did indicate through interviews that informal connections between certain individuals exist in the NCACCP; and, these connections were based upon personalities and common interests rather than longevity, institutional similarities, or professional experience. Finally, at least one president's comments revealed the duality of Emergent Networks in the NCACCP. President 3 described how the informal social connections and informal working relationships mesh in the NCACCP:

I think some of us have formed a friendship over all these years number one, so we can talk. I played golf with another community college president this weekend, and what did we do while playing golf? We talked about issues at our colleges. We talk and email each other constantly. There are others who are close friends. We'll pick up the phone and talk to each other. There are people [from whom] we receive emails; I had an email this morning from a president asking how do you do certain things. And so, if you need an answer about how to do things then you send out an email and people respond. You get a sense of how other people do things. Then there's the regional kind of thing—we talk to each other because it's an area kind of thing. So we see each other once or twice a month; we are always talking about issues at our colleges; and, other people call and email. It is very rare to go through a week without having contact with a half a dozen or so presidents.

Whether Work-Related Contacts, Social Contacts, or a combination of the two types of contacts, the data supported the existence of Emergent Networks amongst the presidents of the NCACCP.

### NCACCP Operation

The second section of data analysis corresponds with the second research question: how does the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents operate? The organizational structure and the multiple goals, intentions, values, needs, and expectations of various actors contribute to how an organization operates. Furthermore, the description of organizational operation involves the transmission from goals and intentions to actual decisions (Mintzberg, 1983). Therefore, in order to elicit description of the NCACCP operation the data were organized to identify the espoused organizational purpose, the perceived goals, the prescribed method of operation, and collective presidential decision making. The data were coded as NCACCP Goals and NCACCP Decision Making. These conceptual category labels were constructed from the literature while the index labels were identified from the collected data.

### *NCACCP Goals*

For the first conceptual category addressing NCACCP operation, the collected data were organized to elicit description of the expressed collective intentions of the community college presidents in North Carolina. The preliminary step in coding the data concerning goals of the NCACCP was to identify accurate terminology. I first distinguished the concepts operational goals and organizational mission. Mintzberg (1983) defined a goal as “the intention behind a decision or action”, and concluded that “in contrast to goal, mission describes the organization’s basic function in society, in terms of the products and services it

produces for its clients” (p. 6). The mission may or may not be an organizational goal.

Mintzberg also clarified the terms goals and objectives. He stated, “An objective is a goal expressed in a form by which its attainment can be measured. And, an operational goal is one that lends itself to such expression.” Furthermore, “a *nonoperational* goal does not lend itself to measurement, that is [it] cannot be easily ‘operationalized,’ as in ‘the aim of this university is to seek truth’”(p. 6). Thus, for the conceptual category NCACCP Goals, I indexed the collected data as NCACCP Purpose Statement and Perceived Presidential Goals.

#### *NCACCP Purpose Statement*

The NCACCP *Constitution* (1996), NCACCP conference records, and the NCACCP website did not designate explicitly any standard operational goals, measurable objectives, or an organizational mission statement. Therefore, I isolated the purpose statement in the NCACCP *Constitution* to elicit the formally designated collective intentions of the NCACCP. Although the writers of the *Constitution* used different terminology than Mintzberg (1983), the content of the constitutional purpose statement most closely identified the non-measurable intentions of the NCACCP. In December 2005 the NCACCP purpose statement read as follows:

The purpose of the Association shall be to foster and promote the growth, progress and general welfare of North Carolina’s Community Colleges through the unified efforts of the Presidents. Assisting institutions with special problems shall be a major priority of the Association. The Association shall provide a mechanism and process for involving the Presidents and Institutions in making system-wide decisions. Professional integrity, as well as personal growth and development, shall be encouraged and promoted by the Association. (*Constitution*, 1996)

It also should be noted that the document, observation, and interview data failed to indicate the definite origins of the NCACCP purpose statement. In other words, although the NCACCP *Constitution* was revised in October 1996 data did not offer description of who participated in the development or possible revision of that statement; neither did the data reveal how the statement was authenticated. Finally, the interviewed presidents never referenced the constitutional purpose statement when asked about the goals, objectives, purpose, or mission of the presidents' association. For example, President 7 did not confirm their location or existence when asked about a formal set of objectives or mission statement of the NCACCP (personal communication, President 7, November 14, 2005).

#### *Perceived Presidential Goals*

Goals, or intentions, of an organization may be expressed officially in the form of a purpose statement, but these official proclamations may be for public consumption only (Mintzberg, 1983). Furthermore, whether the collective or individual goals are formally recognized or not, all goals are "pursued with varying consistency" (p. 247). Thus, in order to elicit further description of the NCACCP goals, interviewed presidents were asked to identify association goals. The interview data offered description of the goals that were perceived to be most important and consistent by the respondents.

All interviewed presidents offered unique lists and explanations of the association goals, but one goal of the NCACCP consistently named by the interviewees was to serve as an information source for the institutional presidents. President 1 summarized the primary goal of the NCACCP as "sharing information, sharing ideas, sharing techniques [and] it's based on the assumption that we all have something to learn from each other." As indicated by the interview data, learning from one another also meant gaining knowledge about the

current and impending intentions and decisions of external actors, such as the community college System Office and the North Carolina General Assembly. As President 7 stated the primary goal is to “keep ourselves educated as to what is happening in Raleigh.” President 5 added that, in the process of becoming educated, the NCACCP intends to develop solutions for situations that might need outcomes.

The interviewed presidents consistently described the pursuit of outcomes as goals of the NCACCP. For example, multiple interviewees acknowledged the pursuit of legislative and budgetary initiatives in their explanation of NCACCP goals. President 4 stated, “I think the primary goal of the association is to pursue policy and legislative actions that will strengthen the capacity of the system.” Another interviewee illustrated an NCACCP intention that involves the pursuit of a specific policy outcome:

We [the NCACCP] believe that we are, as far as a mission or goal of the system, the primary player in workforce development in the state of North Carolina. In order to better prepare our workforce so that they have educational levels appropriate to attract new industry into our state and stimulate economic development, we are going to have to raise our educational levels and skill levels. [We are going to have to do this] because, as you know, with outsourcing and jobs going overseas, the kind of jobs remaining here are higher level skill jobs; they are not just menial production jobs that don't require a lot of skill. (President 6)

Although President 6 did not offer a plan for pursuing this policy measure, the NCACCP goal would be predicated upon the intended outcome, workforce development. President 7 offered more blunt remarks regarding the pursued budgetary outcomes of the NCACCP:

Our goal is to make sure that we get the best budget we can every year. It's a collective thing. We work all year long arming the System Vice President of Business and Finance and the System President with the information that they need to go to the General Assembly and say these are the needs we [the community colleges] have. We are fighting to keep a good piece of the pie out of the state budget.

According to these descriptions, intended outcomes generated the NCACCP goals.

Although several presidents identified the primary goal of the NCACCP as the pursuit of outcomes, two interviewed presidents spoke more broadly in their descriptions of the collective presidential intentions. President 8 did not name outcome-driven intentions and did not state explicitly any goals of the NCACCP, but did allude to the collective development of a plan of action taken each year by the NCACCP. President 2 described the goals of the NCACCP from an institutional or individual perspective:

I think the goals are to do in a group that which we all strive to do independently, which is to be the best [and] to advance the community college system. The focus is a little bit different there. Here, at home, we're focusing on what's best for this institution. When you go to that group [the NCACCP] the deal is, how can I help advance the system in a way that is advantageous to this institution. You are a smaller part of a greater whole there. Whereas, here you are the only focus and I don't care what you do at your community college.

Regardless of the different presidential descriptions, goals of the NCACCP as perceived by the interviewed presidents were not stated explicitly.

In a final attempt to elicit description of perceived presidential goals of the NCACCP I requested access to the password-protected link of the NCACCP website. According to the

NCACCP homepage, the restricted area contains a forum for NCACCP members to vote on issues deemed to be important. These issues were not designated as goals on the homepage, but a discussion forum of important issues may have revealed perceived intentions of the NCACCP. However, four presidents stated that they did not use the information link, and therefore, could not locate a username or password for accessing the link. A fifth president failed to respond to my request for access to this forum.

### *NCACCP Decision Making*

Every organization has multiple collective and individual goals that may or may not be stated explicitly (Mintzberg, 1983). Data pertaining to the NCACCP revealed both collective and individual presidential intentions. However, citing the purpose statement and quoting presidential perceptions do not describe fully NCACCP operation. Goals only serve as a point of origin in the description of operation; the actual decisions convey the action of organizational operation. Furthermore, organizations, like the NCACCP, “can have trouble operationalizing their [potentially] lofty goals” (p. 6). In other words, incongruence or inconsistency between goals and actions may result in the transmission from intentions to decisions. Thus, the operationalizing of goals was the focus of this section of data analysis.

I organized the document, observation, and interview data to display presidential involvement, both individually and collectively, in NCACCP decision making. Specifically, I arranged data so that they would describe the setting in which the collective body of presidents made decisions pertaining to the community colleges of North Carolina. As well, the data were organized to describe and explain what, how, and why decisions were made by the presidents’ association. I indexed the data as NCACCP Conferences and NCACCP Agenda.

Description of the conferences and agendas was important for several reasons. First, the conferences and agendas identified the contextual guidelines imposed upon the presidential decision makers, both individually and collectively. Second, the setting, the decisions, and the decision-making process identified the internal and external influencers involved in presidential decision making. Furthermore, identification of the issues that warranted decisions revealed the actual collective decisions (as opposed to the stated intentions) of the NCACCP, or at least revealed the decisions perceived to be most significant, consistent, or urgent by the influencers of the NCACCP (Mintzberg). Finally, the conferences and agendas offered a clear format for organizing the data pertaining to community college presidential decision making.

#### *NCACCP Conferences*

Collective decision making by the community college presidents of North Carolina occurred at the NCACCP conferences. During the four-year period of document data under study the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996) mandated the frequency, duration, and location of these association meetings:

There shall be an annual business meeting of the Association held in July at a time and place designated by the President. In addition to the annual meeting held each July, there shall be one (1) regular meeting held on the fourth Thursday and Friday of the first month of each subsequent calendar quarter. The President is authorized to modify the meeting schedule as circumstances may require.

In other words, the presidents' association met four times during the course of an academic year with the final year-end meeting occurring in June or July. The summer conferences took place over three days as opposed to two, and typically were hosted by community colleges

located in the coastal or mountain regions (PAD; personal communication, David Sink, July, 13, 2005).

The conference minutes revealed a consistent format for each conference throughout the four-year period under study, and observation data recorded July 21-22, 2005 detailed this format. Following the registration of presidential and community college attendees, the NCACCP president introduced the order of reports and presentations for each conference. The System Office personnel presented reports first to the collective body of presidents followed by the invited guests, such as potential community college business partners. Next, the collective body of participants separated in order for standing committees to meet. Presidents met with their assigned committees and the System Office personnel met with the committees that matched their discipline of specialization; the System Office president met with the legislative committee at the July, 2005 conference. At the committee meetings presidents and System Office personnel discussed in detail issues pertinent to the individual committees. Serving as specialized information sessions, the committee meetings were also the locations at which System Office personnel and individual presidents proposed options for which the whole body of presidents would subsequently make the collective decisions. In other words, at the small group meetings the standing committees agreed on the proposals to be presented to the collective body of presidents. Conference attendees reconvened for reports and proposals, at which point presidents would participate in the official collective decision making process—voting on the proposals brought forth by the committee chairs. Not all committee chairs had proposals for every conference or session, but chairs did report on progress or results from previous decisions (PAD). The final day of the conference involved System Office reports from all Vice Presidents or their representatives followed by

Standing Committee reports from Chairs or Vice Chairs. Discussion between presidents and System Office personnel was open during these reports. In other words, questions were asked and proposals were made by both presidents and personnel. The actual decisions concerning System Office reports and committee proposals are illustrated and explained in the subsequent section—NCACCP Agenda.

Although the association conferences served as the setting for collective presidential decision making, document and interview data revealed that additional meetings and correspondence occurring outside of the conferences yielded discussion about possible NCACCP decisions. According to the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996), the Executive Committee met monthly. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss issues comparable to those discussed at the NCACCP conferences. Thus, executive committee meetings served as an opportunity for participating presidents (those who served on the executive committee) and System Office personnel to update and revise the collective presidential proposals (PAD). Furthermore, interview data revealed that unscheduled presidential correspondence, such as emails, telephone calls, and social gatherings, allowed for presidents to refine existing ideas or propose new ones over an extended period of time. Finally, although presidential attendance at the quarterly meetings was not required and presidential discussion extraneous to the official gatherings occurred, in order to vote on proposals (the formal decision-making measure) presidential attendance at NCACCP conferences was mandatory (*Constitution*, 1996).

#### *NCACCP Agenda*

The data indexed as NCACCP Agenda identified the types of issues discussed by the association members, described how those topics arose for discussion and decision, and

offered explanation as to why particular decisions were made by the presidents. The NCACCP conference minutes were the primary data source for eliciting description of actual presidential decisions, but other documents and observation and interview data detailed the presidential agenda as well.

*NCACCP topics for discussion and decision.* The minutes of the NCACCP conferences best revealed the types of issues for which collective presidential decisions were made. The minutes of the conferences for the years 2001 to 2005 had an established, consistent structure. For every conference there were reports by the System Office personnel and the NCACCP Standing Committees. The System Office reports detailed community college issues relative to the specialized departments within the System Office. For example, the System Office Vice President of Business and Finance detailed financial and budgetary topics that may require presidential decisions; or, the System Office president updated the presidents on legislative topics that required a collective presidential decision. The chairs or vice chairs of the NCACCP Standing Committees delivered reports on community college issues within their respective areas of concentration. Thus, the discrete thematic categories created by the NCACCP and the System Office identified the issues for presidential discussion and possible decision. The officials of the System Office had different titles than the NCACCP Standing Committee labels, but the topics introduced and reported on by the System Office officials were conceptually similar. Furthermore, the System Office representatives corresponded with the appropriate NCACCP Standing Committees, and the standing committees consulted with or reported to the relevant System Office personnel. Table 1 displays examples of the issues collectively addressed by the presidents and recorded in the minutes of NCACCP conferences or Executive Committee meetings. Although

different categories may have resulted from frequency counts or from employing multiple coders, as the sole researcher of a qualitative study I relied upon content analysis for the identification of NCACCP topics.

Table 1  
Examples of Presidential Discussions and Decisions

<b>Standing Committee Label</b>	<b>Example Issue Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
Finance	Recommendation of the Finance Committee to ask the State Board to increase the Presidential Salary Schedule by 2%.	7/23/04
Legislative	Committee Chair asked that each president meet with the local legislative delegation to discuss the 2002-2003 budget request and to explain the impact of the 10 percent cut. Presidents should stress the urgent need for a timely budget so colleges can plan due to the anticipated cuts and that decisions on any tuition increase should be made early.	3/14/02
Personnel	The Personal Committee spokesperson presented briefly information regarding alternative health insurance available from Blue Advantage and Jefferson Pilot. She/he indicated a representative from these companies would be happy to address employees at individual colleges at the college's request.	1/25/02
Professional Development	The Professional Development Committee made the following recommendations to the NCACCP: 1. Explore options for development of a Presidential Leadership Program in cooperation with NCSU. 2. Suggest that the President of the NCACCP appoint a president in the NC System to serve as a mentor for new presidents.	7/25/02

Table 1 continued  
Examples of Presidential Discussions and Decisions

<b>Standing Committee Label</b>	<b>Example Issue Description</b>	<b>Date</b>
Program	The committee recommends the NCACCP adopt a resolution of support for the Five Strategies of the Fire Services Task Force.	7/23/04
Technology	Association member briefly discussed the Wireless plans and Information Highway. Concern that some campuses are not using it, while others are. With grant monies available, a NCCCS representative will develop a plan to consider full utilization of time on the Information Highway and grant utilization.	10/26/01

*How NCACCP topics were introduced.* Along with the identification of the types of issues brought forth for decisions, the data described how issues emerged for decision making. According to collected data the introduction of potential decisions emerged in two ways. First, suggestions or legislative initiatives came from the System Office personnel. The System Office presented the suggestions or directives in reports at the NCACCP conferences, at standing committee meetings at the conferences, and at NCACCP Executive Committee meetings. The minutes from the NCACCP Executive Committee meeting held in July 2002 illustrated how suggestions for presidents emerged from the System Office:

The System Office President advised the Presidents that some members of the General Assembly seem to feel that the community college system has “lost our way in targeting directions for workforce development.” He stressed that there is pressure to be more strategic in our new programs and the expansion of existing programs. He advised that he has appointed a task force to look at incentives for “trade[s] training.”

A second way an issue could be brought forth for decision making by the NCACCP was through the standing committees and individual presidents. Within the small group meetings or through the committee chairs presidents introduced ideas for potential decision making and legislative pursuit by the association. An example of an “Action Item” presented to the System Office by the NCACCP Finance Committee in July 2004 was for the System Office “to ask the State Board [of Community Colleges] to increase the Presidential Salary Scale by 2%.” The motion was approved unanimously (PAD). According to observation data recorded in July 2005, the rationale for this proposal was to improve the salaries of presidents with the lowest salaries in the community college system.

The points of origin of issues necessitating decisions were identified in the conference minutes, but for further description of how issues emerged for decisions I asked interviewees if certain actors held greater clout or dominance in the process of bringing forth issues for decisions. Multiple interviewees indicated that certain internal and external actors of the association do initiate discussion and decision, and, thereby, may be perceived as dominant actors. In reference to dominant internal actors, or presidents, President 5 stated:

I think that [the presence of dominant actors] is always true in any organization.

Longevity gives people the ability to have more experience to say some things and to reflect on. I think knowledge of the system is important, needless-to-say. If someone who has been around a long time, then they are going to have an opportunity to have an opinion or an influence. I think that happens.

Even if issues arose through a “grassroots” effort (President 5) or from a dominant presidential actor, the interviewed presidents acknowledged a reliance on the System Office personnel—external actors—for further action. As President 2 stated, “They [the System

Office representatives] are sometimes the conduit between the legislature and us, as you would expect them to be at the System Office.” Finally, interviewees recognized the presence of key influencers, but emphasized that NCACCP decision making was an inclusive act in that all presidents had the opportunity to participate. For example, President 8 said, “There are dominant players and they just rotate among themselves all the time. They set the goal, direction, and tone. Now, do they ask me for my input? Oh yes, but, are there dominant players? The answer is yes.”

*How NCACCP decisions were made.* The document, observation, and interview data revealed the actual act of presidential decision making as well. There were no listed by-laws of the association detailing the guidelines for official decisions made by the presidents’ association in the *NCACCP Directory, 1999*, in the conference minutes, or on the NCACCP website (PAD; Sink, 1999; North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents, n.d.). Therefore, I elicited description of the decision-making process from the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996) and observation and interview data.

The NCACCP *Constitution* identified the formal method of decision making. The NCACCP *Constitution* states, “All issues, except for the amendment of the Constitution, shall be decided by a majority vote of the members present [at conferences], providing there is a quorum.” In 2005 there were 58 community college presidents and one Industrial Center director (NCCCS website), but a minimum number of association members was not designated as a quorum at NCACCP conferences. Observation data revealed that determination of a majority was conducted orally and collectively for issues that required a vote.

Interview data further detailed the attainment of a majority in the presidential decision-making process. Multiple interviewees identified that a majority was achieved through presidential consensus; and, consensus was the preferred and accepted manner for NCACCP decision making. President 2 prefaced his remarks on presidential consensus by defining the term consensus:

The definition of consensus that I keep on my desk is: a group decision that may not be the best decision, but it's one that we can all live with. We arrive at that decision with all members that have been adequately heard and all are satisfied with the process, and dissenters commit to not undermining [the decision].

However, this president and others expressed concerns about consensus building amongst the association members. According to interview data, presidential consensus in NCACCP decision making did not equate to 100% satisfaction for 100% of the participating members. President 8 distinguished the concepts of consensus and commitment, which were relevant to his understanding of how decisions were made collectively in the NCACCP. He stated:

Remember consensus does not mean commitment. You might get a consensus on an issue but that doesn't mean that 100% of them [the presidents] are committed to the goal or to the idea just because there is a consensus. You can have minority reports that are not in agreement with the decision. Do you think that person who is not in 100% agreement with the decision is going to be 100% committed? There's a difference between consensus and commitment, and I'd rather have the commitment of people than a consensus. That might be more than you want to know about consensus, but that is the belief that I have. A consensus is simply a majority of those in attendance at a meeting who seem to agree that this is the right thing to do.

Furthermore, interviewees acknowledged that presidents knowingly disregard presidential consensus when consensus would prevent possible individual or institutional gain. The remarks from President 3 illustrated individual presidential behavior that undermines collective presidential consensus:

There's a statement out there that there is no gentleman's agreement among the presidents even though we may say there is. We all agree to not go for special legislation and concentrate on what's best for the system as a whole—that is more or less a gentleman's agreement. Yet, a Fayetteville senator comes along and says in my position as senator in the General Assembly I can get Fayetteville a million dollars. So, is he [the community college president who would receive the funds] going to turn it down? The gentleman's agreement is sort of out the window. This year there was some pork—pork meaning special legislation—to ten or so community colleges because they had the inside track with house or senate members. Did I say anything? No, because next year I've got a project that I'm working on that I will probably try and get my house members and senators to get special legislation for. It's the way it works.

President 2 attributed the flaws associated with NCAACCP consensus to “the system size, the diversity [of the institutions within the system], and the scope of the entire organization.” Finally, while the presidents recognized consensus as a favorable method for obtaining a majority, all interviewees acknowledged it as imperfect.

*Why presidents made decisions.* Description of the greater network, or external context, within which the NCAACCP operates offered some explanation as to why the NCAACCP made particular decisions concerning community college governance, and why

those types of decisions were on the NCACCP agenda. I consulted *A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book, 2005* (2005) and the North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS] website for description of the external context. The NCACCP operates within the framework of the NCCCS, which “serves as a resource agency and an administrative arm” of the State Board of Community Colleges (*A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book, 2005*, p. 7). According to the *Fact Book, 2005*, “The System Office, headed by the System President, provides state-level administration and leadership of the Community College System under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges [SBCC]” (p. 7). NCACCP members have had representation within the bureaucracy of the SBCC, but influence based upon presidential numbers has been minimal. For example, the SBCC assigned three community college presidents to the four Standing Committees of the SBCC for the year 2005-2006 (NCCCS website). Thus, System Office directives and the legislative parameters established by the state-level bureaucracy influenced certain presidential decisions.

Content analysis of the collected data yield several themes concerning presidential decision making. According document and interview data, issues introduced and discussed in the presidential decision-making process indicated an emphasis on industrial or vocational programs; concerns over financial or budgetary issues; and an adherence to the established bureaucracy. As well, the collected data offered examples of external influence for each of the themes that were developed from content analysis.

Although a primary intention of the NCCCS since its original creation has been to provide vocational training that will serve the state’s workforce (Herring, 1992), the data indicated, at least partially, that presidents individually and collectively decide to pursue such

programs due to external influencers, such as the state-level bureaucracy. The minutes of the NCACCP Executive Committee meeting held in July 2002 illustrated this external influence regarding vocational/industrial education at the state's community colleges:

He [the System Office President] advised the Presidents that some members of the General Assembly seem to feel that the community college system has 'lost our way in targeting directions for workforce development.' He stressed that there is pressure to be more strategic in our new programs and in the expansion of existing programs. He advised that he has appointed a task force to look at incentives for "trade[s] training."

Document, observation, and interview data revealed financial struggles community college presidents face in the attempt to influence state-wide policy. Interview and observation data indicated that presidents collectively and individually petition for financial support from state legislators, but interviewees acknowledged that the financial parameters are established by the state-level hierarchy. In other words, the NCACCP encounters bureaucratic resistance in the transmission from collective presidential decisions to state-wide policy. Directives issued by the state legislature or SBCC obligate the NCACCP to make certain policy decisions concerning finance. Several of the legislative orders that appear in the document data are Full Time Equivalent (FTE) values, the number of annual leave days granted to presidents, faculty salaries, and annual institutional budgets. As well, interviewees cited, indirectly and directly, funding as the foremost obstacle in the conversion of decisions to policy. For example, when asked about possible changes in the presidents' agenda, President 4 responded:

I don't think there has been a lot of change. The group has been pretty much focused on budgetary items for the last five years, and that could be due to the state of the economy of North Carolina. As a group, we basically have had no choice but to be focused on the budget.

A NCCCS press release dated October 21, 2005 further illustrates the budgetary boundaries within which presidents make financial decisions:

The State Board authorized a reversion of one percent (1%) of college budgets by the end of October. The action is needed because of a shortfall of more than \$3.6 million between budgeted and collected receipts for the Community College System. The colleges had been directed to hold back one and one-half percent (1.5%) of their budgets for this possibility. The System Office Vice President for Budget and Finance told the Board that if collections do not improve, the remaining one-half percent (0.5%) will be requested early next year.

In other words, the SBCC mandated the amount money to be reserved for each institution for possible return to the state budget.

Data also revealed that presidents have adopted alternative financial means in response to the state-wide budgetary shortcomings or to supplement the local and institutional needs. Interviewees (Presidents 3 & 8) named pork-barrel funds acquired through legislators' efforts as a primary method of supplementing institutional funding. As well, practitioners and researchers have identified the presidential practice of establishing business partnerships with private enterprises, instead of legislative measures, as a means to fund institutional or program development (Sink & Jackson, 2002). Thus, according to the data the NCACCP has had limited presidential influence in this state-wide governance

decisions relating to the community college system budget, and some presidents have resorted to alternative funding measures.

As evidenced by the previous examples elicited from the data, presidents were deferential to external authority or networks. This deference was obvious in pursuing the association agenda as well. When asked about pursuing the agenda President 2 responded:

I think that we work through whoever the appropriate party is at the system office. If it is a finance issue then we go to the System Office Vice President of Business and Finance. If it is legal I'd go to the legal. If it is general issue and we don't know quite where to go we'd go to the Executive Vice President of the system and say here's the situation.

However, interview data revealed that presidents were deferential to the internal network as well. NCACCP members referenced the perpetuation of association practices as a result an informal hierarchy. Several interviewees indicated that a "pecking order" exists within the presidents' association (Presidents 1 & 7). For example, President 1 stated, "I think that the old-boy network continues to work. Those personal relationships should not be underestimated and there is a certain pecking order. That's something I haven't discovered entirely, but I think operates."

Although interviewees (Presidents 2 & 5) identified additional reasons, such as the system size and institutional diversity, for presidential decisions, the data revealed that collective presidential influence in state-wide governance decisions has been limited by external authority. Several presidents indicated that some NCACCP decisions have come to fruition (Presidents 2, 3, & 8), but interviewees failed to identify specific decisions that came to fruition (became policy), and were initiated solely by the NCACCP. As well, data

indicated that the System Office President and the System Office Vice Presidents act as liaisons for the NCACCP in that group's attempt to influence policy. However, the primary purpose of the System Office, and its personnel, is to serve as the "administrative arm" of the State Board of Community Colleges (*A Matter of Facts: The North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2005, p. 7). In other words, System Office devotion to the intentions of the SBCC takes precedence over System Office service to the NCACCP. Thus, the data revealed that financial survival and adherence to authority were determinants of presidential decisions regardless of the stated intentions; and, the data failed to identify examples of presidential decisions (that originated in the NCACCP) that resulted in the formation of state-wide policy for the community colleges of North Carolina.

#### Summary of Analysis

The classification of data was not always a linear process; collection of data continued while I analyzed previously gathered information, particularly in regards to the interview data. This process demanded extensive questioning of the data. Reading and rereading of collected data enabled me "to become familiar with those data in intimate ways" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 113). Although there are no prescriptive methods in qualitative research, I created a framework for analyzing the data in order to follow a consistent method of analysis. Categories were developed from the literature and my access to data. The system of coding and categorizing was tested for completeness to ensure that it led to deeper analysis of the emergent themes (Patton, 2002). Since the data were text-based, I employed content analysis and cross-sectional coding. Also known as categorical indexing, cross-sectional coding was used so that "the researcher applies a uniform set of indexing categories systematically and consistently to their data" (Mason, 2002, pp. 150-151).

Adherence to the research questions was the primary objective during the data analysis and presentation of the findings; this approach was necessary to maintain a consistent qualitative methodology (Mason).

In order to elicit description systematically I employed an analytical framework using power and network concepts, especially those expressed by Mintzberg and concepts outlined in network theories. In other words, I coded the data according to labels drawn from the work of Mintzberg (1983) and the works detailing networks. I indexed the data according to themes that emerged from the document, observation, and interview data sources. Thus, the category labels appeared in the literature and the index labels appeared in the raw data.

I organized the collected data to describe the community college presidents of North Carolina as a collective body, as well as to describe the operation of this collective body—the NCACCP. Descriptions of the composition (the internal and external actors) and the structure of the NCACCP were presented to identify network characteristics exhibited by the presidents' association and explained in the literature. Description of NCACCP operation was presented to detail possible influence by the NCACCP in the state-wide governance of community colleges in North Carolina. Furthermore, description of presidential operation was elicited to identify potential inconsistency or incongruence between presidential goals and decision making and the community college mission.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

#### *Overview of the Study*

This chapter first reviews the study, including the problem from which the study originated, the purpose of the study, the acquisition and arrangement of data, and the research questions that led to the collection of data. Following a review of the study, I identify the major findings and discuss those findings as they relate to the understanding of networks and power associated with community college presidents in North Carolina. Furthermore, I discuss potential inconsistency between presidential goals and presidential decisions; and, I draw conclusions about the actual power held by governance officials operating on behalf of the community colleges in North Carolina. Finally, I discuss the implications for research and practice for scholars and presidents of the community college system in North Carolina and nationally.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

In *Higher Education for the Public Good* (2005), Adrianna Kezar, Tony Chambers, and John Burkhardt profess that “higher education exists to serve the public good” (p. xiii). According to these researchers, service towards the public good involves “training leaders for public service, educating citizens to serve the democracy, increasing economic development, and critiquing public policy” (p. xiii). Although these “commitments” to serve the public good continue to evolve as societal needs change, higher education institutions “have helped create a better society and are essential to a healthy deliberative democracy” (p. xiii). The American community college, one such institution of higher education, espouses socially democratic ideals, and operates from the premise that the community college is democracy’s

college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Frye, 1994; Gleazer, 2000; Ratcliff, 1994; Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

Service towards the public good by academic institutions, such as the community college, depends, at least in part, upon the governance structures and personnel responsible for the development of policy (Longanecker, 2005; Mathews, 2005; Richardson, Bracco Richardson, Callan, & Finney, 1998). Some higher education researchers (Fridena, 1998; Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt, 2005; Slaughter, 1990) have adopted a critical perspective of academic governance structures and governance officials, and have indicated that groups and individuals interfere with the ideal of serving the public good. In other words, democratic governance and organizational ideals have been superseded by the exchange of self-interests (such as revenue generation) and the pursuit of individual intentions. Therefore, organizational operation appears competitive and political rather than socially democratic (Kezar, Chambers, & Burkhardt; March & Olsen, 1995).

Within the community college governance structures of each state multiple individuals and groups hold responsibility for establishing and enacting institutional and state-wide policy (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Longanecker, 2005; Richardson, Bracco Richardson, Callan, & Finney, 1998). In regards to institutional governance or management, the community college presidency has been a frequent focus of study for researchers (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Birnbaum, 1988; Levin, 1998c; Vaughan, 1994). While these investigations are significant and interesting contributions, what are the governance roles and practices of community college presidents in the development of state-wide policy? An answer to this question involves the investigation of power and networks, concepts studied by multiple scholars (Mentor, 2004; Mintzberg, 1983; Nohria, 1992; Pfeffer, 1992a). Thus,

the dilemma at the core of this study is whether presidents individually or collectively influence state-wide governance decisions that are inconsistent with the ideals of the community college system of one state—North Carolina.

### *Research Purpose*

Although the broad purpose of this research is to study presidential networks and power in the governance of the community colleges of North Carolina, there are multiple facets to this purpose, such as: to determine if a presidential network exists and functions in the governance of the NCCCS; to determine if presidential intentions and decisions are congruent, and consistent with the socially democratic mission of the community college; and, to draw conclusions about collective presidential power in the governance of the state's colleges. A final purpose of this study is to add to the existing body of literature pertaining to state community college governance and community college presidential power.

### *Sample, Data Sources, and Data Management*

The sample population for this qualitative study includes community college presidents of the community college system of North Carolina, who are *defacto* members of the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents [NCACCP]. This organization is most critical for this study, and the study's participants were selected purposefully.

In order to examine the community college presidents of North Carolina, and the NCACCP particularly, I collected data from three sources: from documents, from observation, and from interviews. Data collection was conducted from March 2005 until December 2005. I first collected document data, which include minutes, handouts, memos, and announcements generated by or relative to the North Carolina Association of Community

College Presidents [NCACCP]; the NCACCP website was consulted as well. The bulk of document data under investigation was lent to me by a North Carolina community college president. These documents detail presidential discussions and decisions during a four-year period—2001-2005. Through the examination of the NCACCP documents I discovered the location and dates of the NCACCP meetings. I attended and recorded observations from the July 2005 conference. These data identify actors, issues, and the order of business conducted at that specific NCACCP conference. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during August, September, and October 2005. Presidents were recruited for participation via electronic mail and subsequent telephone calls. Interviews were transcribed immediately and coded to supplement description of NCACCP structure and operation.

Because the data were text-based I employed cross-sectional indexing. Thematic category labels and descriptions were elicited from both network theories and Mintzberg's (1983) description of power. Additional themes were developed from the data through content analysis.

### *Theoretical Framework and Research Questions*

Data collection and management were not done subsequently to a review of the literature. In other words, the collection and management of data were a continuous and iterative process (Ritchie, Spencer, & O'Connor, 2003). Through a review of literature, especially in the disciplines of management science, political science, sociology, and higher education, I discovered limited research pertaining to collective presidential power in the state-wide governance of community colleges. Furthermore, themes of power and networks were identified in the literature for the purpose of constructing a theoretical framework. For example, Mintzberg's (1983) *Power In and Around Organizations* was critical to this study

because his power configurations serve as models for analysis. As well, the literary pieces detailing social network theories were important because they offered explanation of network composition and operation. Specifically, Actor-Network Theory involves the mechanics of power, and Network Exchange Theory emphasizes the connectivity of subjects in the transmission of power. Through my multiple readings of the collected data and the literature, I developed two research questions relative to the research problem concerning the governance of North Carolina's community colleges:

1. What evidence is there that North Carolina community college presidents have organized into a statewide power network?
2. How does the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents operate?

These questions serve as the foundation of the analytical framework.

#### *Summary of the Findings*

The findings of this examination of community college presidents in North Carolina correspond with the two research questions. The first research question involves the identification of the network characteristics exhibited by the NCACCP. According to the data, a presidential network does exist in the North Carolina Community College System [NCCCS], and this network, the NCACCP, is exclusive. In order to become a member of the NCACCP one has to hold, or has to have held, the position of community college president. Outsiders attend NCACCP meetings and are offered opportunity to participate, but collective decisions are made by members only. The network is composed of 58 current presidents, of which nine are women and three are African American men—the ninth woman and third African American man were approved by the State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) in November 2005 (NCCCS, 2005, November 18). The network has an internal structure

consisting of four officers, six standing committees with at least seven members each, and an executive committee of 17 members (*Constitution*, 1996). The officers and committee chairs and vice chairs serve one-year terms. Document and interview data indicate that specific presidents occupy committee chair positions for multiple terms. Interview data further indicate that presidents perceive particular association members as having dominant status; as identified by the interviewees, this status is acquired through longevity of service or experience in a particular role pertinent to community college intentions. Finally, the NCACCP works within larger networks, such as the System Office, the State Board of Community Colleges [SBCC], and the state legislature.

The second research question examines how the NCACCP operates, which includes the investigation of the espoused intentions and the actual decisions. Data indicate that there is a formal statement identifying collective presidential intentions, and there are informal intentions expressed by the individual presidents. There is a decision-making process for pursuing particular intentions. The intentions are brought forth for discussion and possible decision by presidents representing the standing committees or by System Office personnel via contact with the SBCC or legislators in the General Assembly of North Carolina. The NCACCP decision-making process involves building consensus amongst the presidents. The rationale for particular NCACCP decisions can be traced to the needs as expressed collectively by the NCACCP and to the demands placed upon the NCACCP by external community college networks.

Members of the NCACCP acknowledge a collective goal to pursue action “that will strengthen the capacity of the system,” (President 4) and perceive themselves as a “group of individuals [who] are committed to the community college mission” (President 8). However,

interview data indicate that informal individual intentions and actions, such as the acquisition of pork barrel funds, may circumvent the formal intentions expressed in the NCACCP *Constitution* (1996), thereby revealing potential for inconsistency between NCACCP intentions and individual presidential decisions. The collected data indicate that presidential consensus in the decision-making process does not equate to commitment by the members. Finally, the data do not indicate that the collective intentions of the NCACCP or the external networks regarding state-wide governance are incongruent or inconsistent with the socially democratic mission of the community college system.

### *Conclusions*

While the findings of this study are not generalizable to the investigation of all community college networks or to national presidential organizations, the findings are consistent with the study's theoretical framework and the scholarly literature. Moreover, the findings lead to conclusions about the NCACCP as a network, about power in the establishment of state-wide policy for community colleges in North Carolina, and about consistency between policy decisions and the socially democratic mission of the community college system. Thus, there is transferability to some of the conclusions of this investigation to other community college systems in the United States.

The findings indicate that the NCACCP is an exclusive network and works within a greater system of networks, such as the NCCCS and the SBCC. The individual members of the NCACCP network represent and serve 58 unique institutions. Even though at least one interviewee denied the existence of a "pecking order" (President 2), there is a hierarchy within the NCACCP network. The presidents, or actors, are points of power along the network lines, and presidents with longevity in the community college system and the

NCACCP have (internal) influence along those lines (Nohria, 1992; Walker, 1985). For instance, when a topic is brought forth for discussion and possible decision, the chair or vice chair acts as the transmission point and holds the clout in that particular presidential expression. In other words, centrality in a network equates to the possession of power (Guetzkow & Simon, 1955; Nohria, 1992), and individuals have influence due to the central points that they occupy. In addition, presidents are “purposeful agents who are constantly trying to wrest control for themselves or blocking others from taking control,” which results in the establishment of new networks (Nohria, p. 94; White, 1992).

The dominant actors, who occupy the central positions of the NCACCP, express the collective intentions, and homogeneous collective intentions result. The NCACCP adopts the character of the dominant actors for two reasons—the predominance of external bureaucracy and the similarity of roles assumed by NCACCP members. The NCACCP works through the NCCCS, which acts under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges whose members are appointed by the Governor and General Assembly. Institutional boards of trustees have the power to select each college president, but the SBCC—an external force—has ultimate power in the approval of the selection of college presidents (*A Matter of Facts: North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2000). According to Mintzberg’s power configurations (1983), the college board of trustees, an internal group of administrators, and the SBCC, an external group, have control based on bureaucratic standards. The President of the NCCCS has the power to recommend presidential appointments, and has acknowledged that more progress is needed to achieve diversity within the ranks of the presidency (NCCCS, 1999, October 29), but the bureaucracy limits the power of the System Office President as well. Collectively or individually community

college presidents have no power in the appointment of women and minority presidents. Although limited racial and gender diversity amongst the individual presidents of the association contributes to the homogeneous character and intentions of the organization, the members of the NCACCP have similar roles as presidents and make collective decisions as an association (Mentor, 2004). In other words, the presidents of the NCACCP, regardless of race or gender, play similar roles “with regards to others in the organization,” which results in “a shared opinion” (Nohria, 1992, p. 6; Burt, 1980). Thus, the NCACCP, a network that attempts to influence state-wide policy, expresses collective intentions as a homogenous organization rather than a collection of unique institutional leaders.

Although, as a network, the NCACCP assumes a homogeneous character, the findings do not indicate that the collective presidential decisions are incongruent with the socially democratic mission of the community college system. For instance, content analysis of the data indicates that vocational or industrial programs are an emphasis of the presidents when making decisions regarding community college governance in North Carolina.

Although some researchers (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Raisman, 1990; Zwerling, 1976) with a national focus have questioned the value of vocational education in the pursuit of the community college mission and goals, presidents who pursue the vocational education element of the mission have not failed or have not made decisions that are inconsistent with the community college mission. According to Herring (1992), a founder of the North Carolina Community College System, vocational education is here (in North Carolina) to stay and, therefore, the institutions must maintain high quality programs and be responsive to the community’s changing educational needs. Even though local, state, and federal governments hold funding power, individual presidents and the network of college

presidents in North Carolina are directly involved with the changing educational needs of their respective institutions and the entire state system. Therefore, presidents do hold individual and collective power over the curricular focus of the community colleges, and hold power in sustaining the quality of vocational education. Furthermore, the presidents, who maintain and promote this type of education in the community colleges, act in accordance with the state's community college mission because this vocational focus has been a fundamental and central element of the North Carolina Community College System since its inception (*A Matter of Facts: North Carolina Community College System Fact Book*, 2000; Herring, 1992).

Collective intentions of the NCACCP may be expressed by the dominant actors and may be consistent with the community college mission, but that does not mean that individual presidential intentions or actions are consistent with the collective intentions of the NCACCP. As transmission points in the network any president in the association may attempt to influence or be subjected to influence by local legislators. For example, presidents identified the pursuit of pork barrel funds as an action that undermines the NCACCP; this action is also a demonstration of individual presidential power. In addition, presidents who receive these types of funds via the actions of individual legislators potentially decrease the total amount of funding allocated for the collective body of community colleges. In other words, these instances of individual presidential decisions, or behaviors, can result in actions that are incongruent with the collective intentions of the NCACCP and the community college system.

The presidents' association is also a point of power transmission in the greater network (Law, 2001; Willer, 1999a), but the NCACCP does not occupy the central point of

the greater network in the formation of policy. External influencers in North Carolina—the General Assembly, the State Board of Community Colleges, and the System Office, particularly the President—are more central and powerful than the identified internal influencer (the NCACCP) in the formation of state-wide community college policy. The NCACCP, as a network, tries to influence the formation of state-wide policy, but the decisions made and measures pursued collectively by the presidents convert to policy only with the approval of the external networks. From a network perspective the NCACCP—an internal network—is unable to transmit power to the external network due to bureaucratic constraints (Brass & Burkhardt, 1992). Furthermore, collective presidential behavior and power are not “unchallenged” (Fridena, 1998, p. 52). In other words, the external networks foster the policy decisions that come to fruition, thus the external influencers have more power in the determination of policy. Mintzberg (1983) would label this as an Instrument configuration due to the dominance of external influencers. However, there are also some elements of the Closed System configuration, given the bureaucracy run by the SBCC, which functions as a governing board rather than as a coordinating board (McGuinness, 2002; Tollefson, 2000). What then is the presidents’ group? The NCACCP is a support network of peers that has limited collective influence in state-wide policy (as a formal body), but its individual presidents or informal groups of presidents may have influence through local legislators to pursue individual or institutional intentions. Thus, a formal and bureaucratic system of power exists in the governance of the community colleges of North Carolina.

#### *Implications for Research and Practice*

My academic interests in the community colleges of North Carolina and the concept of power determined the nature of this study, but this investigation has implications for

community college research and practice as well. This study concludes with suggestions for researchers and practitioners concerned with state-wide community college governance in North Carolina and other states.

Multiple scholars (Birnbaum, 1988; Kerr & Gade, 1986; Richardson & Wolverton, 1994; Vaughan, 1986) have examined leadership in higher education, but qualitative researchers need to continually frame and approach research questions differently than previous scholarship (Townsend & Twombly, 1998; Levin 1998c; Patton, 2002). A network perspective offers further description of collective power in the state-wide governance of community colleges in North Carolina and elsewhere. Examination of community college governance from a network approach helps to describe the context of power, identify the limitations of individual and collective power, and explain the transmission of power in the development of policy.

I examine the NCACCP, a presidential network, but other community college networks express intentions and attempt to influence state-wide policy as well. For example, according to the North Carolina Community College Faculty Association “the ultimate goal [of a faculty association member] is to influence the decision of the policy maker.” Along with the NCACCP, an interest for the state faculty association—and the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees—has been the increase of faculty salaries (North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees, n.d.; North Carolina Community College Faculty Association, n.d.). Thus, other networks exist, and are perhaps more powerful than the presidents in particular actions. Examination of these other networks relative to the NCACCP would enhance description and explanation of governance roles and practices in the North Carolina system of community colleges.

Comprehensive analysis of individual actors has been identified as a limitation of a network approach (Callon, 1999; Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Therefore, examination of individual actors, especially those external to the presidents' association, would supplement description of the influencers involved with the development of state-wide community college policy. In other words, the examination of power held by specific individuals offers research opportunities relative to the state-wide governance of community colleges in North Carolina. In particular, how do individuals external to the NCACCP and community colleges influence state-wide policy? What is the role of the community college system office president in the formation of state-wide policy? How do individual legislators learn about community colleges and participate in the formation of policy?

Although I examine community college presidents from a single state, the findings of this study do suggest broader implications for research that extend to the national picture of community colleges. For example, the findings indicate that the North Carolina system of community colleges has a vocational orientation, but does a vocationally oriented community college fulfill its mission as a democratic institution? Some scholars (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan, 1985) suggest that comprehensiveness—multiplicity of mission—and open-access should be the goals of community colleges in the effort to serve the potential student population. Levin (2001) contends that the comprehensiveness of the community college will continue and expand with increased compression of time and space resulting from new technologies. Other scholars (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Eaton, 1994; Zwerling, 1976) with a national focus have expressed concern that comprehensiveness and open admissions negatively impact the quality and effectiveness of the community college, and encourage anarchy in organizational behaviors. Furthermore, high enrollments result

from open admissions. The current literature reveals no overall consensus among scholars as to how community college officials should handle the mission in light of expanding institutional responsibilities and ever-increasing enrollments, but enrollment is connected to the community college's dedication to its inclusive mission. High enrollments indicate that community colleges are staying true to the mission of democratizing society through educational opportunity (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Levin & Dennison, 1989; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996).

Scholars (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Bowen, Bracco, Callan, Finney, Richardson, & Trombley, 1997; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994) have examined the community college mission, but practitioners hold responsibility for making decisions and taking actions that are congruent and consistent with the community college mission. Therefore, practitioners, notably community college presidents, should work collectively to illustrate the need to keep the doors open in an age of expanding institutional responsibilities and ever-increasing enrollments. The failure by community college presidents "to articulate and interpret the community college's role to legislators, parents, students, and the public...will guarantee that the [community college] mission is misunderstood and will result in the loss of public support, including funding" (Vaughan 1985, p. 24). In addition, the external networks that allocate community college resources need to act in accordance with the community college mission. Without political and financial consideration by the external networks, presidents, individually and collectively, will face challenges in their efforts to stay true to the collective intentions of the NCACCP and to the community college mission.

Finally, the character, history, and bureaucratic traditions of the community college are unique within each state, and have influence in state-wide governance structures. As Bowen, Bracco, Callan, Finney, Richardson, and Trombley (1997) stated, “The character and history of state governments clearly affect the choice of state governance structures and the ways that they function” (p. 39). Nationally, each state has at least one board that provides governance or coordination for community colleges (*State Structures for Postsecondary Governance and Coordination*, 1997; Tollefson, 2000). In North Carolina the State Board of Community Colleges functions as a governing board, meaning the SBCC holds responsibility and authority for establishing and implementing policies for the institutions within its jurisdiction (Miller, 1996; *State Structures for Postsecondary Governance and Coordination*, 1997; Sandra Wall Williams, personal communication, April 13, 2006). However, this is not the case with all state community college governance systems, as indicated by Fridena’s (1998) study of the Arizona community college system. As well, a state’s governance structure influences the existing networks within the state system. Due to the jurisdictional differences of each state system further examination is needed in order to describe and explain network influence in full in state-level community college governance. Therefore, it is unlikely and certainly problematic that scholars can talk about community college governance nationally. Given this investigation, the examination of state-wide governance roles should be conducted on a state by state basis; and, different approaches should be adopted to examine actions such as decision making, policy formation, and institutional outcomes in the description of state-wide governance roles. Ultimately, and regardless of location, state governance officials, individually and collectively, need to express intentions

and make decisions based upon the premise that the community college is democracy's college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Frye, 1994; Gleazer, 2000; Roueche & Roueche, 1993).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Permission Statement from

North Carolina State University

Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

**Office of Research  
and Graduate Studies**

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

Sponsored Programs and  
Regulatory Compliance  
Campus Box 7514  
1 Leazar Hall  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.7200  
919.515.7721 (fax)

**From:** Debra A. Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator  
North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board

**Date:** May 19, 2005

**Project Title:** Roles and Practices of Community College Presidents in the Governance of the North Carolina Community College System

**IRB#:** 124-05-5

Dear Mr. Foster:

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101.b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations.  
For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429; the IRB Number is: IRB00000330
2. Review de novo of this proposal is necessary if any significant alterations/additions are made.

Please provide your faculty sponsor with a copy of this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton  
NCSU IRB

APPENDIX B

North Carolina State University

Informed Consent Form for Research

**North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

Roles and Practices of Community College Presidents in the Governance of the North Carolina Community College System

Daniel R. Foster

John S. Levin, Ed.D.

**I am asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to identify and explain the collective role and practices of community college presidents in the governance of the community college system in North Carolina.**

**INFORMATION**

**If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview lasting for approximately 60 minutes and occurring at the site of your choosing. A follow-up session via electronic mail, telephone, or on-site scheduled appointment lasting no more than one hour in length may be requested if considered necessary by you or the researcher. The interview transcript will be made available to you upon request at any time after the interview session; a completed draft of the study will be available upon request in December 2005.**

**RISKS**

I do not foresee any risks beyond anxiety that some individuals may experience when participating in an interview.

**BENEFITS**

The information you share will contribute to the body of literature concerning community college governance, the community college presidency, and power networks in the North Carolina system of community colleges. Through the examination of governance roles and practices of presidents, researchers and practitioners will acquire a better understanding of whose interests are being served in the North Carolina Community College System, and of whether autocratic or socially democratic influencers prevail in the system.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

**The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's home office. Here the documents will be viewed by the researcher only. Interview data will be coded, and names will be recorded on a master list held separately from interview notes. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.**

**CONTACT**

**If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Daniel R. Foster, at russf@blueridge.edu, or 828-694-1854. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)**

**PARTICIPATION**

**Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed at your request.**

**CONSENT**

**"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time."**

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

Script for Interview Questions

Eight North Carolina Community College Presidents

This interview is to learn more about the operation or functioning of presidential networks within the North Carolina Community College System. It's NOT an evaluation of you or your institution; and, your name or institution will not be identified in the dissertation. My main focus is how you have worked with community college presidents (or system administrators) in making decisions related to governance of the state system of community colleges in North Carolina. I want to understand the story since your entry into the position of \_\_\_\_\_. I have a set of questions I would like to ask.

### 1. Background

- Name (which will be withheld from the study)
- Job title (institutional name and location will be withheld)
- Thumbnail sketch of your job
- How long have you been in this position?
- To which presidential groups do you belong in North Carolina?
- How long have you been a part of the North Carolina Association or Community College Presidents?

### 2. I'm interested in the operation of presidential networks or associations in the NCCCS?

- Can you give me three or four descriptive phrases that would describe the NCACCP?
- Can you think back to when you first got involved with this association?
  - When was that?
  - What were your expectations of the NCACCP?
  - How did you get involved with this group?
  - What were the various expressions of the NCACCP?
- Could you give me a description of how the NCACCP operates?
  - What are the goals?
  - What factors, policies, or persons determine the goals?
  - Who sets the goals or agenda?
  - How would you describe the protocol for implementing a plan to pursue goals?
  - How are they pursued as an association?

### 3. Since your entry into the association could you describe your involvement in pursuing these goals?

- What contact do you have (or have you had) with others connected with this group? (PROBE for communication, cooperation, persuasion)
  - Could you describe your contact with fellow members?
  - What governance-related issues are discussed by members?
  - Are these issues discussed at the yearly meetings or at other times?
- Are there indications that your contact with NCACCP members contribute to shifts in community college governance policy?
- Could you give specific examples in which the association's governance-related discussions were followed by a change in governance policy?

- Could you give examples in which the association's governance-related discussions were unsuccessful at bringing about a change in state-wide governance?
- What other results have occurred as related to the NCACCP's interest in governance?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the effectiveness of the NCACCP in influencing the North Carolina Community College System's governance?
  - c. What recommendations do you have for improving the effectiveness of the NCACCP in influencing the North Carolina Community College System's governance?

4. Would you like to add anything else?