ABSTRACT

BREWER, JAMES TIMOTHY. Perceptions held by selected Members of the Wayne Community College Planning Council about their Participation in the Strategic Planning Process at Wayne Community College. (Under the direction of Dr. Edgar J. Boone.)

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions held by Planning Council members about their experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process. Generally, Council members viewed their experiences as positive and indicated that they valued the opportunity to serve on the College’s Planning Council. They attributed their positive experiences to several factors, including having an opportunity to provide inputs in the process, becoming more knowledgeable about the wide array of the College’s programs and communicating the plans of their respective program areas to fellow Council members. Council members reported changes in their understanding of the strategic planning process as they acquired additional experiences in implementing the process.

While Council members seemed to be aware of, and committed to, the College’s strategic planning process, the information that they shared indicate that their greatest involvement was at the program level implementing the several subprocesses of the strategic planning process. These subprocesses are: environmental scanning; including data collection analysis and interpretation; needs assessment; formulation of goals and, objectives, developing strategies for implementing the objectives, and the development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes. For the most part, Council members viewed strategic planning at the institutional level to be the responsibility of the College’s administrators. Council members connected planning at their program levels to institutional level planning. Moreover, they viewed these strategic plans developed for their respective programs as the College’s principal means for implementing its overall strategic plan.
Council members reported that lack of time and the lack of preparation to engage in strategic planning were impediments to their perceived effectiveness in implementing the College’s strategic planning process. They felt that the college needed to aid them in acquiring a better understanding of the strategic planning process and skills that will facilitate their engagement in the process.

The findings of this study yield insights about Council members’ experiences acquired in implementing the several subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process. Significantly, they perceived that their greatest involvement in these subprocesses occurred at their respective program level rather than at the institutional level. These findings imply that Council members’ involvement in the College’s total strategic planning process is limited. Additional research is necessary to determine whether Council members are fully informed about and, importantly, are provided opportunities to contribute fully to the College’s strategic planning process.
PERCEPTIONS HELD BY SELECTED MEMBERS OF
THE WAYNE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PLANNING COUNCIL ABOUT THEIR
PARTICIPATION IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AT WAYNE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By
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BIOGRAPHY

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Chapter One

Introduction

The community college is becoming increasingly complex in terms of programs, organization and management. Programmatically, community colleges continue to expand current programs and add new ones in their response to the changing educational needs of their current and emerging constituent groups. Organizationally, many community colleges are adding satellite campuses and expanding their outreach to make education more accessible to their constituents. From a management perspective, community college administrators are moving increasingly toward participatory management practices and the decentralization of decision-making at operational levels. These developments are encouraging community college administrators to use leadership styles that allow more opportunities for their subordinates to contribute to decisions related to programs, organization and management of the college.

A major function in the community college is the strategic planning process whereby administrators can encourage and provide opportunities for subordinates to participate in decision-making. Strategic planning allows community college administrators, faculty, staff, trustees, community leaders, and others to participate in repositioning and charting the future direction of the community college. Inputs obtained from these stakeholders through strategic planning help inform decisions that determine the future initiatives of the college. Strategic planning includes revisiting and revising mission, formulating future-oriented goals, redefining and clarifying values, and repositioning the community college to respond effectively to the educational needs of its current and emerging constituent groups. According to Robertson and Pat (1987) strategic planning is one of the principal means that the community college uses to maintain its relevancy in fielding programs that respond to the
educational needs of a diverse, complex and changing constituency. Alfred (1994), Hudgins (1997) and Lorenzo (1993) conclude that effective implementation of the strategic planning process yields a number of important results for the community college.

The first result is the development of a strategic plan that is current, future-oriented, and geared to the educational needs of the community college’s constituents, their workplace and environment. The plan becomes the focus of the community college’s unified and planned program efforts and provides a rationale for the procurement, development, and allocation of resources and a basis for demonstrating accountability to its constituents and other stakeholders.

Second, the strategic planning process emphasizes inclusion. It provides opportunities for representatives of all programs and job groups in the community college to contribute to the strategic plan. It also encourages external constituent groups to participate in planning, implementing and evaluating the college’s strategic plan. Inputs obtained from both these internal and external groups help to strengthen the plan as well as create among group members a sense of ownership and commitment to the strategic plan. Dolence, Rowley and Lujan (1997) emphasize the importance of structuring a strategic planning process to ensure effective participation of individuals who reflect the campus’s broad constituency base. They advanced several general assumptions about participation among which they assert that greater participation in the planning process results in higher job satisfaction, increased commitment to the organization, greater acceptance of changes, greater likelihood of supporting the implementation of changes, and increased productivity.

Third, the strategic plan includes goals and strategies that become the basis for both the community college’s institutional effectiveness plan and the process used to develop and
implement it. Institutional effectiveness in higher education is a process designed to strengthen the quality of student outcomes (Hudgins, 1997; Nichols, 1995). The strengthening of the quality of student outcomes is often carried out through the development of measurable goals and objectives that are developed through the strategic planning process (Hudgins, 1997; Nichols, 1995). Clearly defined goals and the context out of which they evolve provide a defensible base for developing an institutional effectiveness plan. That is to say, it is through the strategic planning process that the goals for institutional effectiveness are developed and monitored.

Fourth, a strategic plan and its corollary institutional effectiveness plan help colleges meet the standard for demonstrating accountability that is mandated by, in the case of community colleges in North Carolina, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools does not prescribe a set of procedures for planning and evaluating programs and policies. It does, however, require each institution to clarify its mission, define goals, develop procedures for evaluating goal achievement, use the evaluation results to improve institutional effectiveness and, most importantly, establish and institutionalize this overall process to promote and provide opportunities for broad-based involvement in planning by administrators, faculty and staff (Criteria for Accreditation Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, 1998). Further, the standards mandated by SACS help the college fulfill other accountability standards required by the North Carolina Community College System Office, state legislature and, increasingly, other public and private stakeholders who contribute financial resources to the community college.
While these results are all critical to the effective functioning and future success of the community college, the second result, that of inclusion constitutes the central focus of this inquiry. Inclusion, as treated in this research, concerns the involvement of representatives of a community college’s faculty and staff in its strategic planning process. It should be noted also that this research not only focuses on the element of inclusion of a community college’s faculty, staff, and administrators in the planning process, but focuses on the planning process at a specific community college, Wayne Community College located in Goldsboro North Carolina. Laurence and Smith (1996) assert that the community college’s faculty is among its most central stakeholder groups. They contend that it is difficult to imagine the success of a strategic planning process that does not accord faculty a significant role. Faculty participation is viewed as a critical element in the development of a relevant and substantive plan wherein faculty members not only contribute their ideas, but also acquire a sense of ownership and commitment to the community college’s strategic plan.

Rowley and Sherman (2001) add support to the need and importance of involving faculty members in the strategic planning process. It is through the formation of internal planning groups by the community college, such as a planning council, that an organized effort is made by the community college to involve representatives of its faculty and staff in the development, implementation and evaluation of its strategic plan.

Indeed there is a growing body of knowledge in higher education that speaks to the value of including the inputs of faculty and program groups (through their representatives) in strategic planning. “Enlightened college or University strategic planners have recognized the importance of participative planning and have consciously sought to ensure it.” (Rowley and Sherman, p.180, 2001). Brown (1988) credits participation by both faculty and
administrators at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and, likewise, the cooperation between faculty and administrators for the success of that institution’s strategic plan in helping a relatively new campus build bridges between the campus and community. Moreover, according to Morrill (1988), the collaboration efforts of faculty and administrators in developing and implementing a strategic plan at Centre College of Kentucky played a major role in reversing enrollment declines and budget deficits at that college. Dr. James Hudgins (1997), one of the nation’s foremost authorities on strategic planning in the community college, asserts that one of the most important factors contributing to the success of a community college’s strategic plan is the input provided by its faculty, administrators, support staff, trustees, and community leaders.

Although the literature on the strategic planning process in higher education strongly supports the inclusion of faculty, administrators, and support staff groups in the process, this literature is somewhat limited on insights into the responsibilities and tasks that faculty members, administrators, and support staff are expected to perform as members of planning councils or other designated planning groups. Of particular note is that the literature is essentially void on the experiences of members of planning councils during the strategic planning process. In other words, the participation experience in the planning process has not yet been explored. Further, the literature on the strategic planning process in higher education does not address the need to prepare members of planning groups to become productive and effective planners. Alfred and Carter (1993) express concern about the lack of attention that has been given to helping faculty members and others define and learn the roles that they are expected to perform in the strategic planning process. The authors indicate that it is important for those responsible for implementing the strategic planning process to
monitor and assess the experiences that are gained by community college staff members’
during the planning process.

The need for a clear understanding of the role that planners are expected to perform in
the strategic planning process and, importantly, their experiences in performing those
responsibilities is important to designing a comprehensive training program for them. Tyler
(1971), Boone (1985) and Brookfield (1986), in their discussion of curriculum/program
development, strongly emphasize that learners’ needs derived from their experiences should
be one of the major sources in formulating learners’ objectives for curricula/programs that
focus on these learners. They further add that learner expressed needs should be
supplemented by the informed judgements of subject matter specialists (i.e. strategic
planning) and those needs that are dictated by contemporary society (i.e. the external
environment).

Background Information and Statement of Problem

Strategic planning is an important function of North Carolina’s fifty-eight community
colleges. According to Hudgins (1997), it is a process for reaching agreement on the action
and resources that are required to achieve the community college’s mission in a changing
educational environment. Strategic planning prepares for future action by focusing on the
relationship of the community college to its environment and its constituents.

Although the development and maintenance of an up-to-date strategic plan by each of
North Carolina’s community colleges is not required by the North Carolina Community
College System Office, such a plan is often used by institutions in this system as a means for
documenting the institutional effectiveness requirements embodied in the state legislation
enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1989 (S.L. 1989; C.752; S.80). The provisions of this legislation mandate the following:

“Each Community College shall develop an institutional plan, tailored to the specific mission of the college. This plan shall be consistent with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools criteria and provide for collection of data as required by the Critical Success Factors list.”

So that it may develop and implement institutional effectiveness, the community college needs a strategic plan against which it can measure its fulfillment of mission. In order to do this, a college must decide on the most important outcomes of the mission.

While the 1989 legislation provided impetus for North Carolina’s community colleges to critically examine their planning efforts and plans, most of the colleges had already begun to alter their approaches to planning and assessment of their achievements in the mid-1980s. For example, Wayne Community College’s (WCC) shift to a systematic and management focused approach to strategic planning began in the latter part of the 1980s as it prepared for its self-study and subsequent SACS’ reaccreditation. Armed with knowledge about SACS’ change in accreditation standards from one of measuring colleges against standards to one of meeting criteria, WCC’s administration, faculty, staff, and trustees collaborated with several community colleges in North Carolina to develop a management-focused approach to strategic planning. WCC provides a working model for the involvement of faculty, staff, and administrators in the strategic planning process and, therefore, provides the basis for this research. A conceptualization of the strategic planning process that was adopted and that is currently being used by Wayne Community College is displayed in Figure 1.
Figure 1. Strategic Planning Process at Wayne Community College

- Council members’ engagement at the institutional, divisional and program levels (subprocesses)
  - Environmental scanning (i.e., data collection, analysis & interpretation)
  - Needs assessment
  - Formulation of goals and objectives
  - Development of strategies to implement the goals and objectives
  - Development of plans for measuring outcomes

**KEY**
- Data Collection
- Planning
- Implementation

*Planning Council Participation in italics.*
The centerpiece of WCC’s strategic planning process is its Planning Council that has the responsibility of providing leadership in the development, implementation and evaluation of the College’s strategic plan.

The Council includes twenty-seven members who represent the College’s administration, faculty and staff. Twelve are permanent members and include the President, Vice-President for Academic and Student Services, Vice-President for Educational Support Services, Vice President for Continuing Education and Workforce Preparedness/Basic Skills, Associate Vice-President for Student Services, Comptroller, Director of Planning and Research, Director of Foundation, Division Head for Applied Technology, Division Head for College Transfer programs, the Division Head for Allied Health Programs, and the Public Information Officer. The other fifteen members of the Planning Council come from faculty and staff and are appointed by the Administrative Council which consists of the President and Vice-Presidents. The appointed members serve a two-year term. Figure 2 illustrates the administrative, program, faculty and staff groups represented on the College’s strategic Planning Council.
Figure 2. Administrators, faculty, staff and program groups with membership on Wayne Community College’s Planning Council.

Twelve Permanent Members
- President
- Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services
- Vice President for Educational Support Services
- Vice President for Continuing Education and Workforce Preparedness/Basic Skills
- Associate Vice President for Student Services
- Comptroller
- Director of Planning and Research
- Director of Foundation
- Division Head for Applied Technology
- Division Head for College Transfer Programs
- Division Head for Allied Health Programs
- Public Information Officer

Fifteen Temporary Members appointed to serve two-year terms
- Planning Council Chair
- Student Development Services
  Two representatives
- Academic Affairs
- Department Head
  Applied Technology Program
  Faculty (one)
  Applied Technology Program
  Programs:
  Ag. & Nat. Resources, Engineering/Mech. Studies
  Automotive Technology
  Aviation Technology
  Business Adm./Accounting
  Office Technologies
  Info. Systems Tech.
- Department Head
  College Transfer Program
  Faculty (one)
  College Transfer Program
  Programs:
  Mathematics
  English
  Science
  Social Sciences
- Department Head
  Allied Health Programs
  Faculty (one)
  Allied Health Program
  Programs:
  Nursing
  Dental
  Human Services
- Continuing Education
  (One Representative)
- Library Services
- Educational Support Services
  (One Representative)
- Basic Skills/HRD
  (Two Representatives)
- Wayne Community College
  Association of Educational Office Personnel (AEOP)
  Current President
From an institutional perspective, the Council is charged with the development of the College’s overall strategic plan. This responsibility involves developing a vision statement for the College, conducting a values audit, revisiting and advising on the continued relevancy of the college’s mission, formulating goals for the College’s strategic plan, developing strategies for implementing the goals, and defining the outcomes to be achieved through the strategic plan.

Council members are also expected to provide leadership at the program and divisional levels by engaging their colleagues at their respective program level in the strategic planning process. That is to say, the College’s strategic plan includes institutional level plans as well as those that are developed at program and divisional levels. Council members, therefore, play a significant role at all three levels by representing their respective departments in the strategic planning process at all three levels. Specifically, Council members’ strategic planning responsibilities at the institutional, divisional, and program levels are the following: (1) environmental scanning including data collection, analysis and interpretation; (2) needs assessment; (3) formulation of goals and objectives; (4) development of strategies to implement the goals and objectives; and (5) the development of plans for measuring outcomes.

While the major outcome sought in the implementation of these responsibilities is the development of the College’s overall strategic plan, it is important to note that this plan is visionary, and provides the framework that guides the development of strategic plans for each of the College’s program and service areas. An important part of WCC’s strategic planning process, for example, is at the program level. Each of the Council members who represents a program area is expected to assume a lead role in working with colleagues to
develop a program area strategic plan. The Council members lead their program area colleagues in conducting a scan of the program’s external environment, analyzing and interpreting the information gathered through the environmental scan, identifying and assessing the needs of the program’s current and emerging constituent groups, formulating goals and objectives to respond to those needs, selecting and developing strategies to achieve the objectives, and developing plans for evaluating the expected outcomes achieved. These program level plans are an integral part of and critical to the implementation of the College’s strategic plan.

Each of the Council members who represent a College program also functions as a member of his or her respective division level team. The member’s primary role at this level is to collaborate with the other program area Council members in their respective divisions in assessing, sorting, and integrating departmental/program area plans that then become each division’s strategic plan. These divisional strategic plans are important to implementing WCC’s overall strategic plan.

Once the division plans are developed, the twenty-seven council members then engage in an analysis and assessment of each of the divisional plans and select and prioritize divisional goals and strategies. While the development of the program, divisional and the institutional strategic plans are critical, it is essential that orderly implementation and evaluation at the three organizational levels takes place for effective outcomes.

In order for the members of the Planning Council to perform the responsibilities expected of them, they must possess a thorough understanding of the strategic planning process and the skills needed to implement the process. Based on the researcher’s experience as a member of the Planning Council at Wayne Community College and from discussions
with former Council members, there is reason to believe that many of the council members who serve two-year terms experience considerable anxiety and frustration during their first year and to some degree in their second year.

The researcher participated in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process for three consecutive years, two years as a Planning Council representative of a program area and one as the Chairman of the Planning Council. During this time an increased understanding and appreciation of the planning process was realized, though not immediately. The initial year of participation was one of frustration and discouragement due to: (1) lack of a clear understanding of the functions of a strategic plan; (2) lack of a clear understanding of the strategic planning process and how to contribute to the process; and (3) a perception that individual input into the process was not useful or valued. Nonetheless, during his three-year tenure on the Planning Council, the researcher developed a better understanding of the planning process and its subprocesses including: environmental scanning, data collection, analysis and interpretation; needs assessment; formulation of goals and objectives; development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and development of plans for measuring outcomes.

With continued exposure to and participation in the strategic planning process, the researcher became more appreciative of its importance and became more efficient and effective in the use of skills required to develop the College’s strategic plan. Such understanding and skill developments led to a greater commitment to the process which, in turn, led to the realization that his contributions were perceived to be substantive and also valued. In reflection, the researcher realized through personal experience that his perceptions
of the planning process changed in a positive way as his knowledge about strategic planning increased.

The researcher’s reflections on his experiences also led to the supposition that other members of the Planning Council may have had similar experiences, based on their varying levels of understanding, commitment, and planning skills. They also may have questioned the value of their contributions to the process. It became apparent that an understanding of such experiences may be useful information for those administrators charged with implementing the strategic planning process at WCC. An understanding of the experiences of council members will aid in determining how to prepare them to engage in the planning process.

Strategic planning is an important process that WCC uses to successfully meet the needs of its constituent groups. According to Howell (2000), since the 1980s “community college administrators have used the strategic planning process as a way to guide their institutions into the future and soften the surprises that come with economic, technological, demographic, and political change” (p.1). Because strategic planning is so crucial to the success of the institution, Planning Council members should be knowledgeable about and skilled in engaging in the strategic planning processes. Aiding Council members to become more engaged in the strategic planning process should be a priority of the College. In today’s community colleges, strategic planning requires broad-based participation (Nichols, 1995). In order to foster an environment in which faculty and staff are connected to the strategic planning process, participants need to be informed, familiar, and comfortable with the strategic planning process. An understanding of the experiences of Council members’
participating in the strategic planning process at WCC may be useful for designing strategies to strengthen their engagement in the process.

Research Questions

The focus of this research is to determine Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the strategic planning process at Wayne Community College. The research questions to be addressed in this study include the following:

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

2. Do Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience with the process?

3. What are Planning Council members’ perception of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

Significance of the Study

Wayne Community College’s Planning Council is important to the College’s strategic planning process. Members of the twenty-seven member Planning Council are faculty members, administrators, and support staff. For the most part, many have had little or no formal training in the strategic planning process. Excluding the twelve permanent members, the remaining fifteen members serve for two years on the Council. A limited term on the Council, coupled with a limited understanding of the planning process, are thought to be detrimental to members’ effective contributions to the strategic planning process. Conversations with these Council members, coupled with the experiences of the researcher,
indicate that members may experience considerable frustration and anxiety with the overall strategic planning process and particularly in acquiring the skills needed to perform their roles on the Council.

The findings of this research seek to provide insights into the perceived experiences of Wayne Community College’s Planning Council members in implementing the several subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process, including environmental scanning (i.e., data collection, analysis and interpretation); needs assessment; formulation of goals and objectives; development of strategies to implement the goals and objectives, and the development of plans for measuring outcomes. The findings will be useful to Community College administrators in determining strategies for aiding Council members’ engagement in the strategic planning process.

Limitations of the study

Qualitative research is distinguished partly by its admission of perceptions and biases of both the participants and the researcher. The researcher has been an active participant in the strategic planning process and has also been a member of Wayne Community College’s Planning Council. His experience as a participant in the College’s strategic planning process is a source of potential bias due to familiarity with the process as implemented at Wayne Community College. That is to say, the researcher has witnessed and participated in the process that is the focus of the research and has developed certain assumptions about individual Council member’s experiences.

This research is centered, therefore, on the participants’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the subprocesses included in the strategic planning process, thus minimizing, to some degree perhaps, inherent bias. The researcher remained aware that the
process was interpretive, both from the point of view of the researcher and also of the participants, given that the research is grounded in the participants’ perceptions of their experiences. Therefore caution was used with the findings of this research. “It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behavior that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p.62). Likewise, the human behaviors studied in this research cannot be generalized outside of the context in which they occur and are limited to Wayne Community College; therefore, it is very difficult to compare and contrast these findings to findings obtained from other community colleges.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms used throughout this presentation are defined in the glossary that follows:

*Participation in decision-making:* The active involvement of workers in which they participate in decisions that affect the areas in which they work. For this study, participation in decision-making refers to the decisions that Planning Council members make while contributing to the planning process. More specifically, their participation in decision-making occurs during the subprocesses of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, needs assessment, formulation of goals and objectives, development of strategies to implement goals and objectives, and the development of plans for measuring outcomes.

*Strategic planning:* A type of planning that focuses on a matching process between external opportunities and trends, internal strengths and weaknesses, and personal values of the community (Shirley, 1983). Strategic planning at WCC is a cyclical process that documents in detail the intended purpose, direction, and expected outcomes of the College. Strategic planning also provides a mechanism for periodic review and updating the College’s vision,
mission, and goals. At WCC it is a process that requires input and participation from administrators, faculty and staff at the institutional, divisional, and program levels. Moreover, at WCC, strategic planning is comprehensive and broad-based. It includes several subprocesses and provides the basis for the college budget.

**Perception**: The ability of Planning Council members to formulate their own thoughts about a particular subject by using information derived from their senses and past experiences. Planning Council members’ perceptions are self-reported and provide insight into their experiences that are gained while participating in data collection, analysis and interpretation, needs assessment, formulation of goals and objectives, development of strategies to implement goals and objectives, and the development of plans for measuring outcomes in the strategic planning process at Wayne Community College.

**Goals**: Major milestones that have a one to five year horizon (Dolence, Rowley, and Lujan 1997). The WCC planning process develops long-term and annual goals for the College’s strategic plan. Goals are developed based on analyzed data obtained through environmental scanning and other sources. These goals provide the broad outcomes sought by the College through its divisional and departmental programs.

**Objectives**: Behavioral changes sought in publics that are served by programs of the College. Each objective defines an intended behavioral change that a specific constituent group needs to acquire to fulfill a defined need. Objectives at WCC are used in connection with its goals. That is to say, goals and objectives are used in the development of the strategic plan. An example of a goal and objective is as follows:
Goal: Expand and improve current educational programs by helping students become better writers. Objective: Students will be better prepared to deal with writing assignments in all classes across the curriculum.

Objectives are generally followed by the definition of an intended outcome and assessment criteria. In this example, an intended outcome may be “students using the writing center will show improvement in basic writing skills.” An example of assessment criteria is that “75% of students using the writing center will be able to write a 150-200 word paragraph with a maximum of 10 mechanical errors as evidenced on a writing example.”

Planning Council: A formal standing committee of twenty-seven members, established by Wayne Community College, to guide and facilitate the development of the College’s strategic plan. Wayne Community College’s Planning Council is actively involved in environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis and interpretation; identification and assessment of the educational needs of the people; formulation of goals and objectives; formulation of implementation strategies; and developing plans for evaluating the outcomes achieved through implementation of the Colleges strategic plan.

Council members work with faculty and staff in their respective program areas to develop a strategic plan for their program areas. Planning Council members also present goals and objectives of their respective program areas and divisions as part of implementing the College’s overall strategic plan. As liaisons between their program areas and division and the College’s planning department, Council members also ensure that the program areas and divisions that they represent meet all of the planning deadlines.

Environmental Scanning: A continual process of scanning the College’s external environment to determine the status of the educational needs of the College’s constituencies.
Particular emphasis is placed on the social, cultural, economic, technological, and political forces that are active in the college’s external environment and the dynamics of the interaction of these forces. The College’s Planning Council is actively involved in a continuing scan of the College’s external environment to discern current and emerging needs, trends, and issues that need to be addressed in the College’s strategic plan.

**Needs Assessment:** A process that focuses on identifying deficiencies in the knowledge and skills of current and potential constituent groups being served by the College. These deficiencies are initially uncovered in the data and information obtained in the scan of the College’s external environment. The goals and objectives of WCC’s strategic plan are based largely on the assessed educational needs of current and evolving constituent groups of the College.

**Data Collection:** The process of gathering information through environmental scanning and other means for use by the College’s Planning Council in assessing the educational needs of the College’s current and evolving constituent groups.

**Analysis and Interpretation:** Making of informed decisions regarding the information processed during data collection. This is a process that separates and breaks down information gathered through environmental scanning and needs assessment and is followed by an examination of these informational parts to determine and explain their significance.

**Measurable Outcomes:** Definitive changes sought in the College’s constituencies that are defined in the goals and objectives of the College’s strategic plan as well as its divisional and program plans. These are the results that should be accomplished with the development and implementation of the strategic plan. These intended outcomes are used to focus program efforts and to assure their success.
Prioritization: The process of ranking goals whereby some take precedence over others based upon the institution’s mission and program priorities. The prioritized goals are used to make strategic decisions regarding the College’s procurement and deployment of resources.
Chapter 2
Conceptual Framework and Review of Related Literature

Participation in strategic planning is important to the community college’s quest to respond effectively to the educational needs of its current and evolving constituent groups and to provide educational programs relevant to those groups. Current challenges such as ensuring accessibility, increasing diversity, increasing costs without increased federal and state aid, and determining how to incorporate the explosion of information technology into the world of academia are just a few of the demands placed on higher educational institutions, including the community college (Bacig, 2000). “With increasing demands upon higher education institutions, and with a concurrent decrease in the potential resources for allocation to varied purposes, planning becomes more important as a participative function involving faculty, staff, community, and administrators” (Robertson and Pat, p.1, 1987). A planning council that is representative of all programs and stakeholder groups in the college is important for the effective implementation of the strategic planning process. Moreover, the increasing demands on the community college require the use of alternative planning methodologies. According to Casolara, Haynes, and McPheeters (1999), alternative planning methodologies require that organizations become agile and responsive-agile in their ability to adapt and change as stimuli exert pressures and be responsive in the actions taken to attain excellence and accountability. To meet these challenges, administrators must seek new and innovative strategies that include a wide base of expertise and knowledge; this is accomplished by bringing together a variety of backgrounds with the intent of collecting information and using collective knowledge to design a road map for the future. “The result
is a dynamic and energized experience that breathes new life into the strategic planning process” (Casolara, Haynes, and McPheeters, p.2, 1999).

Presented in this chapter are the following: (1) concepts relevant to the study of the WCC Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the strategic planning process; (2) a conceptual framework; and (3) a review of related literature. The research questions formulated to guide the study are included in the last section of this chapter.

**Concepts**

Concepts pertinent to this study and that form the basis for its conceptual framework include: (1) the community college; (2) strategic planning; (3) participation in decision-making; and (4) perception.

*The Community College*

The community college has a rich tradition of serving as the nation’s “people’s college.” Courses and programs provide university transfer opportunities, occupational-technical opportunities, developmental and basic skills training, industry training and retraining as well as cultural education for people from all segments of the community (Boone, 1997).

Today’s community college is deeply embedded in the fabric of its community by virtue of its founding legislation, mission, funding base, and achievements. Its program offerings are comprehensive. This comprehensiveness is attributable to its efforts to respond to the educational needs of its constituencies. “Throughout the last century, the changing needs of Americans seeking higher education drove the creation of a new comprehensive institution with a contemporary, open-access, inclusive mission” (Garmon, 2001, p.1).

“Community colleges in the United States have evolved into one of the most important
segments of higher education in the nation. They will continue to grow at an ever-increasing rate as our diverse, multicultural population explores opportunities to further education and training to meet the growing demands of the workplace” (Kemppainen, 1999, p. 2). Today there are many issues before the community college, including among others: (1) developmental issues; (2) increasing the movement towards nontraditional modes of instruction; (3) meeting the cost of technology; (4) the implementation of dual admission and other agreements with universities; (5) continued pressure on public funding; and (6) global competition with a non stop-and-go economy (Burnett, 2001; Curtis, 2001). Compounding these issues and others are the increasing number of cries for accountability from legislators, accrediting agencies, and constituents being served.

The nation’s more than 1,200 community colleges have earned a highly respected and valued place in the nation’s overall educational system and, indeed, have served the people well. As indicated their program offerings are comprehensive and embrace various aspects of life. These community colleges have amassed an outstanding track record during the last half of the 20th century.

According to Boone (1997), the following achievements can be attributed to the nation’s community colleges:

- Community colleges enroll more than 50% of the nation’s students who are enrolled in higher education.

- Community colleges, are responsible for preparing a sizable number of the nation’s workforce for entry into the workplace as well as re-training and updating the skills of the nation’s workforce.

- Community colleges have continued to play a major role in enriching the lives of people, some of whom would not experience such enrichment at all were it not for the community college through continuing education and cultural enrichment programs.
Community colleges have become both the nexus and the beacon for rallying and uniting the public and private sectors, thus renewing the concept of community.

Operating in a rapidly changing environment requires that educational institutions, and community colleges in particular, engage in thinking about the future in meaningful ways (VanWagoner, 2001). A growing number of stakeholders are coming to realize that traditional approaches to management may not work in a market characterized by quality-conscious customers, aggressive competitors and tightening resources (Wirth, 1991). This reality is affirmed by Alfred and Carter (1993) who posit that increased competition and accountability require organizational structures, systems, cultures, roles, and relationships to be defined not by tradition and comfort but by competitive opportunities that provide strategic advantages for community colleges. One of the ways in which the community college may respond to these issues is through strategic planning. Nutt and Backoff (1992) suggest that there remains no better method of determining the changes the campus needs to make and how to put those changes into place than strategic planning. This allows the institution to continuously reexamine its strategy and its fit to the demands posed by the environment. An effective institution will align its strategy to these demands. Planning is a means by which institutions may respond to the dynamic environments that they serve. “The key to community colleges’ survival in this new century will be energetic planning and timely reaction in a constantly changing environment” (Garmon, p. 2, 2001). In order to plan strategically, administrators in community colleges are inviting faculty and staff to share in the planning for the organization. Administrators and top management are tapping into and cultivating the expertise brought by capable individuals and adopting strategies that empower people to contribute to the decision-making processes found in strategic planning (Thaxter and Graham, 1999). This recent management strategy has emerged in the community college...
as a result of the environment in which it is now a part. In today’s environment the classic, hierarchical structure dominated by top-down command and control is ineffective with particular implications for community colleges where traditionally there was strong top-down management and control-oriented leadership. Community colleges today have embraced the principles of inclusiveness in decision-making related to strategic planning as a means of survival and to allow administrators to make the best informed decisions they can (Alfred and Carter, 1993).

Management in today’s community college has changed so that decision-making responsibility is pushed down into the organization, thus involving faculty and staff and encouraging more active staff involvement in strategic tasks such as planning and assessment (Alfred and Carter, 1993). “The goal is to restructure management by involving more staff in big decisions that affect front-line services instead of bouncing decisions up the management ladder or issuing edicts from above” (Alfred and Carter, p7, 1993). A task before community colleges and their leaders is to shape their institutions to the new realities that they face. “A management model that values continuous improvement and is sensitive to external pressures must be nurtured if community colleges are to deal with the shifting demands that they face. This model is one that decentralizes decision-making and personal empowerment along with shared vision of institutional purpose and accountability for results to get things done” (Parilla, p.24, 1993). Parilla (1993) also states that “an adaptive institution is one that knows a lot about itself through faculty and staff who are involved in identifying challenges and in creating programs to meet changing needs” (p.21).

Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley (1986) suggest that the central focus of strategic planning in higher education is developing a good fit between the organization’s activities
and the demands of surrounding environments. Allowing stakeholders (faculty and staff) to have input into the decision-making that occurs in the strategic planning process allows the institution to determine more accurately the external forces triggering the need for change. For the community college today this is an approach that is increasingly being adopted as a means of survival. Wayne Community College has embraced the use of stakeholders as key players for decision-making in its strategic planning process. Participation in decision-making within the strategic planning process is the means by which the college provides comprehensive programs to the community it serves. It also serves as a means for the college to stay connected to its vision and mission as well as achieve institutional effectiveness.

Strategic Planning

Planning is an important tool for the community college to use in charting a strategic course that responds to the needs brought about by dynamic and rapid changes in its external environment. An insightful and well designed strategic plan may be viewed as the blueprint, or master plan, that the community college and its staff develop to achieve desired future outcomes such as the preparation and maintenance of a well prepared workforce. To correct weaknesses in its traditional comprehensive planning, the community college has embraced and adopted the strategic planning process. In adopting the strategic planning process, short-term and long-term goals are used to meet the needs of those constituents whom the community college serves. The goals are designed to be measurable and serve to assure that constituent needs are being met as well as to ensure institutional effectiveness. Strategic planning balances short-term and long-term goals while adapting to realistic opportunities. It
is premised on the articulation of measurable objectives combined with processes of evaluation and assessment (McDermott, 1998).

Strategic planning is becoming an integral part of all organizational activities, providing guidance on a day-to-day basis in addition to direction for the achievement of long-term goals (Walleri, 1992). The following definitions also help to establish the importance of strategic planning in providing guidance for institutions.

As defined by Olsen and Eadie (1982), strategic planning is:

A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it. At its best, strategic planning requires broad scale information gathering, an exploration of alternatives, and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. Strategic planning can facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, and foster orderly decision-making and successful implementation. (p.4)

Cope (1987), focusing on essential elements of strategic planning, offers the following explanation:

Strategic planning is an open systems approach to steering an enterprise over time through uncertain environmental waters. It is a proactive problem-solving behavior directed externally at conditions in the environment and a means to find a favorable competitive position in a continual competition for resources. Its primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution’s future to anticipated changes in the environment in such a way that acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, good will) is faster than the depletion of resources. (p.3)

Cope’s definition focuses on strategic planning for providing direction. However, it also emphasizes another reason for strategic planning, the acquisition of resources. A key point about the fundamental reason for strategic planning in higher education is that it allows an enterprise to position itself favorably relative to the resources in its environment (Pfeiffer and Salancik, 1978; Yuchtman and Seashore, 1967).
Cope (1987) makes a clear distinction between planning and strategic planning, as seen in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** Differentiating strategic planning from other forms of planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Planning</th>
<th>Other Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on the environment</td>
<td>Emphasis on the enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented toward change</td>
<td>Emphasis on stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision directed</td>
<td>Follows a blue print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inductive and integrated</td>
<td>Deductive and analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on doing the right thing</td>
<td>Emphasis on doing things right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and external focus</td>
<td>Closed and internal focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipates changes</td>
<td>Extrapolates from the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current decisions based on looking toward the future</td>
<td>Current decisions based on looking from the present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial and action oriented, even when there is ambiguity</td>
<td>Inaction when there is ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on innovation and creativity</td>
<td>Emphasis on the tried and tested true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergistic</td>
<td>Univariate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise’s environment and context are primary determinants of strategy/choices/direction</td>
<td>Enterprise’s strengths and weaknesses are primary determinants of strategy/choices/direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on opinions, intuition, and the qualitative</td>
<td>Emphasis on facts and the quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation toward effectiveness</td>
<td>Orientation toward efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns are in a stream of decisions</td>
<td>Decisions are made and carried out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The distinctions made in Figure 3 suggest that the focus of the strategic planning concept is on the external environment, as well as orienting and repositioning the institution to respond to its external environment (Cope, 1987). In the case of WCC, its’ external environment is also its service area (i.e., Wayne County). The left-hand side of the model shown in Figure 3 emphasizes mission, environment, the enterprise strengths and key success factors (Cope, 1987). “The strategic planning process should not be a static or bureaucratic exercise, rather it must be a dynamic and evolving approach to creating vision and solving problems. At its best, it has a tradition of being a participatory and information rich process, engendering community dialogue and being shaped by the outcomes of the dialogue. Under these conditions, strategic planning can assist in forging better links with other institutional processes and in clarifying the vision guiding the college toward a designed and desired future” (McDermott, p. 44-45, 1998). Kotler and Murphy (1986) describe strategic planning as the process of developing and maintaining a strategic fit between the organization and its changing marketing opportunities. In short, strategic planning is oriented toward providing synergy, wholeness, effectiveness, and patterns in decision-making as people within the institution use qualitative information to inform their intuitive judgements.

The need for the development of strategic planning in higher education resulted from circumstances similar to those that occurred in business and industry in the United States in the late 1970s through the 80s. Business and industry leaders found themselves struggling to compete with markets that were increasingly being taken over by foreign companies that were better run and managed. “Industry giants with strong reputations, deep pockets, and big market shares were being displaced by competitors with far fewer resources but lean management and soaring expectations” (Alfred and Carter, p. 7, 1993). During the 1980s
within the community college system, a looming issue was growing that stressed the need to bring outdated administrative structures and systems into line with a new vision about how a college should deliver education. Keller (1983) describes changing enrollments and student clientele, changing college curricula, increasing competition, technological demands, and the tightening grip of outside controls as the major forces that caused higher educational institutions to reassess their traditional approaches to planning. As these concerns spread throughout higher educational systems, administrators at all academic levels began to develop strategies for assessing and improving the quality of their institutions (McDermott, 1998). The themes that reached across the for-profit organizations such as pushing decision-making responsibility down in the organization and encouraging more active staff involvement in strategic tasks began bubbling up all over the community college landscape (Alfred and Carter, 1993). College leaders began to discuss how organizational changes could lead to strategies that could be used to redesign and reposition their institutions (McDermott, 1998). It was becoming obvious to many campus leaders that if strategic change was not made colleges would lose ground to competitors who were eager to capture new markets (Rouche, 1996). “Losing ground is easy to understand -- it is a loss of market share followed by a decline in enrollment and operating revenue and, ultimately, in competitiveness” (Rouche, 1996. p. 12). Campus leaders began to discover that the nation’s colleges were falling behind the expectations of the marketplace and academic standards. “Burdened with high fixed costs, outdated programs and management systems, and hierarchical administrative structures, community colleges were caught in a vortex of change that threatened to undermine their competitiveness” (McDermott, 1998, p.14). The quality improvement efforts in our nation’s business community were popularized under the term
Institutional effectiveness. In the community college, institutional effectiveness has become an umbrella term that encompasses a host of related concepts, including accountability, student outcomes, assessment, and various measures of efficiency (Hudgins, 1997; Krieder, 1988). As previously stated, at WCC, institutional effectiveness is mandated by legislation. The goals and objectives used to attain institutional effectiveness are carried out through the strategic planning process that has been described.

Strategic planning should be active and intrusive. Keller, as early as 1983, proposed that American higher education needed to transcend the current faculty administration stalemate, to take its own management more seriously, and to create new forms of institutional decision-making if it was to cope with and help shape the new environment in which it found itself (Keller, 1983). Parekh (1977) suggests that while college administrators were aware of environmental changes, they typically were poor strategic planners. Existing plans were too general to provide useful guidance for all organizational levels and often remained unused. Goodstein, Nolan and Pfeiffer (1992) state, “Our experience as consultants to a wide variety of organizations has convinced us that most strategic planning processes are poorly conceptualized and poorly executed; the process is often not very creative and it is tactical rather than strategic in nature; and the so-called strategic plan rarely impacts the day-to-day decisions made in the organization” (p.14).

The challenges faced by colleges and universities in the 1980s encouraged leaders to move beyond incremental solutions and focus on the strategic planning approaches that Keller (1983) characterized as a third way, that is, an approach which incorporates the best aspects of rational and political/incremental decision-making. More leaders began to take proactive stances when examining the environment rather than the reactive stances that had
traditionally characterized responses to decline (Keller, 1983). Strategic planning emerged that engaged a more proactive, change-agent orientation, and focused more deliberately on outcomes, program quality and institutional effectiveness than planning had assumed hitherto.

As planners in higher education institutions confront the challenges of the 21st century, strategic planning is proving to be a viable means to respond to those challenges. Strategic planning allows an institution to become more introspective and analytical while setting priorities and developing strategies (Hudgins, 1997; Kotler and Murphy, 1986). It often forces an institution to examine its own assets, that is, ways in which its own faculty and staff may contribute, assist, and participate in planning decision-making.

Higher educational institutions are recognizing the importance and the need to plan strategical, that is, the need to articulate clearly the vision for the future and to specify the means by which the vision is to be realized (Casolara, Haynes and McPheeters 1999, Bacig, 2000, and Howell, 2000). It is through this vision that institutions seek to develop the optimal relationship between institutional capabilities and values, while balancing the environmental needs and subsequent opportunities (Shirley, 1983).

In conjunction with the overall vision, colleges must be analytical and make observations about their identity and the steps that need to be taken to reach goals. This introspective look is crucial to the community college but equally important is the need for the college to be aware of its external environment. It is imperative that a college not become so involved in its internal environment that it becomes oblivious to external events and the community that it serves. Faculty, staff, and administrators must be aware of their purpose as dictated by the mission of the institution. This mission is carried out by the
faculty, staff, and administrators with an understanding of the community needs and by meeting those needs through the strategic planning process.

The mission and the vision define the institution and constitute the foundation for strategic planning; it is important that these two are linked. When the planning process is tied to the mission and is well conceived and executed, then the planning process becomes a conduit for communication. Strategic planning also challenges higher education institutions to demonstrate their accomplishments and their overall effectiveness through the assessment of departmental/program outcomes and objectives that have been linked to the mission (Nichols, 1995). “This requirement changes the mission or statement of purpose from a shelf-document with little practical use to the basis for the assessment of institutional action that it was intended to be” (Nichols, p. 9, 1995). The ultimate determination of effectiveness is the relationship of the mission and the accomplishment of institutional goals as achieved through strategic planning (Yost, 1995). “The mission provides the direction for strategic planning within all levels of the institution and, in turn, will give direction to the majority of the activities and efforts within the institution” (Yost, p. 41, 1993).

Therefore, strategic planning provides the vision for the institution. The strategic vision projects a positive image externally while simultaneously projecting a positive image internally for members of the campus community (Carter, 1998). Strategic planning serves as a link to the institution’s mission, vision, and anticipated changes while keeping the various elements of the institution working toward common goals. In other words, the strategic planning processes that institutions use should keep their internal units working toward the same goals (Deegan, and Tillery, 1985). Those same goals are dictated by the mission. The fundamental mission of WCC is to educate as well as to retrain individuals,
such as traditional students who enrolled immediately after high school or those who may be returning to gain employable skills or change careers, and to provide services to communities. The most important outcome sought through strategic planning is to position the community college to serve the educational needs of its current and emerging constituent groups more effectively.

According to Rowley and Sherman (2001), the central reason for strategic planning is to better align the college with its environment. Linking the goals that are developed through strategic planning to the needs of the external environment will help assure that the college will survive. When connected to its external environment, the strategic planning process also serves as a tool to accomplish the vision and mission of the institution. The strategic plan also serves as a conduit of communication internally and externally. Therefore strategic planning is important to charting the future of community colleges and will remain important because of the role that it also plays in institutional effectiveness.

**Participation in Decision-Making**

The community college historically has responded to the educational needs of the people residing in its service area. Through intensive and continuing study and analysis of both its external and internal environments, the community college has achieved considerable success in fielding educational programs that target and respond to the educational needs of its diverse and changing constituent groups. These programs that focus on community residents have contributed greatly to the development of the economy in the community college’s service area and, importantly, to the empowerment of people through education.

Since its inception, the community college has moved through stages of development from establishment to maturity. These stages have involved increasing pressure from
community, faculty members, and internal and external stakeholder groups for a greater
voice in decision-making in matters concerning the leadership and future direction of the
community college. According to Alfred and Carter (1993), a factor now universal to the
community college, irrespective of its context, is the movement towards participatory
decision-making. As the community college has become larger in terms of numbers of
people served and more complex in its organizational structure, its attention has turned to the
role of the faculty in the management of the college and particularly to their role in
determining the future direction of the college. Faculty leaders contend that leadership in a
business-as-usual fashion, wherein a token representation of faculty actively participate in
decision-making, usually by means of collective bargaining, will result in a strongly
adversarial presence in management-faculty relations and diminished loyalty from instructors
(Slaughter and Braussal, 1986). The ideal scenario emphasizes faculty and staff participation
in a broad range of institutional processes and a shift in focus of professional roles from the
periphery to the center of decision-making and policy formulation. To accomplish this goal,
new participatory leadership models have evolved that strengthen the self-concept of faculty
through involvement in strategic planning, various aspects of administration, and
opportunities for continuing professional education (Alfred, 1994; Floyd 1985).
Alfred (1994) states that:

Effective community colleges will implement systems for continuous planning and
assessment at all levels. In the process faculty roles and work loads will change. Tomorrow’s
faculty members will do more than teach. They will engage in environmental scanning; plan and evaluate curricula; forecast market conditions; conduct research on student outcomes; build marketing and recruitment plans; lobby private sector markets for resources; and perform other management functions as necessary to improve performance (p. 248-249).
Floyd (1985) also builds a strong case for increased faculty participation in decision-making. Using generic organizational theory, Floyd catalogued the advantages of faculty participation in decision-making. According to her work, faculty participation in organizational decision-making can improve faculty satisfaction and performance in a number of ways.

1. Participation leads to greater understanding and acceptance of decisions.

2. Participation leads to greater identification with decisions and a more intense commitment to their implementation.

3. Participation leads to greater understanding of objectives and action plans developed to achieve objectives.

4. Participation provides employees with a more accurate perception of organizational reward contingencies.

5. Participation is consistent with the needs of mature employees for self-identity, autonomy, achievement and psychological growth.

6. When a decision arises from a participatory process groups apply pressure on dissenters to accept or at least outwardly comply with decisions.

7. Group decision-making promotes cooperation, mutual understanding, team identity, and collaboration.

8. In cases of divergent objectives, consultation and joint decision-making provide opportunities for resolving conflicts.

9. Participation allows the use of the expertise and analytical skills of individuals throughout the organization.

Additional support for faculty participation in decision-making is found in the research of Sagie, Elizur and Koslowsky (1990). Their findings indicate that participation in decision-making improves faculty attitudes and performances. Further, they contend that participation helps promote a sense of ownership and commitment.
The fluidity of the environment in which the community college currently functions is indicative of change and a state of uncertainty and instability. Although the community college has established a record of meritorious service to the people, it is evident that it must reposition itself to maintain its status as a viable part of America’s system of higher education. Effective repositioning of the community college to respond to its fluid and changing external environment can only occur through an empowered faculty that views its role as more than traditional classroom teaching (Clark, 1998). Alfred (1994), as well as several other leaders in higher education, builds a strong case for faculty members to become more involved in promoting and marketing the college. Clark and other higher educators envision an entrepreneurial role for faculty that includes actively pursuing external funds for projects associated with their disciplines and specialties.

This empowered role envisioned for community college faculty must be learned through experience and practice. While continuing professional educational opportunities for faculty and other community college personnel greatly assists in helping them acquire some of the competencies needed to expand their traditional roles, considerably more can be learned by faculty members if opportunities to participate in decisions affecting the management and operations of the community college are provided to them. Participation in decision-making by community college faculty and other staff members requires more than attendance at called meetings of committees and task forces on which they have been asked to serve. Faculty and staff must be afforded opportunities to become actively involved in leadership roles and in identifying, analyzing, and resolving issues important to the college.

The strategic planning processes that many community colleges currently employ increasingly include faculty and staff as participants in the decision-making and development
of these plans. The strategic planning processes of today demand active involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making; this involvement and participation crosses functional and hierarchical boundaries, thus allowing a variety of perspectives that can enrich the ultimate decision, the more skills that are brought together the better off the college will be (Alfred and Carter, 1993). Participation by faculty and staff members in decision-making is important for community colleges because it provides them an opportunity to be in touch with the community college’s community (or external environment) and the challenges it faces. As previously stated, for strategic planning to be properly implemented the process must be connected to its environment. Greater participation allows for this. In discussing the adaptation of institutional structure and culture to change, Parilla (1993) stresses the importance of moving away from a rigid hierarchical structure. According to Parilla (1993), a successful organization is one in which the culture acknowledges that everyone must participate in decision-making. He also recognizes that for continuous quality improvement, which strategic planning may provide, an environment should be fostered that allows faculty and staff to feel connected to the organization. This may be accomplished through participation in decision-making. Lorenzo (1993) discusses the need for strategic planning models to provide appropriate feedback for developing strategies. Allowing for greater participation of faculty and staff in decision-making provides a means for the institution to be well informed to strategically plan as well as to foster higher levels of employee commitment and enthusiasm which is essential to improving institutional performance (Lorenzo, 1993; Parilla, 1993; Alfred and Carter, 1993).
Perception

The concept of perception was defined by Bartley (1958) as the process by which an organism relates itself to its surroundings. Specifically, individuals use their sensory system, knowledge, and judgement skills when formulating a perception of an object or an event (Bartley, 1958). The sensory system detects a stimulus from external energies, such as chemical, thermal or mechanical elements, and translates those nerve impulses into information that is then analyzed by the brain. Once the information is received, those nerve impulses are traced to determine if this new pattern matches previous templates coded in the brain which access the person’s knowledge base (Bartley, 1958). Next, the individual uses his or her judgement skills either to recognize the pattern as similar to other images or to classify the figure as a new experience. Allport (1955) states that perception is based largely on an individual’s sensory impressions and, to some degree, on understanding, recognition or awareness (knowledge) of the object or event. The sensory impressions that help frame perception can be traced to the individual’s ability to see, smell, taste, feel, and hear the object and then merge this information with the knowledge base stored in his or her brain (Allport, 1955).

Following the work of Bartley and Allport, Oatley (1978) defined perception as the ability to make meaningful sense of data collected from the outside world. Specifically, the data that are received about an object or event usually are in the visual or language form and incomplete, which means that those information fragments must be interpreted to reach an accurate identification of the phenomenon. Individuals must use their experiences and knowledge to help synthesize the existing data into a pattern that is recognized by their brains. This task of merging sources is critical if the fragmented data fail to provide enough
information to form a precise image of the object or event. Thus, Oatley’s theory, expounded in 1978, adds the language element to the sensory component of the perception formula developed by Allport (1955) and Bartley (1958).

On the other hand, Forgus and Melamed (1976) suggest that perception should be classified as a cognitive process along with learning and thinking since learning, thinking, and perception all deal with knowledge. The researchers conclude from their findings that perception should be regarded as the process by which an organism receives or extracts certain information from a vast array of physical energies that stimulate the organism’s sensory system. These stimulants have “cue values” that trigger some type of reaction from the individual’s brain; the brain then translates cue values into images that are either familiar or categorizes them as new experiences. Based on this explanation, both Forgus and Melamed developed their interpretation of perception from earlier research, except that they identified the concept as a true cognitive process because of its relationship with the individual’s knowledge base.

Van Geert (1983) maintains that perception is more than the reception of a sensory stimulus. Perception is the particular process of experiencing and organizing the stimulants into some type of order in the brain. This organizational process depends on theoretical and empirical criteria that include conceptual consistency, empirical applicability, extension of the empirical class, and the existence of prototypes. These elements produce different stimulants in every person and, thus, affect an individual’s ability to formulate identical perceptions about particular objects or events. Therefore, predicting perception is difficult, because each individual uses his or her mental framework to interpret the stimulants that are consistent with personal and unique experiences and knowledge.
In the present study, perception is defined as an individual’s ability to formulate his or her own thoughts about a particular subject by using information derived from senses, past experiences, and knowledge that are required as they relate to WCC Planning Council decision-making. Because each person forms his or her own perceptions, an analysis of Council members’ perceptions of experiences with the strategic planning process might provide insight into Council members’ levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes about the process.

**Conceptual Framework**

This research investigates WCC Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in assisting with and implementing the strategic planning process. It focuses on the five subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process in which the members participate and are expected to provide major inputs. These subprocesses are: environmental scanning (i.e., data collection, analysis, and interpretation); needs assessment; formulation of goals and objectives; development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and, the development of plans for measuring outcomes.

Figure 4 is a schematic illustration of the concepts presented in the previous section. Presented as the conceptual framework for this inquiry, the concepts are arranged and connected to depict how they are related to each other and help guide the study. The first concept, community college (outer oval), constitutes the context in which the second concept, the strategic planning process, occurs. The third concept, participation, illustrates Council members’ active engagement in the strategic planning process. Perceptions are Council members’ personal recall and interpretations of their experiences in participating in and contributing to implementing the five subprocesses of the strategic planning process.
Thus, Figure 4 frames the study and is intended to serve as a guide to understanding Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process.
Figure 4. Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process.
To summarize, the conceptual framework includes the major concepts that have been schematically arranged to guide this study. Wayne Community College is the institutional context in which this inquiry is being conducted. The strategic planning process and the participation of WCC Planning Council members in implementing it are two major concepts that are central to the study. The perceptions’ held by Council members about their experiences in participating in and implementing the subprocesses included in the strategic planning process constitute the major focus of this study. As indicated, the Planning Council consists of twenty-seven individuals; twelve have permanent appointments to the Council and fifteen are faculty and staff members serving two-years. Each of the fifteen rotating members typically has had little or no preparation for working with the strategic planning process. The underlying assumption is that each of the council members will have different perceptions of their participation in and interpretations of their experiences with the implementation of the five subprocesses of the strategic planning process displayed in the conceptual framework.
Review of Related Literature

Participation is important to the decision-making processes that take place at WCC. For decisions to be handled and addressed properly it is important that those individuals who are affected by and closest to the decision are involved. Although the literature indicates that participation is important, it also recognizes varying points of view concerning the level of participation in decision-making. This review of literature provides useful insights about values that can accrue to both the institution and participants as a result of promoting inclusiveness and participation in strategic planning and other decision processes.

The Positive Role of Participation in Decision-Making

Various research has touched on the different views and perceptions participants have about their role in decision-making. In studies that examine the role of faculty participation in strategic planning within higher education, Morriss (1998, 2000) found that faculty, staff, and administrators agree on the necessity of involving stakeholders, particularly the faculty, in strategic planning. Further, these faculty, staff, and administrators are very committed to the strategic planning process. The reasons for this support include recognition of the education level and knowledge level of faculty and the need to gather ideas from a wide range of sources, that is, faculty and staff whose expertise spans a broad range of areas. Two comments that emerged from the responses in the studies were particularly pertinent within the context of complex change and discontinuity; one is that the idea that those people at the top administrative levels have all the information is no longer true and, second, all good ideas about the future of an institution do not reside with the administrative leadership or its planners’ (Morriss, 1998, 2000). With the involvement of faculty and other stakeholders, came an expectation of greater ownership of the problem and the solution (Morriss, 1998,
However, the respondents also pointed to the difficulty of engaging quality participation from the faculty because faculty often have a narrow perspective and no clear understanding of the strategic planning process. Other cautionary notes that were sounded from this research included the recognition that not all groups participate in the same way or at the same time. Neither do they have the same level of influence on the ultimate decision. Laurence and Smith (1996), in their study on faculty perceptions of strategic visioning and planning, found that in order for participation to be meaningful and to gain broad support for strategic planning and visioning, faculty must participate and voice their concerns. According to Laurence and Smith, participation and open discussion are essential to the development of a useful planning process. Their study indicates that faculty participation in planning is an important contributor for strategic visioning. It also concludes that for a planning process and strategic vision to be successful, a president would be wise to develop a process that permits broad-based and meaningful participation that most faculty would concur results in an appropriate process. For the process to be meaningful, therefore, it must be open to incorporating the concerns voiced by participating faculty which, in the aggregate, are likely to be reflective of the concerns of the whole faculty (Laurence and Smith, 1996).

In an attempt to understand administrative behavior and what makes this behavior successful, Miller and Vacik (1998) studied 110, faculty each of whom were involved, moderately involved, and not involved in participatory decision-making. According to these researchers, the perceptions of faculty relative to participation in shared decision-making must be understood in order to create a more effective, efficient, and successful organization. “As multiple demands are placed on the community college faculty member, the need to understand the current and possible role of the faculty member in important decision-making
processes is vital to institutional success, growth, and effectiveness” (Miller and Vacik, p. 4, 1998). They found that there were no differences in the perceived roles faculty play in shared decision-making. There were, however, several marked differences in the general perceptions of faculty toward the participatory processes. In particular, faculty that were very involved tended to view the process and specific elements of participation more positively than their non-involved counterparts. Additionally, faculty who were very involved viewed their actions as worthwhile and representative of the faculty body as a whole (Miller and Vacik, 1998). These findings seem to indicate that by being involved, faculty acquire a more positive outlook on the entire process of shared decision-making. The perceptions of faculty toward shared decision-making is important, as evidenced by the generally positive ratings of different issues related to faculty involvement. “Administrators, then, looking to increase opportunities for consensus development and the empowerment of faculty can look to faculty leaders as both role models for gaining the involvement of others, as well as sources of data for defining what constitutes an ideal and effective shared decision-making strategy at their specific institutions” (Miller and Vacik, p. 4, 1998).

Drummond and Reitsch (1998) studied administrator and teacher attitudes about participation in decision-making. They found that faculty and administrators’ perceived level of participation in participative systems directly affects their attitudes about the quality of the institutional environment. The greater the level of participation, the better administrators and faculty members feel about their institution. An institution in which faculty and administrators have a more positive attitude toward their participative procedures appears to be one in which the needs of the constituents are served more efficiently than one in which pessimism and other negative views prevail.
McDermott (1998) found in her study of participant perceptions of strategic planning that respondents indicated that participative processes had engendered a high level of involvement, participation, team building, and energy. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of participants involved in one community college’s strategic planning process in which faculty administrators and staff at all levels of the organization were encouraged to participate. This research also showed that community college departments will interpret and implement institutional strategic planning processes in ways that are unique to and congruent with their academic discipline; a single process cannot be successfully dictated. McDermott also found that when managers serve as facilitators or use others to facilitate strategic planning processes, staff will self-organize, a process will emerge and leadership will take a variety of forms. Also, according to McDermott, “this study demonstrates that the implementation of a participatory strategic planning process is not as simple as it may appear” (p.143). This study also discovered that community college staff who encounter changes in strategic planning processes reflect a continuum between two dominant themes, frustration and optimism.

Tesluk and Vance (1999) studied employee involvement. They found that successful employee involvement requires systems to optimize the contributions of those individuals who are at the forefront of problem solving, quality improvement, and constituent responsiveness. Their study highlights the complex interplay of managerial, structural, and climate factors at several organizational levels. Their study also suggests that organizational designers should recognize the importance of top managers in establishing the context of conditions for participation, and of middle managers in influencing employees’ motivation to participate. This study suggests a number of implications for organizations implementing
employee involvement practices. One critical implication rests with the role of management in determining the success of employee involvement. Institutions need to ensure that divisional and department chairs and other middle managers are supportive of employee involvement and are communicating their support to those below them. “Salient examples of top management’s support for participation (e.g., making major decisions with the use of a task force, rather than issuing a unilateral decision made by the top manager) indicate to lower level managers that participation is the preferred method of decision-making” (Tesluk and Vance, p. 12, 1999). The study also suggests that large-scale employee involvement interventions provide more participative contexts when the employee involvement process is backed with a certain level of structure. The findings from this research also demonstrate that organizations must consider how multiple climates operate and influence employee attitudes and behaviors. The larger organizational climate may be supportive but the smaller unit or work groups may not be as supportive. This smaller climate may serve as a strong impediment to employee participation.

The need for managers to understand the effect that organizational climate has on employee perceptions of involvement is the point of research conducted by Shadur and Mark (1999). Their study found that a supportive climate alone serves as a significant predictor of involvement variables used to study participation in decision-making, teamwork, and communication. The study suggests that organizational climate, when broken down into its various subcomponents (participation in decision-making, teamwork and communication), can be used to better determine the effectiveness and progress of management systems such as employee involvement programs within the organization. “Organizational climate should be regarded as a complex indicator of organizational perceptions that can be used to better
manage an organization and its employee involvement systems” (Shadur and Mark, p. 10, 1999). This study also found that employee attitudes are important predictors of perceptions of employee involvement.

Valadez (1994) compared two community colleges, both from multi-campus districts, that had implemented strategic planning and assessed the effectiveness of the planning processes, as perceived by the college administration at both campuses, and used the comparison as a model for expanded use in the community college system. His research showed that if strategic planning is to be implemented at an institution, senior management should consider the experience of its administrative staff and prepare to deal with resistance should it arise. Also, “it is essential that the college dedicate a least a year of administrative training prior to initiating the process” (Valadez, p. 135, 1994). This research also found that the primary concern is the direction that the campus constituents, particularly the senior administrative staff, want the college to head. According to Valadez, “institutions need to look at who they are at the temporo-spatial point and take a close look at those institutional components already in place that can be refined and used in the strategic planning process. In that way the strategic plan takes into account the uniqueness of the individuals, all the campus, constituencies as well as external community leaders, and the manner in which uniqueness can be used to further the vision the institution has created for itself” p. 137.

Dupont (2000), in a study to assess the perceptions of community college faculty regarding their participation in decision-making, found that faculty are generally satisfied with their level of input in decision-making; they believed they had the greatest influence in division decisions and academic affairs issues with the least amount of influence in financial affairs, student affairs, and system decision-making. This research also showed that academic
rank served as the primary predictor of faculty’s present level of participation in decision-making processes, with senior faculty believing they had greater influence than junior faculty.

Sisson (1997) investigated a community college faculty’s progress in their struggle for involvement within the institution’s decision-making process. This research examined the faculty’s perceptions of their role according to various demographic variables, the faculty’s perceptions of institutional morale, decision-making, and commitment to innovation and, finally, the institution’s decision-making mechanisms and the factors that impede that involvement. The findings revealed the following: (1) differences between the faculty’s perceptions of the present and preferred involvement with specific institutional decision-making; (2) differences between faculty perceptions of their present and preferred involvement, according to demographic factors; (3) differences among faculty on their perceptions of institutional morale, decision-making, and commitment to innovation; and (4) differences on the effectiveness of the institution’s decision-making mechanisms and the factors that impede faculty involvement.

Bingham (2000) investigated participation roles of community college faculty as perceived by the faculty, staff, and executive administration pertaining to individual and collective participation in institutional governance. These perceptions were sought to help faculty and administrators better understand individual and collective realities of shared governance and to identify common ground on which to collectively determine institutional vision, mission, and purpose. Shared governance was the term used in this research and at the study site to describe faculty and staff participation in decision-making processes such as strategic planning. The study also identified that participation roles in decision-making were
a means for cultivating strong collegial relationships within the organization and were essential for faculty and administrators who want, collectively, to position their institution for implementing new learning paradigms.

Duncan (1993) explored the nature and extent of faculty participation in a state community college system’s institutional planning process. The study examined institutional variables that tend to sustain or impede faculty participation in planning and those that lead to effective or ineffective outcomes of the planning process. The study results revealed the following as impediments to faculty participation: lack of “institutional readiness,” lack of trust and communication, lack of operational strategies, lack of CEO commitment and support, unclear faculty roles as well as a lack of faculty incentives. Factors that sustain faculty involvement include: faculty assurance that they can influence decision-making, trust and mutual respect, faculty incentives, competent leadership, resources/budgets linked to planning priorities, and availability of sufficient resources. This research used three case studies and found that college presidents’ perceptions were much more positive than those of faculty and other administrators. These case studies also illustrate the influence of institutional culture and climate as well as fiscal scarcity to reward faculty participation and the effectiveness of planning and implementation of outcomes. The researcher indicates that the findings have implications for improving faculty and administrative collaboration in all types of community college decision-making.

The Negative Role of Participation in Decision-Making

Participation in decision-making can sometimes be problematic. Healy (1997) and Nussbaum (1998) indicate that implementing participation in decision-making can: (a) promote divisiveness and turf wars between faculty, staff, students, and management groups,
each pursuing its own organizational agenda; (b) produce fragmented budgets based on bilateral agreements among each of the warring groups; (c) promote distrust and resistance to change; (d) be unsound in terms of legal accountability; and (e) be slow. Thaxter and Graham (1999) conducted a study of one-hundred community college faculty members in the Midwest to gauge perceptions of their level of involvement in decision-making at their institutions. This research found that these faculty members did not feel that they were meaningfully involved in important decision-making activities in their respective community colleges. This study also shows that while the principles of participation in decision-making may have made some inroads, those principles were not prominent at the community colleges that they studied. None of the five decision-making categories indicated that the faculty had any real decision-making involvement. In general, faculty appear to experience some control in dealing with classroom-related issues, but have little sense of involvement in institutional affairs outside of the classroom, such as institutional goal-setting, recruiting or evaluating personnel or contributing to the budgeting process.

Another challenge, according to Healy (1997), is that some college presidents say that the extensive consultation required by participation in decision-making in shared governance processes interferes with their ability to do their jobs. They are besieged by pressure groups, including employee unions wanting more money and power and state officials who want quick improvements.

Sims (1998) suggests that participation in decision-making fosters diverse points of views; often those points of view are from persons who are not qualified to speak on the subject at hand. In committee work designed to help operate the college, faculty participants may come from various academic departments such as music, anthropology, and psychology.
Faculty admittedly are well-educated but only obliquely in the areas they are called upon to govern (Sims, 1998). “While the expertise from certain individuals is welcomed, it is diluted by the members who offer input that is uninformed” (Sims, p. 4 1998). Participatory processes take time. Instead of action, there is deliberation, and often the process reigns over the product (Sims, 1998). As also indicated by Healy and Nussbaum above, participation in decision-making may also cause factions to form. Walls may go up between faculty and administrators as each bloc debates its own agenda and point of view. Rather than unifying personnel, participation in decision-making may be divisive as representatives from different groups within an institution discuss areas of their institution that, for example, need budget cuts (Sims, 1998). Keller (1998) suggests that participation has been encouraged with the hope that involvement will result in a consensus for change, but adds that “no such process has ever resulted in a major change at any university, or is likely to do so” (p.18). Conway (1984) identifies several myths related to participation in decision-making, one being that participation is necessary for people to accept and implement change and another that participation in the development of goals is necessary for their accomplishment.

Each of these examples illustrates the challenges in determining participant perceptions as well as the variety of views that have been used to develop a better understanding of this complex issue. Some organizations insist that they truly desire more participation in decision-making and say that they have adopted such strategies. The problem is that often while adopting participative strategies, they leave the same structures and systems in place that support continued extrinsic control.
New Perspectives on Participation

In the community college of the 21st century, participation in decision-making is becoming more important. Leaders are often not acting independently in the decision-making process; they sometimes need the input of others. Perhaps the best way to describe a middle ground approach for participation in decision-making would be the term democratizing decision-making. Lahti (1973) addresses the democratic element in saying that “the traditional, bureaucratic pyramid of power is no longer effective in a climate of technological and educational diversification. Power distribution must move from a completely autocratic to a more democratic basis for the greater utilization of human resources” (p.14). However, as indicated, a consistent objection to greater participation in higher education has been a perceived inefficiency in such approaches. As Berquist and Phillips (1975) observe, “Academic organizations have never been noted for the efficiency of their decision-making procedures” (p.157). The reality of that observation may well lie in the failure to utilize participative, democratic procedures.

According to Bennis (1993), greater efficiency derived from participation in decision-making (as opposed to more authoritative approaches to decision-making) is possible, and this democratic participative efficiency is a corollary to the “ability to survive and prosper” in the modern world; it is the leadership strategy best able to cope with change. Berquist and Phillips (1975) also extol the advantages of the participative approach. This approach will, they contend, save time in the long run, thus resulting in more durable decisions. Moreover, they feel that the process markedly accelerates as practitioners learn its use and become aware of how decisions permeate all levels (p. 160). Seagren, Creswell and Wheeler (1993) find that the participative model is essential, suggesting that leaders must use an empowered,
participative frame to reach two objectives: the benefits of shared leadership and a commitment to institutional goals.

Participation in decision-making is a reality for many leaders in higher education today. In the community college it may be important for the development of a strategic plan. However, the participation is often in the decisions that are made in the development of the actual plan. The actual decisions for implementation and the allocation of resources towards the goals and objectives used in the development of the plan are often made by only a few in the administration. In other words, often in the strategic planning process decisions are democratic in nature throughout the development of the plan; however, the final decisions are not. Nonetheless, the level in which participation occurs may be dependent on the situation as well as the type of decision that must be made. That is, not all decisions need to be totally participatory in nature.

Allowing stakeholders to participate in decision-making is an option that leaders in the community college have at their disposal. It is not a panacea for all the complex issues that colleges face, however; as this literature review has illustrated, participation in decision-making has both positive and negative aspects that may need to be considered. Strategic planning for many institutions is an action that may be enhanced by participation. The way in which an organization plans typically has reflected the conditions of the times (Lorenzo, 1993). Wayne Community College is no exception. In the community college of today, the central focus of strategic planning is to connect the organization’s activities with the demands of its surrounding (i.e., external) environment. Institutional performance is measured by quality and effectiveness. One means to assure quality and effectiveness is through faculty and staff participation in decision-making. “Employees are becoming more
crucial to institutional success. Community colleges will have to help staff appreciate the vision and mission of the institution, and effective colleges should work to build staff ownership into the well being of the institution” (Lorenzo, p.52, 1993). One way that this can be accomplished is to allow greater participation in decision-making at various levels throughout the planning processes as well as the institution.

**Research Questions**

At WCC participation by its faculty and staff in decision-making processes is an important component of the strategic planning process as evidenced by their participation on the Planning Council, the group responsible for strategic planning. An understanding of participant perceptions of their experiences with the strategic planning process is needed to discover how to aid their engagement in the process. To determine Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the strategic planning process, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the inquiry.

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

2. Do Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience with the process?

3. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This inquiry considers a particular college with a specific group of people engaged in certain aspects of a strategic planning process. This attention to a particular setting under study is indicative of the concern with content that is shown by qualitative researchers (Bogden and Biklen, 1998). The characteristics of qualitative study that apply to this research are the following:

**Naturalistic:** The setting of this research is a direct source of data and the researcher is a key instrument. Context is important; therefore, the particular setting is crucial.

**Process:** Concern with process evokes the following question. How do individuals perceive their participation in the subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process? What are the individuals’ understanding of those aspects? In what order do participants’ perceptions evolve?

**Meaning:** The value of this research is based on the implications and intent that the individual experiences convey to participants as they participate in certain aspects of the strategic planning process.

This research is concerned with interpreting and accurately describing the meaning that participants give to the reality around them; therefore, meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach of this research.

The approach that is used to address participant experiences is the open systems model. Wheatley (1999) describes the open systems model as a web with ebb and flow whose parts can only be understood in terms of the dynamic interaction of the whole. With systems thinking, knowledge in organizations is interconnected, dynamic, and elevates the importance of people. It also includes the participants’ subjective experiences in the decision-making process (McDermott, 1998). Further, the systems thinking approach emphasizes the importance of individual experiences and perceptions in organizational processes. This
approach also emphasizes the importance of participation experiences for growth and meaningful reflection (Wheatley, 1999). Key to the systems thinking approach, therefore, is the importance of understanding participants’ experiences and their perceptual interpretation of their experiences. This understanding allows for the improvement of organizational processes such as planning.

The system thinking approach uses qualitative inquiry to determine experiences, perceptions and interpretations of organizational events. This approach is in contrast to the more traditional mechanistic model, or scientific model, which is based on objective knowledge developed from such methods as experimentation and controlled observation. All truth, according to the scientific model, exists outside of the individual (McDermott, 1998). The mechanistic (scientific) model views the world as a clockwork machine with organizations as a set of functions that are linear, predictable and structured. The organizations function as rigid hierarchies with people as replaceable components who work on the basis of orders from above (Wheatley, 1999). Traditional quantitative research methods, such as written surveys and statistical analysis for example, are common mechanistic model approaches.

The systems thinking model, however, is based on qualitative research, the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. In this approach researchers are interested in “the meaning people have constructed; that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998 p.6).

Case Study Design

This qualitative research uses the case study method. A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular situation and its meaning for
those involved in it. “The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than in confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Case study research and, in particular, a qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena (Merriam, 1998). The case study is also appropriate when one is trying to attribute causal relationships rather than simply to explore or describe a situation (Yin, 1993).

Nature of the Case Study

The site of this study is Wayne Community College. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of experiences of Planning Council members in implementing the several subprocesses that are included in the planning process. The site was selected because of the accessibility for the researcher, consent from the institution to do the research, and size of the institution. The leaders of the institution indicated that this research would be a “good service” to the college. Furthermore, the researcher is a former member of the faculty at WCC and had participated in the planning process that is the focus of the research.

Wayne Community College is a single campus with approximately 2800 students and 147 faculty and staff members. The college is considered medium size in terms of Full Time Equivalencies (FTE) generated when compared to other community colleges in the North Carolina Community College System.

The rationale for the case study method is that the investigation covers a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon occurs. The phenomena in this case study are the experiences of Planning Council participants in data collection, analysis and interpretation (i.e., environmental scanning), needs assessment, formulation of goals and objectives, development of strategies to implement goals and objectives, and the
development of plans for measuring outcomes. The study is confined to the campus of WCC and is descriptive in nature. Yin (1993) defines a descriptive case study as a study that presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. The context here is the strategic planning process.

The establishment of a conceptual framework early in the research is important for a descriptive case study. A conceptual framework is not an expression of a cause-effect relationship. Rather, the conceptual framework covers the scope and depth of the object (case) being described (Yin, 1993).

**Participant Selection**

The focus of participant selection is on members of the Planning Council, which was the committee responsible for planning on the WCC campus. The individuals who were interviewed are current and former planning Council members. Nine Council members were interviewed. Two of these are permanent Council members. Three are past Council members and the remaining four served as members at various intervals during their two-year term on the Planning Council. The interview portion of this research focused primarily on these nine members who represent the faculty and staff.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to help in developing interview techniques as well as to help in determining an interview guide. The pilot study served as a means to practice interview techniques, become proficient with the use of a tape recorder and determine the pace of questioning and probing. The interview guide was also used to determine if the proper questions were being asked to address the proposed research questions. The results of the pilot study indicated a need to narrow the focus of the questioning and a need for more
probing to determine participants’ perceptions. The appropriate modifications were made to
the interview guide. Before the actual research interviews were conducted the researcher
memorized the interview guide; this allowed the interview to run smoothly with good
interaction between the Council members and the researcher.

Data Collection

An Interview

According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), “interviews share an advantage over less
obtrusive measures like questionnaires because researchers guide the revelation of
information: Through elicitation and personal interaction, the investigator is better able to
obtain data addressing the questions asked in the study” (p.165-166). The interviews for this
research are in the form of key informant interviewing. Key informants are individuals who
possess special knowledge, status, or communication skills and who are willing to share their
knowledge with the researcher (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). The key informants in this
study are the faculty and staff representatives on WCC’s Planning Council.

Nature of Interviews

Merriam (1998) discusses the types of interviews that qualitative researchers may
use: structured, semistructured, and unstructured or informal. The structured interview is
questionnaire driven. This type of interview is actually an oral form of the written survey.
This survey, which rigidly adheres to predetermined questions, may not allow the researcher
to access the participant’s perspectives and understanding of the world. The semistructured
type of interview is more open-ended with a less structured format than the structured format
and assumes that the individual respondents define the world in unique ways. This second
type of interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the
exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. The unstructured or informal interview is useful when the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask relevant questions. There are no predetermined questions and the interview is exploratory.

This research used an interview process that resembles the semistructured interview. The interviews were guided by open-ended, interpretive questions. These questions focused on the participants’ perceptions of their experiences.

The Interview Process

Before the interview process began, permission was obtained from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Use of Human Subjects in Research to conduct the qualitative interviews with Council members (Appendix A). Upon receiving permission from the IRB, the President of Wayne Community College and the Director of Planning and Research at the College were contacted by e-mail to discuss the proposed research and the interviewing of Planning Council members. The President of the institution as well as the Director of Planning and Research indicated that they would help in any way they could with the research and indicated that this research would be a good service to the institution. The Director of Planning and Research then contacted all of the Council members through e-mail and described the research project indicating that it was a qualitative research project involving interviews to determine Council members’ perceptions of their experiences with the planning process. Nine Council members indicated that they were interested in participating in the interviews. Each of the nine Council members were then contacted by the researcher via e-mail thanking them for their interest. An introductory letter was attached in the e-mail (Appendix B). This letter explained the purpose of the research
project, how the interviews were to be conducted, tape recording of the interviews, and confidentiality issues. Upon receiving responses from the nine Council members, an interview schedule was developed. The time frame within which this occurred was late May 2002 through the first two weeks of June 2002. This time frame was chosen for conducting the interviews because of less demands on faculty and staff members schedules.

The interviews were conducted in each of the Council member’s offices at convenient times for each participant. Upon greeting each of the participants in their offices, information was provided them which included a summary of the purpose of the study, the need to tape record the interviews, and a request to sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) as required by the IRB. An interview guide was used to initiate the interview questioning for each of the research questions (Appendix D). For each of the research questions an introductory sentence was used to begin conversations with the participant. This was followed by probing to determine Council members’ perceptions. Each of the tape recorded interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour. Four questions constituted the framework of the semi-structured interview.

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

2. Do Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience with the process?

3. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?
Information obtained in each interview was then transcribed. Follow-up interviews were conducted to affirm and clarify the researcher’s interpretations of the interviews. Initial follow-up was first conducted through telephone interviews. Follow up was successfully completed with three Council members in these telephone interviews. The telephone conversations lasted thirty minutes in length and concentrated on summarizing what the respondents had indicated in their initial interviews and how that had been interpreted and understood by the researcher. Follow up was also conducted through e-mail. With e-mail follow up, four Council members responded to similar questioning that was posed in the telephone follow-ups. The e-mail follow-ups also concentrated on summarizing what the respondents had indicated in the initial interviews and how that had been interpreted and understood by the researcher as well. Two of the original nine Council members who were interviewed did not respond to either the phone or e-mail follow ups.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data (Marshall and Rossman 1999). The analytical procedures used for this research were guided by the following: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). These processes reduce the data to levels that are more manageable for analysis. They also allow for the development of meaning and insight to the words and behaviors of those who participate in the study.

As the study data are analyzed, interrelated concepts using data collection techniques (i.e. coding, memos, and constant comparisons) were used to offer explanations. This is a
continual process that leads to an inductively developed construct that considers the diversity within the data through constant comparisons. By comparing incidents, the researcher learns to see categories in terms of both their internal development and their changing relations to categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method was used to analyze and interpret data throughout this study, thus providing an ongoing means for inquiry, observation and interpretation. In addition, responses from each of the Planning Council members were grouped by their relevance to each of the research questions, which allowed further comparisons. Coding was then used to reference repetitive or recurring words and phrases. Bogden and Biklen (1998) outline this method adapted from Glaser and Strauss (1967), as a research design for multi-data sources. It is similar to analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly complete by the end of the data collection. It is a process whereby the researcher looks for key issues, recurring events or activities in each of the questions that are asked. These key issues then become the categories of focus for the study.

Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link participants and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and one that can integrate the entire project (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). In conjunction with this notion, the constant comparative process also requires that details and/or incidents be written about each of the questions; concurrently, the researcher describes and accounts for all of the incidents found in the data as he or she continually searches for new incidents. In the current study, the researcher first examined Planning Council members’ responses to the research questions formulated for the study. The researcher then looked for key issues, recurring events, and actions in the data that then became categories of focus.
Actions for Quality and Trustworthiness

Validity, in its the basic sense, pertains to the congruence of the researcher’s claims to the reality he or she claims to represent (Eisner and Peshkin 1990). Eisner and Peshkin (1990) also state that valid interpretation and conclusions function as surrogates for that which is not directly experienced. Wolcott (1975) describes the early stages of fieldwork and how these actions can build validity into the research process. His first suggestion is to talk little, listen a lot. This research, i.e., the WCC Planning Council study, was built around participant interviews. The researcher was the listener and prompted those who were being interviewed to do the talking. The second of Wolcott’s suggestions is to record field information as accurately as possible and in precisely the words of the participants. For this research, field notes were recorded as soon as possible and supplemented with the mechanically recorded information from each session. Wolcott’s third suggestion is to begin writing early in the interview process. Information gathered from each interview in the WCC study was transcribed immediately to begin to describe, in writing, the themes that began to evolve from the data.

Forms of triangulation were therefore incorporated into these steps during the research process. Triangulation is a strategy that aids in the elimination of bias and exemplifies the use of multiple sources from outside the actual research to support the data. Triangulation is used to verify experiences that are perceived to have occurred. Actual verification is difficult to obtain; however, a deeper and richer perspective of the research in progress may be gained instead. Moreover, triangulation can increase the probability that the researcher’s perceptions are accurate. For this research, triangulation was characterized by the comparison of interview findings, literature, and peer reviews. Feedback was sought
from the Director of Planning and research at the College to confirm the interpretation of key themes and understandings of participant perceptions.

Finally, during the writing and revision process it was necessary to reassess the information being interpreted and to return to the transcribed interviews as well as revisit field notes.

The Researcher’s Role

The researcher’s role was explained to participants with full disclosure in statements issued by the President of WCC and the Director of Planning and Research. In addition the interviews were designed to be minimally intrusive to the participants. The researcher was aware that participants were giving of their time and help so that the researcher may better understand their experiences in the strategic planning process. The researcher is indebted to them for their cooperation and has expressed this gratitude to them.

Scholarship and research are themselves political activities (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). The researcher, having been employed for eight years at WCC, was familiar with its culture and politics. This understanding afforded the researcher “an insider’s perspective” which allowed him to anticipate the willing participation of those who were interviewed. That is to say, this research process was an apolitical one.

Researcher Bias

Marshall and Rossman (1999) acknowledge that in applied fields such as education a strong autobiographical element often drives the research interest. It is a challenge for a qualitative researcher not to allow this personal interest to bias his or her study. In this study, the researcher’s direct experiences with the strategic planning process stimulated his curiosity. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) indicate, the researcher linked this curiosity to
the research questions which were developed partially based on the researcher’s own experiences as a Planning Council member at Wayne Community College.

As a former member of this Planning Council the researcher did have preconceived notions about the findings that may be uncovered regarding participants’ perceptions of their experiences. The researcher was a member of the Planning Council for three years, the last year as the Planning Council chair. As a Planning Council member, the researcher’s experiences grew and changed as he spent more time with the process. Initially, the researcher did not understand the significance of his role as a Planning Council member. This understanding changed when the researcher became aware of the importance of his participation in the strategic planning process. This incentive served as the motivation for the researcher to become proficient in the planning process. He maintained the perception that the strategic planning process was for the attainment of equipment and fiscal resources. It was not until the researcher was the chair of the Planning Council that he began to recognize the importance of strategic planning to implementing the mission and vision of the institution and assessing its effectiveness. This broader and deeper understanding of the strategic planning process provided the researcher with a greater sense of commitment to the process and to the institution. With these experiences in mind, the researcher developed the tacit theory that others members of on the Planning Council likewise may have changed in their perception of experiences and that an awareness and understanding of those changes may prove useful for the Planning and Research Department at WCC as it continuously strives to improve the strategic planning process.

The researcher understands that his experiences as a Planning Council member and as the Planning Council chair may have biased this research. The researcher has attempted to
identify the sources of these biases and has tried to take them into consideration throughout the study.
Chapter 4
Research Findings

Strategic planning is a continuing process that the community college uses to respond to the educational needs of current and emerging constituent groups and their environments. The strategic planning process constitutes the principal means that a college employs to implement its mandated mission and to plot its future direction. Central to the college’s implementation of the strategic planning process is the structured involvement and the inputs of its total staff through staff representatives. The formation and use of planning councils, whose membership includes representatives of college administrators, faculty, support staff, and other stakeholders, are critical to the success of the college’s strategic planning efforts.

This study addresses the perceptions of experiences gained from participation in the strategic planning process that are held by Planning Council members at Wayne Community College. Four major research questions provide the focus for the study:

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

2. Do Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they gain experience with the process?

3. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?
Study Participants

The nine Council members interviewed represent one-third of the membership of WCC’s Planning Council. They are diverse in terms of content areas represented, number of years employed at the College, years served on the Planning Council, and previous strategic planning experience acquired at Wayne Community College and other institutional contexts. The content areas of those interviewed included Counseling, Social Services, College Transfer, Mathematics, Applied Technology, English, Nursing, Information Systems Technology, and Agriculture and Natural Resources. These characteristics as reported by the nine participants are displayed in Table 1. In an effort to maintain some degree of anonymity of the nine council members, a letter has been assigned to each.
Table 1.

Research participants’ content (specialty) area, tenure at Wayne Community College, number of years on the Planning Council and previous experience with the strategic planning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participant</th>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Years of tenure at the College</th>
<th>Years served on the Planning Council</th>
<th>Previous experiences with the Strategic Planning Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extensive experience with military and public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>College Transfer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extensive experiences at other institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*D</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Experiences with early strategic planning processes at the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Applied Technology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Experiences with early strategic planning processes at the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Information Systems Technology</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Agriculture and Natural Resources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The asterisk represents Council members who are permanent members on the Planning Council.

Although not evident in Table 1, positions held by respondents varied from instructor to division head. The years of employment at the College ranged from two to thirty-one years. Participants who reported several years of employment at this College had served in several different positions. The number of years served on WCC’s Planning Council varied
from one to five years. Two of the respondents, by virtue of their administrative positions, were permanent members of the Council. Five of the nine Council members interviewed reported no prior experience in strategic planning at Wayne Community College or at other institutions. Two Council members had participated in earlier planning efforts at the College that predate the College’s adoption of its current approach to strategic planning. Two reported previous experience in strategic planning at other institutional contexts including public schools, community colleges and the military.

Perceptions acquired through participating in the strategic planning process

Strategic planning is a critical process in which the community college engages to implement its mandated mission, maintain its relevancy in responding to the educational needs of its current and emerging constituent groups, and demonstrate accountability to its constituencies, governing board, elected officials, and other stakeholders. Importantly, the community college’s strategic plan also charts the future direction for the college and serves as the basic framework and standard for assessing institutional effectiveness.

Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the planning process will be presented according to the four research questions which includes: (a) perceptions held about overall experiences; (b) changes in perceptions; (c) perceptions of the subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process; and (d) perceptions held about obstacles.

Perceptions held about overall experiences in the planning process

Council members were asked to describe their perceptions of the overall strategic planning process. Two themes are used to describe these perceptions, having a voice and being heard, and buy-in and empowerment. Overall, Council members’ perceptions indicated
that they held positive perceptions of their experiences with the Planning process and indicated that they felt privileged to be able to participate.

Having a voice, being heard and hearing others. Council members perceived that their participation allowed them to contribute and provide input into the College’s strategic planning process. They served as spokespersons for their program areas (departments) to the Planning Council and shared the goals and objectives that they had developed with their colleagues. As spokespersons, they attached considerable importance to describing, articulating and justifying the plans advanced by their departmental colleagues to the total Planning Council. Council members perceived that the strategic planning process provided them a platform to speak freely about the subject matter in which they had a vested interest. This opportunity allowed Council members to inform other Council members, including the President and other college administrators, about the plans that had been formulated for their respective program areas.

“Being able to talk about and represent my area’s goals and objectives allowed me to have genuine input into the planning process.”

“In discussing your goals and objectives with other Council members you are able to have meaningful input into the planning process.”

“You discussed your goals and objectives to an audience that was important and one that listened.”

There was an exchange of information between Council members about individual departmental plans and how each of them contributed to and aided in implementing the College’s overall plan. That is to say, the College’s strategic planning process allowed Council members to be heard and to inform other members of the needs, goals, and concerns
of their respective program areas. Being receptive to others’ plans and, importantly, sharing their own program area’s plans, allowed Council members to broaden their understanding of the College’s major program initiatives. Council members gained information about College programs and activities that they may have never thought about otherwise.

“Throughout the process I was able to hear and understand some of the issues of the other areas that were represented on the Planning Council.”

“You get to see and hear others points of view and what their needs were.”

“I learned a lot just by listening to others voice their opinions and concerns.”

The sharing of information with their fellow members about the goals and objectives of their respective content areas allowed Council members to acquire positive impressions about the College’s strategic planning process. Importantly, they acquired a sense of self-worth as active and valued members of the Planning Council. Further, they perceived that their opinions as well as the information they shared were well received and valued by the Planning Council.

“My participation made me feel that I was providing important information to the process.”

“It made me feel as though I had some very important information to provide and play an important part in the planning process.”

**Buy-in and empowerment.** Through their participation in the planning process, Council members acquired a sense of ownership of the process and a degree of empowerment. They were able to embrace and buy into the strategic planning process because their voices were heard; that is, an atmosphere of mutual respect was evident during exchanges of ideas. They perceived that their thoughts and opinions about the future direction that the College should take were well received by their colleagues on the Planning Council.
“I think the primary reason that I bought into the process was because I was asked to get involved.”

“Working through the planning process, developing and presenting goals and objectives, I felt like I was really a part of the process.”

That is to say, positive perceptions of the process were reported when Council members were asked for their input and that input was accepted by their colleagues and actually used in developing the College’s strategic plan. The presentation of their respective department’s and program area’s plans and the consideration of these plans by their Council colleagues led to the perception that their programs were viewed as important and a part of the strategic plan being developed for the College.

“This is how the buy-in was accomplished for me; they took what I discussed and said this is what you recommended, here is what you have suggested and I saw how it was used in the process.”

“I saw my work as a part of the process.”

Buy-in provided ownership in the process which, in turn, contributed to individual Council members assigning value to the strategic planning process and becoming more committed to the process. Council members’ positive perceptions and buy-in into the process seemed to be associated with the opportunities that were provided to them to contribute their inputs and thoughts and opinions about specific elements to be included in the college’s plan, rather than being told what those elements should be. That is to say, Council members recognized that this was a process that welcomed, encouraged and depended on their active involvement and inputs.
“I was really asked what do you think needs to be done, rather than saying this needs to be done. That makes a difference. The information I gave was important for the process.”

“I had an opportunity to participate and share with the entire Planning Council the things that I wanted to do and what I thought was important for my area. This was important for the process.”

Council members’ overall positive perceptions of the planning process also appeared to be associated with the sense of empowerment that arose out of access to information that was provided to them about the College and its programs, information that they would not have known about ordinarily and that was available only to top administrators. Such access to high level information allowed them to acquire a sense of empowerment which served to reinforce and affirm their perceptions that their role was critical to the planning process.

“In today’s society in which we live information is power. I was given information important to the College. Being on the Planning Council made me feel empowered because I felt like I was in the know.”

“I was made a part of and given information on things critical to the College’s success. This was kind of empowering.”

Council members also related their positive experiences to a sense of honor and privilege to serve as a member of the Planning Council

“I feel honored. I was glad my “number” came up to serve on the Planning Council.”

“As a member of the Planning Council I felt like I was at a different level professionally, like you have some stripes going in and some stripes going out.”
“I felt privileged about being asked to be on the Planning Council. It is an important committee.”

“One of the ways that I was empowered was the way in which I was made to feel like I was part of the process. I was involved. I was asked to share in this important process.”

*Changes in perceptions*

Council members reported that their perceptions of the strategic planning process changed as they acquired more experience. They indicated feelings of less anxiety and a clearer understanding of the process.

*Anxiety.* Some Council members experienced anxiety with their initial participation in the strategic planning process at WCC. This anxiety was due to their limited knowledge about strategic planning at the outset of the process.

“I had some anxieties because I did not know what they wanted. I knew about the process, but had no experience.”

“For me this was a process that at first glance was very intimidating. I guess I was a bit anxious; I knew about it but had never worked with it.”

Council members associated their anxiety with not fully understanding the planning process as well as not knowing what was expected of them as Council members.

“I just hoped that they had limited expectations, at least initially, because I did not know anything about what they were doing, or how the process worked.”

“I didn’t know what they were looking for in a new Planning Council member. I did not know a lot about this process.”
For Council members, much of this initial anxiety subsided with exposure to and experience with the planning process. Members became more familiar with the process and less intimidated because their knowledge and expertise increased.

“I just think that it was the familiarity in going through the process, that is what helped with the anxiety.”

“I think that exposure to the process and just sitting in on a few committee meetings and reading through things and that kind of stuff helped me feel more comfortable with the process.”

*Clarity.* Clarity was the result of increased exposure to the process and also developing an understanding of how it worked. That is, Council members’ anxieties subsided because the process became clearer to them. One participant expressed clarification in broad terms:

“It became clear to me how the planning process worked at the departmental, divisional, and at the college level.”

Another Council member spoke of clarification in terms of the roles that individuals play in the strategic planning process. Council members were led to understand how the College operated internally through discussions led by more experienced Council members and WCC’s Director of Planning and Research. Participation in the College’s strategic planning process also exposed members to the hierarchical organizational structure and management of the College. In addition, the strategic planning process provided Council members with hands-on experience in implementing the tasks and sub-processes in the planning process.

“I understand now the roles that our administrators play in this process and that has helped in understanding a little better what is going on with the planning process. It is
beginning to make sense now. When I first started, I had this perception that this was a process that was too complicated.”

“It has become clearer to me how planning works, but also I have a better understanding for the college operation.”

Council members began to realize that the planning process was not just about their departmental area only. They reported that they tended to have negative attitudes about the planning process until they were exposed to and began to learn about the process. Council members indicated that they had a tendency in the beginning to be territorial and boundary oriented about the process, with an attitude of looking out for their departmental concerns only. Members noted that this outlook changed as they developed an understanding of how and why the process worked.

“I guess my attitude changed when I went in and first was a member of the Planning Council. I went in there with the idea that my program area is the most important thing that goes on at WCC. After participating and learning more, I know now it is about the whole campus.”

“I began to understand the interconnectivity of how it all worked together.”

Process understanding. Participants perceived that most of the changes occurred as a result of enhanced experience in and better understanding of the planning process. In other words, for Council members, time and exposure to the process were the factors that helped them to develop a better understanding of the process.

“As I began to spend more time with the process and work with it, my experiences began to change. Truthfully, by the end of the second year I made a statement to one of our senior people here that I wish I could be on it for longer.”
“The more experience that you have with it the more sophisticated you are going to feel about it and the more comfortable you are going to feel with it.”

Exposure and hands-on experience were indicated as keys to developing process understanding. One Council member described that hands-on work with the process and increased experience changed his perception of the process.

“I learned basically how the process works rather than just reading it and guessing who is involved, who has input, what the input is and how to provide my own input so that it is effective.”

“I learned a lot about the process from the first year to the second year. This was because it was so hands-on.”

In short, this process required Council members to work hands-on with the planning process, thus contributing to their increased understanding of the process.

*Perceptions of the subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process*

Strategic planning is a macro-process that includes several interrelated subprocesses. The ultimate outcome envisioned for the process is a strategic plan that provides the vision for and plots the future direction of the college in responding to and implementing its mission and goals. The subprocesses in which a planning council engages includes environmental scanning that requires the continuous collection, analysis, and interpretation of information and data that describe the forces that are operative in the college’s external environment. These forces influence and shape the educational needs of constituent groups that are being served by, or have the potential to be served by, the college. The mission of the college and its changing external context are critical to identifying and mapping its constituent groups and importantly, their needs. The needs of these constituent groups become the focus of the
college’s strategic plan. Careful study and analysis of the needs of the college’s constituent groups’ set the stage for formulating goals and objectives that drive the strategic plan and subsequent actions for their achievement. These goals and objectives are then utilized to make decisions about the allocation of resources and budgetary needs. Significantly, the measurement of outcomes attained due to the goals and objectives of the plan also becomes the principal means for assessing the institution’s effectiveness an assessment that, in the case of WCC, is mandated by the state legislature, system office, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Central to the implementation of the College’s strategic plan is the selection and implementation of appropriate strategies to facilitate the College’s achievement of the defined goals and objectives.

The planning council is expected to implement each of these subprocesses. Thus, a major part of this research was to determine WCC Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing each of the subprocesses including: (1) environmental scanning that includes data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (2) needs assessment; (3) formulation of goals and objectives; (4) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives, and (5) the formulation of plans for measuring outcomes and assessing institutional effectiveness.

_Environmental Scanning._ Environmental scanning is a continuing process in which the WCC Planning Council engages to identify and analyze the social, cultural, economic, political, and technological forces that are present in WCC’s environment. The outcome sought by the Council in this process is to acquire and maintain a current knowledge base about the College’s constantly changing external environment and the impact of the interaction of these forces. An analysis of data and information obtained in these scans assists Council members
in identifying, analyzing, and mapping the current and evolving publics of the College. Further, the data obtained through environmental scanning can be used by the College and its Planning Council to review and assess the relevancy of the College’s defined mission and goals and objectives. That is, such data allow Council members to determine how well the College’s mission, organizational structure, and management system are aligned with current and emerging trends and forces that are impacting the larger populations that reside in Wayne and Green counties as well as the larger geographical region. Importantly, environmental scanning at WCC serves as an important renewal tool, informing the College’s leaders how to reposition the College according to its current and emerging publics and their changing external environment. The needs of those publics that are identified through the environmental scanning process become the focus of the College’s strategic plan.

Wayne Community College, through its Planning Council, engages in environmental scanning at three levels of the College’s organization. As shown in Chapter One, Figure 1, these levels include the institutional level, divisional level and program (i.e., departmental level). At the institutional level, environmental scanning includes the Future Search process that is conducted every three to five years whereby service area College and community leaders, assisted by the Planning Council, collect information about the WCC service area and engage in discussion about the implications this information has for the College’s strategic plan. Institutional level environmental scanning also includes the inputs obtained by the College’s President in his continuing interaction with the College’s stakeholder groups. It is at the institutional level of environmental scanning that the College seeks to learn about economic, social, political, and technological changes that impact its current publics and, importantly to identify emerging publics. Divisional level environmental
scanning focuses on data obtained and plans formulated by program and departmental administrators and faculty members associated with the several programs and the departments within each of the College’s divisions. The third level of environmental scanning at WCC occurs at the program and departmental levels. It is at this level of the College’s strategic planning process that in-depth and specialized information is obtained about changes and developments that are occurring in the external environments of each of the College’s programs. Data about the external environment of each program help to make the administrators and faculty associated with each program aware of changes that need to be made to increase the relevancy and effectiveness of their respective programs. In turn, those changes become the basis for developing plans for these programs that become an integral part of and aid in implementation of the College’s overall strategic plan. A number of sources are used to obtain information about the external environments of each of the College’s program areas, including advisory committees, technical reports provided by employees of program graduates, and program leaders’ and Planning Council members’ continuous dialogue with the several programs’ stakeholder groups. Information obtained through environmental scanning at the institutional, divisional, and program (departmental) level form the College’s knowledge base that aids in the identification and better understanding of its publics and their changing educational needs. These needs become the focus of the College’s strategic plan.

Council members were queried about their perceptions of experiences in engaging in environmental scanning at the three levels. First, an effort was made to determine the importance that they assigned to environmental scanning at the institutional level. Council members indicated that institutional level environmental scanning, including the Future
Search, was important to plotting direction for the College’s strategic plan. Confirmation for the importance that they gave to institutional level planning is evident in the following responses:

“Environmental scanning through the College’s Future Search is critical to Wayne Community College maintaining a comprehensive knowledge base of its service area. It is the crux of the College’s strategic planning process.”

“Information obtained through a continuous scan of Wayne Community College’s external environment helped me and other Council members scan information about what the College needs to address in its strategic plan. Insights that I obtained provided a framework for me and other Council members in developing our respective divisional and program plans.”

“I think that information obtained through the Future Search is important to keeping the Planning Council current about our College’s service areas and the educational needs of the people residing in the service area.”

The degree of the Council members’ involvement in institutional level environmental scanning is not readily apparent in the responses that they provided. However, they seemed to be aware that scanning at this level exists and they did associate environmental scanning at their respective program level with institutional level environmental scanning. Reference was made to insights acquired from data generated in the Future Search and their use in framing and guiding divisional level and program level environmental scanning.

“I feel that we are guided by insights that we acquire through data collection about the service area of the College. These insights help us conduct environmental scans of the external environment of our program areas.”
“I see connections between the environmental scanning that we do at the College division and program levels. All of the information we collect helps us design the strategic plan for the College and plans for divisions, and specific programs.”

Environmental scanning in the College’s three divisions is informed by both institutional and program level data. While information obtained through the College’s annual Future Search and from other sources at the institutional level are helpful at the divisional level, data collected and plans formulated for each of the programs in the College’s three divisions constitute the primary sources of data for the division’s strategic plans.

Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in WCC’s environmental scanning process indicate that their involvement in the process for the most part is at the program level. Strong support for their involvement in and commitment to environmental scanning at the program level is noted in these responses.

“When it comes to environmental scanning and data collection, I usually think only in terms of my program area.”

“I understand the importance of environmental scanning for the College, but I feel that my primary responsibility is to collect and interpret information that will be helpful for my program.”

“If I am conducting environmental scanning properly and am listening to what advisors from industry are telling me is needed in my program area then I am contributing to the strategic plan for my program and the College’s strategic plan.”

“I think that what we do in environmental scanning in my program contributes to the Colleges environmental scanning process.”
“In my technical program area we depend heavily on environmental scanning and data provided by our advisory committee whose membership includes industry and the employers of our graduates.”

In general, the analysis of Council members’ perceptions of their experience in the environmental scanning process indicate that they assign importance to this experience as a part of the College’s overall strategic planning process. It appears that they perceive their greatest involvement in environmental scanning to be at the program level. Program level advisory committees seem to be the principal source of information used by Council members and their colleagues to develop and maintain strategic plans for their respective programs. Numerous references were made to program inputs provided by employers and other industry leaders as well as secondary education leaders.

*Needs Assessment.* The assessment and identification of the needs of the College’s publics are the outcomes sought through environmental scanning. Data obtained about the College’s service area through environmental scanning are analyzed by the Planning Council to assess and identify educational needs of current and emerging publics. *Needs assessment* focuses on identifying the educational deficiencies of these publics. These educational deficiencies that are labeled as needs become the focus of the College’s strategic plan and lower level plans developed at divisional and program levels.

Council members were asked to share their perceptions of experiences acquired in needs assessment at the institutional and program levels. Although several of the Council members indicated that they were aware of the needs assessment at the institutional level, they perceived this to be the responsibility of the College’s administration.
“I understand that needs assessment is carried out at the institutional level. I have always perceived that the administration did this.”

“It is my perception that needs assessment at the institutional level is something that was carried out at the upper administration level through processes such as “Future Search.”

Through further probing, it became clear that the Council members (study participants) felt that they were more involved in needs assessment at their respective program levels, as reflected in these responses:

“My understanding of needs assessment is connected to my program area. Through analyzing the data collected about my program in its environmental scans, I can assess the educational needs that need to be addressed by my program’s plan.”

“My understanding of needs for my program area comes mainly from environmental scanning that I do in the form of talking with former students and working with advisors to the program from industry.”

“It is my perception that the best way to determine the needs for my program area is to go to the workplaces where the students want to be employed. This is why in our environmental scanning we use the advisors to our program for environmental scanning and to understand needs.”

It is of interest to note that Council members who participated in this study did not differentiate between the two subprocesses of environmental scanning and needs assessment. They seemed to view the two processes as occurring simultaneously. Program level needs assessment was cited frequently with the emphasis placed on information about needs
provided by advisory committees, industry representatives, and employers of program area graduates.

Goals and objectives. Goals formulated for the College’s strategic plan define what the College must accomplish to fulfill its mission. They are broad descriptions of the actions that the College intends to undertake to respond to the dynamics of its changing external environment (i.e., service area) and the resultant educational needs of people who reside in the service area.

As part of its role in the planning process, the College’s Planning Council provides inputs in formulating the goals for the strategic plan. Guided by the College’s mission, knowledge about the dynamics of the College’s service area and the resultant educational needs of the College’s publics, the Planning Council seeks to reach consensus on the long-term actions (goals) that the College must accomplish to implement its mission effectively and to respond to the changing educational needs of its constituent groups (publics).

In relating perceptions about their experiences in contributing to the development of the long-term goals for the College’s strategic plan, Council members seemed to be aware of the importance of institutional goals and their role in guiding and developing division and department programs to achieve these goals. Further, in recounting their experiences, Council members expressed that the College’s goals helped them to gain a broader perspective of the College’s scope and function in its service areas. They connected the College’s goals to the educational needs of its publics as defined in the College’s mission. Perceptions of their experiences in formulating goals for the College’s strategic plan are reflected in the following responses:
“In discussing the goals to be included in the College’s strategic plan, I learned a lot about what the College must do to fulfill its mission and meet the needs of its students. I now see the connection between how our annual plan and everyday program activities are contributing to achieving the long-term goals and mission of the College.”

“In thinking about the continued effectiveness of the College in helping people acquire and maintain work skills that are marketable, I recognize that the goals of the college have to be focused on helping its service area maintain a well prepared workforce.”

“The goals that are developed for the College’s strategic plan helps to inform us of what needs to be done in planning the College’s annual plans. The short-term goals and objectives that my program area develops must be related to the College’s goals.”

Council members who participated in this study were knowledgeable about how the College develops annual plans and programs at divisional and program levels to aid the College attain its long-term goals. The educational needs of the people that are identified in the continuing analysis of information obtained through environmental scanning at institutional and program levels, along with other data, drive the development of the College’s divisional and departmental programs and their objectives. Guided by the College’s goals in its strategic plan, and further informed about educational needs discerned through environmental scans associated with their respective programs, members of the Planning Council work with peers in their respective program areas to develop objectives that address deficiencies (needs) of their respective programs publics.
“The needs of our program’s current and future publics/students become the focus of our efforts to state objectives that are keyed to our learners’ needs and that contribute to the College’s goals.”

“Determining the needs of our learners is difficult and challenging. An even more complex task is that of knowing how to formulate learners’ objectives that focus on the behavior(s) that learners need to acquire to overcome the defined deficiencies defined in learner objectives and that contribute to the attainment of the College’s long-term goals.”

The major obstacle cited by the study respondents in formulating objectives for the annual programs of their divisions and programs was discerning how to state these objectives so that they could be measured.

“Stating objectives and measuring the outcomes intended in learner objectives are very difficult.”

Council members are knowledgeable about and are involved in formulating goals for inclusion in the College’s strategic plan. However, their involvement seems to be in helping their peers in their respective program areas see the connection between their program objectives and the College’s long-term goals. The respondents indicated that they experience difficulty in stating objectives for their respective program that are measurable.

*Selecting strategies for implementing goals and objectives.* Developing the strategies that describe the ways in which the College intends to meet its goals (i.e., ways that support its long-range goals) is an important subprocess of WCC’s strategic planning process. Wayne Community College’s Planning Council is expected to contribute to formulating strategies that will aid in the implementation of each of the College’s goals. The College’s goals and
implementation strategies inform and provide a framework for administrators and faculty in the development of their respective programs that focus on the needs of their program’s public(s), formulation of learner objectives, and selection of strategies to implement them. Hence, Council members’ implementation of this subprocess requires them to think through and provide inputs that aid in selecting strategies for implementing each of the College’s goals and also aid in helping their peers develop action strategies that will facilitate implementation of planned programs in their respective program areas.

The Council members who participated in this study indicated that their major involvement in formulating strategies for implementing the institution’s goals (i.e., strategic plan) is in the development of implementation strategies encompassed in their respective programs. They viewed the plans developed for their respective program area to be one of the College’s principal means for implementing its strategic plan.

“I understand the need to formulate strategies for implementing the goals of WCC’s strategic plan. Most of my experiences have been in working with my colleagues in identifying and selecting change strategies to assure the attainment of program level objectives. I perceive that our division and departmental plans are the College’s means for implementing its strategic plan.”

“Once I have formulated my program’s objectives, I usually know what I need to do to implement them. Implementation for me is selecting the activities and materials to teach students what they need to know.”

There is reason to speculate, then, that the involvement of WCC’s Planning Council in selecting and/or formulating strategies for implementing the College’s strategic plans is confined for the most part to the efforts that they expend in developing their divisional and
departmental plans. That is, they see their respective program plans as important to the College in implementing its strategic plan.

*Developing plans for evaluating/assessing outcomes.* A critical subprocess encompassed in WCC’s strategic planning process is that of developing a plan to determine whether the College has accomplished the goals of its strategic plan. Outcomes need to be defined for each goal and evidence identified that will help the College substantiate that its goals have been achieved. Of particular note are the outcomes (i.e., results) of program objectives in program plans that need to be defined and plans developed for their measurement. WCC’s Planning Council members are expected to discuss and reach consensus on the outcomes that the College expects to accomplish with respect to each of the long-term goals included in its strategic plan as well as standards against which to measure the outcomes.

From responses obtained concerning Council members’ experiences in formulating plans for identifying and assessing long-term outcomes at the institutional level it appears that their involvement in implementing this subprocess was seen as assessing and reporting outcomes achieved within their division and department programs. They understood the importance of the College identifying and reporting outcomes achieved in implementing its strategic plan’s goals, but their perceptions of implementing this subprocess were in defining outcomes for their respective divisional and departmental programs. They perceived that outcomes achieved at the program levels contributed directly to achieving the College’s goals.

“The outcomes achieved in my programs are important in measuring and assessing the attainment of the College’s goals.”
“Most of my experiences in program evaluation have been in defining outcomes for programs and developing plans for measuring these outcomes.”

“Through the annual review of the progress achieved by WCC in implementing its strategic plan, Council members report on the outcomes achieved in their respective programs.”

Council members contributed to developing and implementing the College’s plans for evaluating and reporting results that are achieved during the implementing of its strategic plan. They perceived that the outcomes achieved through their programs were critical to the progress made by the College in implementing its strategic plan. Participants’ perceived experiences in implementing these subprocesses indicate that they were aware of and possess knowledge about each of them. However, the perceptions that they shared suggest that most of their experiences in implementing these subprocesses were at the program level.

**Perceptions about obstacles in the strategic planning process**

Council members identified several obstacles that interfered with or hampered their effectiveness in contributing fully to the process. These obstacles included the initial learning of the strategic planning process, not having enough time to work with the planning process, the perception of power, influence, or “politics”, as Council members described it, and budgetary limitations.

*Initial learning of the planning process.* Council members reported that a major obstacle to their participation in the planning process was what one described as an “initial learning curve” or having to start the process while understanding very little about it. First-time Council members who had never participated in the planning process were often placed on
the Planning Council during the middle of the planning cycle. This required new Council members to learn rapidly about the process.

“I think the initial learning curve that everybody has to go through before you feel comfortable enough to start commenting and having a little bit more insight into the process and articulating what you feel to be true is an obstacle.”

“There is just so much to learn in the beginning. I wondered if I was ever going to catch on. You were just kind of thrown into the process.”

“I think just the initial anxiety was an obstacle because of the lack of familiarity, and not knowing what was expected because of never being exposed to the planning process at this level. But like I said that fades with time and experience.”

One Council member likened her responsibilities as a Council member to being a new player to an unfamiliar game who is unsure how to play it at first.

“It is like a game. I did not know how to play the game. Now that I have spent some time with the process it is more familiar to me.”

“Not knowing how to play the planning game is the biggest inhibitor or obstacle.”

*Time with the process.* Lack of time to spend with the planning process was also seen as an obstacle. Council members expressed that there was simply not enough time to work with the planning process because of many of the other responsibilities that were required of them as instructors, division heads, department heads, and staff members.

“A lot of time we just do not have the time to put into planning that is necessary.”

“We have so many other responsibilities on campus, it is hard sometimes to give to the process the time that you think it deserves.”
In addition, Council members new to the process expressed that there was not enough training or time to become proficient with their responsibilities. However, they did express that the training that they received was positive, but that there was not sufficient time to digest the information.

“The process was explained, but there was not sufficient time for new members to digest what that information was before we were asked to come in and participate in planning.”

“I thought the orientation and training was good for me as a new member. It was a lot to take in all at once.”

*Power and influence.* Members perceived, too, that power and influence were obstacles to participation. Sometimes certain Council members, because of their position or program, were perceived to use influence to enhance their goals and objectives which were then viewed more favorably.

“In other words everyone knows if so and so wants something they are going to get it, so that favoritism is an obstacle.”

“If somebody wants bigger space and they happen to have influence or power to achieve that, they are likely to get it. That is an obstacle to others.”

“An obstacle is those “chosen” pet things, and favoritism. We have to keep the integrity of the process in sight.”

Another term that was used to express power and influence as an obstacle was “politics”. Politics was used to describe the machinery operated by those individuals and program areas that were perceived to have influence because of their high demand or prestige.
“Politics is an obstacle. I mean the powers that be, it is my perception that politics sometimes keeps the planning process from working the way that it should.”

“When I say politics I am talking about programs and people here that seem to always get what they need. They are the programs that everybody likes, the ones that always have waiting lists and lots of students that when they graduate are in high demand.”

“There are some programs that seem to have “political” pull to always get what they want.”

**Budgetary Limitations.** Budgetary limitations were also perceived as an obstacle to participation. Budgetary limitations were defined as insufficient fiscal resources available to carry out the goals and objectives to their completion. The time during which the research interviews were conducted was one in which there were serious budgetary concerns for the institution. This factor contributed to Council members’ perceived obstacles.

“I guess the one thing that frustrated me was the financial and economic condition of the State. An obstacle was not being able to submit certain goals and objectives.”

“What was an obstacle for me was not being able to submit goals and objectives that I thought were important because we did not have a budget. I had to think of other things to submit.”

“Because of the budget situation I was forced to be very grounded, very realistic about where we were headed. I do not see that necessarily as a limitation; I see that as an obstacle that I had to overcome and doing what was necessary for our immediate environment.”
Summary

Council members’ overall perceptions of experiences with the strategic planning process were positive. Council members indicated that their participation allowed their voices to be heard as well as hear the voices of others on information related to the strategic planning process. This resulted in buy-in and empowerment. Participants’ experiences did change as a result of additional experiences with the process. These changes ranged from reduction in feelings of anxiety to clarity and greater understanding. Council members assign importance to their experience with environmental scanning. Needs assessment was viewed as a process that occurred simultaneously with environmental scanning. Perceptions of experiences with formulating goals and objectives was related to Council members helping their peers in their respective program areas see the connection between their program objectives and long-term goals. Perceptions of Council member experiences with selecting strategies to implement the goals and objectives seem to be confined to their efforts in developing divisional and departmental plans. The outcomes that are achieved through their programs are perceived to be critical to the progress made by the College’s strategic plan. Table 2 provides a general summary of the research findings. Participant perceptions are stated in an abbreviated form, followed by the themes generated to describe the information that emerged from the interviews. Descriptive phrases and key words gleaned from the Planning Council members’ interviews are included with their corresponding categories.
Table 2.

*General summary of research findings.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Perceptions</th>
<th>OVERALL EXPERIENCES IN THE PLANNING PROCESS</th>
<th>CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS</th>
<th>PERCEPTIONS OF SUBPROCESSES</th>
<th>PERCEPTIONS OF OBSTACLES</th>
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<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Having a voice, being heard, and hearing others</td>
<td>• Anxiety</td>
<td>• Environmental Scanning</td>
<td>• Initial learning of the planning process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Buy-in and empowerment</td>
<td>• Clarity</td>
<td>• Needs Assessment</td>
<td>• Time with the process</td>
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<td>• Process understanding</td>
<td>• Goals and Objectives</td>
<td>• Power and influence</td>
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<td>• Selecting strategies to implement goals and objectives</td>
<td>• Budgetary limitations</td>
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<td>• Developing plans for evaluating/assessing outcomes</td>
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<td><strong>Descriptive phrases and words.</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Allowed genuine input”</td>
<td>• “Initial anxieties lessened with increased experience”</td>
<td>• “The external environmental scanning was crucial”</td>
<td>• Initial learning curve</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Buy-in and ownership”</td>
<td>• “Becoming familiar with planning model the institution uses”</td>
<td>• “Goals and objective development was important because it allowed for the articulation of what is important…”</td>
<td>• Initial anxiety</td>
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<td>• Empowerment</td>
<td>• “No major changes just learning the process at this institution”</td>
<td>• The “crux” of the strategic planning process.</td>
<td>• “Dealing with individuals who were skeptics”</td>
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<td>• Seeing overall picture</td>
<td>• “Changes from a departmental view, to a divisional view, to an institutional view”</td>
<td>• “If you did not pay attention to the external environment you would get left behind”</td>
<td>• Not having enough time to work on the process</td>
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<td>• Being able to make statements and observations</td>
<td>• Seeing more of the “big picture”</td>
<td>• “We look to industry to understand the needs of our students”</td>
<td>• “Not knowing how to write goals and objectives”</td>
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<td>• “Open process”</td>
<td>• “Development of a better understanding”</td>
<td>• The “nuts and bolts” of strategic planning</td>
<td>• “View that strategic planning is someone else’s responsibility”</td>
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<td>• Greater level of understanding</td>
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<td>• “Too many objectives to be prioritized”</td>
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<td>• “Overall positive perception of experience with the planning process”</td>
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<td>• “Lack of money”</td>
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<td>• Buy-in and belief in the process</td>
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<td>• “Do not know how to play the game”</td>
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Chapter 5
Conclusions and Implications

Overview

The strategic planning process at Wayne Community College plays an important role in charting the College’s future direction. It is through this process that College administrators, faculty, staff, trustees, community leaders, and other stakeholders are given opportunities to provide inputs that help inform decisions about the future initiatives of the College and its strategic plan. Strategic planning is the principal means that the College uses to revisit and revise its mission, formulate goals, redefine and clarify values and, importantly, to reposition itself to respond effectively to the changing educational needs of its current and emerging constituent groups. If effectively implemented, a number of tangible and positive results accrue to the College through its strategic planning process. The resulting plan ideally defines and addresses the educational needs of its current and emerging constituent groups and provides direction for the College, and subsequently, each of its programs.

This plan defines the goals and strategies that become the basis for the College’s institutional effectiveness plan and the process to implement it. Significantly, the results obtained through implementing the strategic plan provide the College with standards to demonstrate accountability to its publics and other stakeholders, including the North Carolina General Assembly, the State Community College System’s Office, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Strategic planning at WCC is carried out by a Planning Council. The Council includes twenty-seven members representing the College administration, faculty, and staff. Fifteen of the twenty-seven members are appointed by the College’s administration and serve
two-year terms. The Planning Council develops the College’s overall strategic plan and works with its members and their colleagues to develop complementary and supporting divisional and departmental plans. These divisional and departmental plans are the major means through which the College implements its strategic plan.

*Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine Council members’ perceptions of their experiences as they engage in the planning process. An understanding of Council members’ perceptions may be useful to administrators in determining strategies for aiding Council members’ engagement in the strategic planning process. Four research questions constitute the focus of the research:

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

2. Do Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience in the process?

3. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

*Conceptual Framework*

The framework for this study is based on the concepts advanced by Hudgins (1997), Boone (2002), Howell (2000), Nichols (1995), Parilla (1993), and Jackson and Moulton (1993) that emphasize both a systems and process approach to strategic planning in higher
education institutions. Viewed as both a system and process, strategic planning includes five interrelated subprocesses in which higher education institution’s leaders and members of its Planning Council are continuously engaged to develop and maintain a strategic plan that is responsive to the changing educational needs of current and emerging constituent groups served by the College in its service area. These subprocesses include: (1) environmental scanning; (2) needs identification and assessment; (3) formulation of goals; (4) selection of change strategies to implement the goals; and (5) formulation of plans for evaluating/assessing results (outcomes) achieved as a result of implementing the strategic plan.

The Planning Council’s role in strategic planning includes its continuing and active involvement in the implementation of these five interrelated and interdependent subprocesses. This conception of the strategic planning process and its subprocesses provide the lens through which the perceived experiences of WCC Planning Council members are viewed.

**Literature Review**

Participation is an important component of the strategic planning process at WCC, and is used to encourage and allow Council members to have direct input into the planning process. The literature review provides useful and informed insights about values that can accrue to both the College and staff through their active involvement and participation in the College’s strategic planning process. Morris (1998, 2000) and Laurence and Smith (1996) view participation of the college’s staff in strategic planning as essential to the development of a useful college plan. Laurence and Smith (1996) also advance the notion that for the strategic planning process to be meaningful in a college it must be open to incorporating the
ideas of its faculty and staff. According to these experts, this form of inclusion permits and assures broad-based and meaningful participation that is critical to the success of the strategic planning process.

Miller and Vacik (1998) speak to the importance of determining the perceptions of participants relative to their participation in the strategic planning process. Faculty who are involved tend to view the process and specific elements of participation more positively than their noninvolved counterparts. In addition to this finding, faculty that are involved tend to view their actions as worthwhile and representative of the faculty body as whole (Miller and Vacik, 1998). These findings suggest that through involvement, faculty acquire a more positive outlook on the entire process of shared decision-making. Drummond and Reitsch (1997) share similar findings, indicating that faculty and administrators’ perceived levels of participation affect their attitudes about the institution. The greater the perceived level of participation in the process, the better administrators and faculty feel about their institution. Finally, Dupont (2000) found, in assessing the perceptions of faculty and administrators who participated in decision-making processes, that they were generally more satisfied with their level of input in decision-making and participation. These administrators and faculty believed that their inputs influenced decisions associated with program and management functions of the College.

Research Methods

This inquiry is a qualitative case study designed to determine WCC Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in participating in the strategic planning process at Wayne Community College. The site of the study is Wayne Community College. It was chosen because it was accessible to the researcher, consent was obtained from the institution
to do the research; and the size of the institution allowed for access to Council members. Furthermore, the researcher was a former member of the faculty at the College and had participated in its planning process.

In qualitative research such as this case study, once the data are organized into relevant categories, the portrayal of a complex whole phenomenon begins to emerge. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) make the analogy of assembling a jigsaw puzzle whereby the edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference, followed by separate attention to the more striking aspects of the puzzle pieces. Such was the case with this research.

The qualitative case study design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular situation and its meaning for those involved in it. Interviews were conducted with nine Planning Council members. These interviews were in the form of key-informant interviews and lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour. An interview guide was used to initiate interview questioning for each of the research questions. Each of the interviews was transcribed. Follow-up interviews were conducted to affirm and clarify what was being interpreted from the interviews.

The constant comparison method was used to look for key issues and recurring themes related to each of the research questions. These themes then became the focus of organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the responses provided by the Council members.
Summary of findings

Strategic planning is a function at WCC that is important for documenting and reporting institutional effectiveness as well as a process by which the College stays connected to its mission and vision. The inclusion of faculty and staff in the strategic planning process is critical to the successful implementation of the process and the resultant strategic plan. It is through the Planning Council that faculty and staff are provided opportunities to serve and contribute to the process and the content of the College’s strategic plan.

Overall, Council members valued the opportunity to serve on the Planning Council. They attributed their positive experiences to a number of factors. Their participation gave them a voice for providing input in an important institutional process. It also allowed them to hear other Council members’ points of view and ideas about the College’s overall plan and their respective program/departmental plans. Further, they perceived that through their participation in the College’s strategic planning process, they were afforded the opportunity to develop a feeling of ownership of the process as well as acquire a sense of empowerment. Through acquiring an appreciation for all of the College’s programs and sharing with fellow Council members the plans for their respective program areas, Council members acquired an overall positive perception of the College’s strategic planning process. Council members reported changes in their understanding of the strategic planning process as they acquired additional experience in implementing the process. They indicated that initial feelings of anxiety subsided with increased experience in implementing the process. Greater clarity of their roles in the strategic planning process, as well as increased understanding of the process, developed with more experience.
Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing each of the subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process indicated that they were aware of these subprocesses but that their greatest involvement was at the program and divisional levels.

Council members’ perceptions of environmental scanning indicated that they were aware of this process at the institutional, divisional, and program levels of the College. At the institutional level, Council members reported that they perceived environmental scanning as important for plotting the direction of the College. However, it was the Council members’ perception that environmental scanning at the institutional level was conducted mainly by administrators through processes such as Future Search, as well as the interaction of the President with stakeholder groups in the community. Council members viewed environmental scanning at the institutional level as important to plotting the direction of the College’s strategic plan. However, their responses indicated that they engaged in environmental scanning mainly at the program level. Council members’ perceptions of environmental scanning at the program level implied that they assigned great importance to this experience as a part of the College’s overall strategic planning process; it was at this level that they perceived their greatest sense of involvement. They reported that program level advisory committees, employers, industry leaders, and secondary education leaders were the principal sources of information that they and their colleagues consulted to develop plans for their respective programs.

Council members indicated that they were aware of needs assessment at the institutional level but perceived this to be largely the responsibility of the College’s administration. It became clear that the Council members’ involvement in needs assessment
was with their respective programs and that they did not make a clear distinction between environmental scanning and needs assessment; i.e., they viewed them as processes that occurred simultaneously.

Council members noted their awareness of the importance of institutional goals and their role in helping to guide their efforts in working with their colleagues to develop division and department programs. It was the perception of Council members that the College’s goals helped them to gain a broader perspective of the College’s overall educational focus in its service area. Council members indicated that they connected the College’s goals to the educational needs of its publics residing in the College’s service area and, consequently, the College’s mission. Council members were knowledgeable about how the College develops annual plans and programs at divisional and program levels to aid the College in its attainment of its long-term goals. Council members were guided by the College’s goals in the strategic plan and were further informed about educational needs discerned through environmental scans associated with their respective programs. While working with peers in their respective program areas, Council members developed objectives that addressed the needs of their respective program’s publics. Council members did perceive that there were obstacles related to the formulation of objectives for their specific programs. They reported difficulty in stating objectives that were measurable.

Council members’ major involvement in formulating strategies for implementing the institution’s goals was in the development of implementation strategies encompassed in their respective programs. It was their view that the development of plans for their program area was one of the College’s principal means for implementing its strategic plan. In other words,
they viewed their respective program plans as important to the College’s implementation of its strategic plan.

Council members perceived that experiences in formulating plans for identifying and assessing long-term outcomes at the institutional level were related to assessing and reporting outcomes of their divisional and departmental programs. They believed in the importance of the College identifying and reporting outcomes achieved in implementing its strategic plan’s goals, but their greatest involvement was in defining outcomes in their respective divisional and departmental programs. The outcomes achieved at the program level contributed to achieving the outcomes sought at the College level.

Council members noted their beliefs of obstacles to participation in the College’s strategic planning process. First-time Council members believed there was insufficient time to learn about the process. They did not have enough knowledge about the strategic planning process, a situation they described as needing to get up to speed and facing an initial learning curve. Council members also indicated that too many other responsibilities were required of them while serving as a Council member. Council members also perceived that power and influence skewed the planning process, resulting in a process that was not allowed to be carried out or work properly. Another perceived obstacle was budgetary limitations, resulting in the lack of fiscal resources as an obstacle to completing their goals and objectives. Council members were asked if longer tenure on the Planning Council would provide more time to become proficient with the process. Council members indicated that, based on their experiences, longer tenure on the Council would be helpful but would limit the opportunity for other faculty and staff to participate on the Planning Council.
Concluding Remarks

Strategic planning is an imperative for North Carolina’s community colleges in the 21st Century. As mandated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in the Southern Region, the North Carolina State Legislature, the North Carolina Community Colleges Systems Office, and other stakeholders, strategic plans define the goals of these colleges and become the principal means for assessing institutional effectiveness and demonstrating accountability to their publics and other important stakeholders, among which are those that provide the funds for their operation.

Strategic planning is a continuing process in which community colleges engage to reposition themselves and maintain relevancy in responding to the changing educational needs of their current and emerging constituent groups (publics). Resultant strategic plans define the future oriented goals that community colleges seek to attain and the strategies that will be employed to attain these goals. The outcomes that are expected to be attained through implementation of the goals are also defined. These goals become the basis for assessing the effectiveness of the institution.

Hudgins (1997), Alfred (1994) and numerous other authorities on strategic planning in the community college have provided general indicators of success that are associated with the effective implementation of the strategic planning process. Two important factors that these experts indicate must be an integral part of the process are the community college’s data base about its external environment (i.e., service area) and the inclusion/involvement of its faculty and staff in the collection and analysis of these data, the identification and assessment of the educational needs of constituent groups derived from these data, and the formulation of goals that address the analyzed needs.
The conceptualizations of the strategic planning processes advanced by Hudgins (1997), Alfred (1994) and other strategic planning authorities are insightful. However, a major void is their failure to adequately describe strategies and techniques that can be used to implement the process. While attention is given to the collaboration of the college’s staff and leaders of its constituent groups in developing a vision statement, revisiting mission and conducting value audits among the staff, limited information is provided about strategies and techniques/skills that are needed to conduct internal and external environmental scans of the college and its service area, how to analyze and interpret data gleaned through these environmental scans, how to use these data to formulate goals, how to formulate strategies for implementing goals, and how to develop plans for measuring outcomes attained.

Significantly, little attention is given to the role of the college’s institutional level strategic plan in providing direction for the development of divisional and program level strategic plans and how these lower level plans become the principal means for implementing the college’s overall/institutional level strategic plan.

Compounding the paucity of literature on the implementation of the strategic planning process is the absence of ideas that specifically address the expected roles of faculty and staff in participating in strategic planning processes. In many respects, these conceptualizations of the process, while helpful, are for the most part theoretical and are derived from ideas derived from applications in industry. There is little or no research that focuses on the experience of the faculty and staff in implementing the process. Also, there is very little literature that addresses how to train participants in implementing the subprocesses that are important to the success of strategic planning.
With the limited amount of information in the literature about the roles of those who engage in the strategic planning process, further research is needed into the actual experiences of Planning Council members in implementing strategic planning processes. These experiences, combined with the theoretical and conceptualizations of the process, are critical to strengthening the behaviors that planning council members need to exhibit in implementing the strategic planning process.

The findings of this study confirm that Planning Council members possess an awareness of the strategic planning process but that their understanding and involvement in the process are for the most part confined to their respective program levels. The Council members included in this study seem to understand the importance of the WCC’s strategic plan. In recounting their experiences in its development, they imply that decisions for developing the College’s institutional plan are, for the most part, the responsibility of the College’s administrators. If genuine involvement of community college planning councils in all aspects of the strategic planning process is to be obtained, members’ roles must be defined so that members are proficient in those roles.

Implications for Research

This study extended the conceptualizations of the strategic planning process to include the discernment of the members of a planning council in implementing the process. Hudgins (1997), Boone et al. (2002), Howell (2000), Nichols (1995), Parilla (1993) and Jackson and Moulton (1993), in their conceptualizations of strategic planning processes in which community colleges engage, provided the lens through which the experiences of WCC Planning Council members could be viewed. The findings, although confined to a single community college, provide insights about the limited understanding that council members,
in general, possess with respect to their expected roles in implementing the subprocesses that are encompassed in the strategic planning process. These insights should serve as a stimulant for other researchers in designing and conducting research that is focused on the implementation of the process and, importantly, the perceived and real experiences of those who are charged with the responsibility of developing a college’s strategic plan. Significantly, such research should be directed towards the development of plans at the several levels of the organization (i.e., institutional, divisional, departmental/program). The challenge to researchers is to move from the theoretical to the actual application and implementation of the process. In order to focus on the experiences of faculty and staff (i.e., planning councils) in implementing the strategic planning process, thought needs to be given to on-site and field investigations (participant observer and other methods) to observe, record and assess the actual experiences of planning councils in implementing the strategic planning process.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study imply that the Community College needs to help its Planning Council members to more fully understand the strategic planning process and to become more engaged in the process. Particular emphasis needs to be given to aiding Council members in understanding the interconnectiveness of planning at the institutional, divisional, and program levels. The College’s strategic plan needs to be viewed as the driving force for stimulating and energizing planning at divisional and program levels and the subsequent development of strategic plans. Council members need to understand that these divisional and program plans constitute the College’s principal means for implementing the college’s strategic plan.
Further, the findings of the study imply that Council members need to be helped to become more skilled in implementing the subprocesses encompassed in the strategic planning process. The experiences reported by Council members in implementing each of the five subprocesses imply that their knowledge of and skills in implementing the subprocesses are limited. The College needs to explore alternative strategies for strengthening Council members’ engagement in implementing the subprocesses.
References:


Garmon, J. (2001). Will community colleges’ first centennial be their last? *Community College Week* 13, 4-5.


Appendix A
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
Proposal Narrative

A. Introduction

1. Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this case study is to examine participant perceptions of their experiences as they participate in certain subprocesses of the planning process at a specific community college campus. An understanding is sought of participant perceptions of their experiences as they participate in the subprocesses of: (a) environmental scanning (i.e. data collection, analysis and interpretation); (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives, and (d) development of plans for measuring outcomes. An understanding of these perceptions may allow for the development of a planning process that is more efficient and effective at the case study site.

2. If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

This research will be for a dissertation.

B. Subject Population

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?

The focus will be on the Planning Council, the committee responsible for planning at the research site. Nine of the current faculty and staff individuals who are members of the Planning Council will be recruited.

2. Describe how subjects will be recruited.

Prior to the data collection stage an announcement from the President of the institution as well as the Director of Planning and Research will be made. This announcement will be distributed to potential participants via the campus e-mail system. The announcement will indicate who will be conducting the research and what it will hopefully be used for. The researcher will also approach all of the participants that will be chosen and inform them on what the research is about and how it will be conducted. This discussion will include tape recording, confidentiality issues, and consent forms as well as how the information will be used. All participants will be asked to complete consent and confidentiality forms.
3. How much time will be required of each subject?

All those interviewed will be asked to participate in an interview that relates to five research questions. A select subgroup may be asked for a second interview. These interviews should last between 30-45 minutes.

4. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

Eligibility will be based on those who are current or former members of the Planning Council.

5. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations (women, minorities, elderly).

This sampling procedure will exclude faculty and staff who have not directly worked with the Planning Council. However, it may at some point be necessary to include those faculty and staff members who are familiar with the planning process to gain their perspective.

6. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

This research is to be conducted as a case study at the site where the researcher was formerly employed. The researcher has worked with many of those that will participate in various capacities in their duties as an instructor at this institution.

7. Check appropriate box for any vulnerable populations included in study:

   Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research
   ___ minors(under age 18)
   ___fetuses
   ___pregnant women
   ___persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities
   ___economically or educationally disadvantaged
   ___prisoners
   ___elderly
   ___students from a class taught by principal investigator
   ___other vulnerable population

C. Experimental Procedures

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects.
This is an investigation of perceptions of experiences of Planning Council members as they participation in specific subprocesses of a planning process. The focus will be on faculty and staff members that are part of the Planning Council, the committee responsible for planning on campus.

Interviews with Planning Council members will be conducted to gain an understanding of their experiences as the progress through the subprocesses of a particular portion of the planning process.

The constant comparative method will be used to produce themes and theories that may be useful to strategic planning processes

**Interviews**

The interviews will be based on these five questions.

1. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?
2. Do Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience with the process?
3. What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; and (e) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?
4. What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s planning process?
5. What are Planning Council members’ thoughts about specific content and teaching methods that should be included in a training program to prepare newcomers to the Planning Council for their expected roles?

In the individual interviews, the researcher will ask participants a series of questions that are related to these research questions. An interview guide will be used to initiate a probing of participants perceptions of their experiences as they progress through specific subprocesses of the planning process.

Follow-up will be used for clarification if needed upon completion of the interviews and transcribing of the data from the tapes. The interviews will be taped with participants’ permission.

**D. Potential Risks**
1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal, or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

There will be minimal risks with these research procedures. Although this research will try to determine the perceptions of participant experiences with certain subprocesses of a strategic planning process, the questions that will be used and the information that is gained from those that volunteer is not personal or sensitive. There should not be any cause for physical, psychological, social, legal or any other risks.

If at any point those who volunteer indicate that they are uncomfortable with data collecting or information gleaned from the data collection, any and all information that was provided by that subject will be removed from the research data base and destroyed.

2. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonable place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability? If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

There will not be any questions asked that could possibly harm the subjects employment status or alienate them from their employer. Confidentially statements will be issued stating that all information will be used for research purposes only, none of the participant’s names will be used.

3. Will the subjects be presented with materials which they might consider to be offensive, threatening, degrading, or could produce stress or anxiety. If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for psychological counseling.

There will be no materials presented in this research process that would be offensive, threatening, degrading or could produce stress or anxiety.

4. Describe methods for preserving confidentiality. How will data be recorded and stored, with any identifiers attached? How will reports be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

Confidentially statements signed by the researcher will be given to those who participate. Data will be recorded using a tape recorder and field notes. The notes and recordings will be coded into relative categories for description.

5. If audio or videotaping is done will the tapes be stored and how/when will the
tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Tapes will be destroyed by breaking at the conclusion of the research.

6. Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedure that have been arranged.

No

E Compensation

1. What, if any direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? in the event of monetary gain, include all payment arrangements (amount of payment and the proposed method of disbursement, including reimbursement of expenses, if applicable). If non-monetary compensation is given, indicate value.

None

G. Additional Information

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used attach a copy to this proposal.

See attached

1. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this is proposal.

See attached
Appendix B

Introductory Letter to Individual Interviewees

Date________________

Dear________________:

I am pursuing a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration in the College of Education and Psychology at North Carolina State University. I am in the process of conducting my doctoral research, investigating participants perceptions of their experiences in participating in the strategic planning process. This case study involves interviewing individuals at this College. These interviews will help in developing a better understanding of what the individuals experiences are while participating in the strategic planning process.

You have been identified as an individual who might be willing to share your perceptions of experiences in the strategic planning processes at this College. More specifically, I am asking you to agree to being interviewed. Obviously, all interviews will be confidential and your identity will be known only to me. The interview should take about 30 minutes. The questions will cover your experiences with participating in the strategic planning process. It would be appreciated if you would allow for the option of a follow-up interview if necessary. I would like to tape record the interview; this will allow for me to talk to you more freely.

Sincerely,

James T. Brewer (Tim)
Appendix C

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: James Timothy Brewer  Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Edgar J. Boone

INFORMATION
You have been chosen as a participant in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of participants experiences while participating in the strategic planning process. You are asked to be interviewed in an individual interview. The questions that will be asked will be related to your participation in the strategic planning process.

RISKS
With participation in an individual interview you will be asked to be as forthcoming as possible. This will be based on the individuals own determination of comfort level.

BENEFITS
Participation is a key component in the strategic planning process. This research may contribute to the development of a more efficient strategic planning processes.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral, or written reports which could link you to the study.

COMPENSATION
No compensation will be given for the participation in this study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, James Timothy Brewer, at (W) 919-733-7051 ext. 730 or (H) 919-261-9290. 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 7906, NCSU Campus.

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.

CONSENT
I have read and understand the above information. I received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject’s signature______________________________  Date___________________

Investigator’s signature___________________________  Date___________________
Appendix D

Interview Guide

Research Question 1
What are Planning Council members’ perceptions of their overall experiences in participating in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

Interview initiation question:
Can you describe to me what your perception is of your overall experience in the planning process?

Question 2
Do Council members’ perceptions of their experiences in the Wayne Community College strategic planning process change as they acquire experience with the process?

Interview initiation question:
Did your perceptions of the strategic planning process change as you gained more experience with the process? If so, how and why did those experiences change?

Question 3
What are Planning Council members’ perception of their experiences in implementing the following subprocesses encompassed in Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process: (a) environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis and interpretation; (b) needs assessment; (c) formulation of goals and objectives; (d) development of strategies to implement goals and objectives; (d) development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes?

Interview initiation question:
Can you describe your perception of experiences with implementing the subprocesses of environmental scanning, including data collection, analysis and interpretation, needs assessment, formulation of goals and objectives, development of strategies to implement goals and objectives, and the development of plans for assessing or measuring outcomes in the strategic planning process?

Question 4
What are some of the major obstacles encountered by Planning Council members in contributing to Wayne Community College’s strategic planning process?

Interview initiation question:
What do you perceive has been the biggest obstacles you have encountered while contributing the planning process? Please describe these obstacles