ABSTRACT

PARKER, GEORGE RANDOLPH. Selected Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the Role of the Community College and the Community College President in the Community. (Under the direction of Dr. Edgar J. Boone.)

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions held by selected community leaders about the role of the community college and the community college president in connecting with and serving the needs of the community. These leaders’ perceptions and views are compared to the documented missions of the colleges selected for study. Six rural community colleges and their service areas in three southern states were randomly selected, and twenty-eight community leaders from the colleges’ service areas were interviewed for this study. Open systems theory of organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1966) and the community-based programming model for community colleges (Boone and Associates, 1997) serve as the conceptual framework for this research.

The findings of this study could prove beneficial to community college presidents and boards of trustees in developing the mission of the college to meet the needs of the community and in building partnerships and relationships with community leaders to enhance advocacy efforts for the college. The findings indicated that the community leaders selected for this study perceive that 1) the community college contributes to the quality of life of the community, 2) the primary role of the community college is to support economic development, 3) making educational programs accessible is an expectation of community leaders, 4) the college should provide the two-year terminal degree in technical areas and the first two years for college transfer, 5) the role of the community college in the community is consistent and congruent with
the major tenets of the documented missions of the selected colleges, 6) the college should be a team member with other community-based organizations in resolving critical community issues, 7) the community college president should be visible and involved in the affairs of the community, and 8) the community college president should be a community leader and serve in a variety of leadership roles in the community.
Selected Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the Role of the Community College and the Community College President in the Community

by

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Adult and Community College Education

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research and study to two people who have supported me through this project. First, to my wife, Lou Ann Murphy Parker, who has been with me through the long nights and weekends during my studies in graduate school, research, and the writing of my dissertation: Thank you for your encouragement and support in my efforts to complete my graduate studies.

Secondly, I want to dedicate this work to Eunice Bray Parker, my mother, who has been a living example of endearing and positive support for all of the members of the Parker family through the years in whatever we have chosen to pursue, and whose dream of being a school teacher found its fulfillment in my career as a community college faculty member and administrator.
BIOGRAPHY

George Randolph Parker, known as Randy, graduated from Havelock High School in eastern North Carolina in 1970 and received his AAS degree in Drafting and Design Technology from Lenoir Community College in Kinston, North Carolina in 1972. He transferred to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and received his bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology in 1974. In the fall of 1974, Randy joined the faculty of Lenoir Community College and taught in the Drafting and Design Technology program. While teaching at Lenoir Community College, he completed his master’s degree in Mechanical Engineering at North Carolina State University in 1976. From 1976 through 1981 Randy held positions as Project Engineer at Rockwell International in Raleigh, North Carolina and Manager of Design Engineering at the Applied Engineering Company in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In 1981 Randy returned to Lenoir Community College as an engineering instructor and also held positions as an industrial trainer and program head of Drafting and Design Technology, Industrial Maintenance, and Electronics Engineering Technology. He also served as Director of Industrial Training, Dean of Business and Industry Programs, and completed his twenty-five years of service at Lenoir Community College as Vice President of Instruction and Student Services. In September of 2004 Randy was named President of Vance-Granville Community College in Henderson, North Carolina, where he continues to serve.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the perceptions held by community leaders of the role of their community college in the community. It also focuses on the perceptions held by these leaders about the role of the president of their community college in connecting with and involving the college in the community. The importance of this inquiry is underscored by the increasing expectations held by national, state, and local leaders for the community college to become a central player in working with the leaders in its service area to rebuild the local economy. These high expectations are a response to the current national and global economic crisis and are shaped and influenced by a number of factors, including: a) the track record of the community college in fielding workforce development programs that contribute significantly to the economy of its service area; b) the continuing reduction in financial resources for the community college, which has grown out of the worst recession that the nation and, indeed, the global community has faced since the 1930s; and c) beliefs held by many national and state leaders that part of the momentum for recovery from the current recession should begin with the community college, by virtue of its mission and proximity to the people.

The ability of the nation’s community colleges to fulfill the expectations of national, state, and local leaders is dependent upon the colleges’ ability to acquire the financial and physical resources needed for their operations. Current economic and budgetary challenges, such as the global economic recession, rising publicly funded health care costs, and the reduction in tax revenue at all levels of government, are
imposing substantial limitations on the allocation of public funds for the operations of all public institutions, including community colleges. With these limitations in public funding, the Congress, state legislatures, and county commissioners expect community colleges, along with all other sectors of the nation’s publicly funded education system, to operate with reduced funding and to ‘do more with less’ (Boulard, 2009; Dembicki, 2009b; Gee, 2009; Katsinas, 2005, 2009; Sampson, 2009).

Some of the budgetary challenges that confront the nation’s community colleges are identified in Katsinas, Tollefson, and Reamy’s (2008) national survey of state directors of community colleges. Their survey focused on funding issues and the directors’ perceptions of the future and stability of state investments in higher education. The findings of the survey indicate that: a) the majority of state community college systems’ annual budget allocations, which are based on funding formulas, were not fully funded in fiscal year 2007/2008; b) in nearly every state, higher education is the largest discretionary item of the state’s budget, thereby creating fierce competition for scarce tax dollars; c) tuition increases remain a predominant method that states employ to obtain scarce resources for community colleges; and d) rural community colleges face greater strains on their budgets than their urban and suburban counterparts.

These economic and budgetary challenges come at a time when the nation’s community colleges are in the middle of the largest enrollment surge since the baby boom of the 1960s, and when millions of unemployed and displaced workers are
turning to community colleges for education and training (Katsinas, 2009). To meet the
expectations held for community colleges to help rebuild local economies, serve
expanding student enrollments, and train and retrain the workforce, budgetary shortfalls
and policy issues must be addressed. One method of addressing such challenges is to
increase the advocacy and lobbying efforts for community colleges in order to persuade
lawmakers to allocate funds to maintain critical programs and to add new programs in
response to workforce development needs (Gould, 2008; “In tough times,” 2008;
Katsinas, 2005; McCall, 2009).

Community colleges, now more than ever in their more than 100-year history,
must review and strengthen their linkages with the people and leaders in their service
areas to begin the process of increasing much-needed organized and effective advocacy
efforts (Gould, 2008; Katsinas, 2005; McCall, 2009). An increase in such efforts may
help expand the base of community leaders, power brokers, and broad-based
community members who are willing to actively support and advocate for community
colleges. The resultant expanded base of advocates could wield more influence on local,
state, and national elected governance officials to assign a high priority to the allocation
of public funds for their community college. One only needs to examine public policy
and its legislative genesis to discover the effect that public grassroots opinion has had
on its formulation and content. Although studies and written testimonies can be
powerful tools in persuading local, state, and national lawmakers to support legislation,
personal messages and visits from constituents are the primary means of effective
communication that catch lawmakers’ attention (Forsyth, 2009). An example of a community-based organization that is comprised of advocacy groups that can be mobilized to speak and advocate for its programs is the Cooperative Extension System (CES), a nationwide non-credit educational agency of the state’s land grant universities and of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which has university-based state, district or county offices in each state.

A beginning step in expanding and strengthening the advocacy efforts for the community college is to review, revise, and expand its knowledge base of its service area community members and their leaders in terms of their perceptions and understanding of the community college. That is, community leaders’ perceptions and understanding of the college could be helpful information in developing strategies to expand the college’s advocacy efforts. Currently, few studies exist that focus on external stockholders’ perceptions and, specifically, on community leaders’ perceptions of the community college and/or its president. The focus of this study is to investigate and describe ways that selected community leaders perceive their community college and its president in their respective service area for six community colleges. In doing so, this study may serve as an initial step in helping community colleges increase much-needed advocacy and will also contribute to the existing body of literature in the field of adult and continuing education.
Background and Statement of the Problem

Although the genesis of the American community college is the founding in 1901 of the nation’s first two-year publicly supported junior college, Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois, the findings and recommendations contained in the 1947 report from the President’s Commission on Higher Education had a significant impact on the community college movement in the United States. This report “…. would forever change the role, scope, image, and mission of the public junior college” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 25) and, indeed, represents the beginning of the comprehensive community college as it is known today. The President’s Commission on Higher Education (1947) recommended the establishment of a network of publicly supported two-year postsecondary education institutions. These institutions were to be called community colleges, a name that was readily accepted and that placed the community at the center of the mission of these institutions. Community colleges, the Commission claimed, should be within reach of all Americans, charge little or no tuition, serve as cultural centers for the community, offer continuing education for adults as well as technical and general education, be locally controlled, and be part of the nation’s higher education network (Vaughan, 1997).

The movement toward the establishment of community college systems in each of the states varied in focus. Because this study focuses on six community colleges located in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, the institutions in these three states are the examples given here.
North Carolina’s approach to establishing its community college system stressed economic development as that state’s primary need. Beginning in the late 1950s with a system of industrial education centers and community colleges, North Carolina, through passage of the Omnibus Higher Education Act in 1963, designated such institutions as comprehensive community colleges (Brooks & Others, 1997). Today, North Carolina’s system of 58 community colleges provides access to the state’s adult population. The colleges are located strategically throughout the state within thirty miles of 95 percent of the state’s citizens (Klein & Associates, 1992). Although North Carolina’s community colleges are comprehensive in terms of their educational programs, their emphasis has been, and continues to be, on workforce preparedness and economic development.

South Carolina’s technical college system, established in 1961 to provide technical education centers, is viewed as that state’s principal centerpiece for attracting new industry and preparing the workforce for new and existing industries (Duffy, 1997). Although South Carolina’s two-year postsecondary institutions are comprehensive in terms of program offerings, they are called technical colleges rather than community colleges.

Virginia’s community college system began with legislation first passed in 1964 that established the Department of Technical Education, followed in 1966 with legislation that established the Department of Community Colleges, with the goals that these institutions were to be accessible, comprehensive, and serve the citizens in their
communities with lifelong learning (Basset, 1997; Graham, 1995; Vaughan, 1987). A 2003 study of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) found that in the fall of 2002, the VCCS educated 63 percent of all Virginians enrolled as undergraduates in the state and was the largest provider of higher education services to those at risk of being left behind from transitioning from an industrial-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Virginia Community College System, 2003). The study concludes that the VCCS plays a significant role in ensuring Virginia’s economic future while enhancing the productivity of Virginia’s workforce.

As these three states exemplify for the nation as a whole, certain differences exist in the formation, organization, and management of community college systems and their individual community colleges throughout the fifty states and the several United States (U.S.) territories. However, common threads among them lend a sense of unity and commonality to the nation’s community colleges. This commonality is demonstrated by several facts: a) many community colleges began as two-year extensions of secondary education and were often called junior colleges; b) they provide access to higher education for their communities; c) they are accessible to community members; and d) their missions target the specific needs of their community.

The designation, junior college, prevailed for more than fifty years, and as the numbers of these institutions grew and their roles expanded, junior colleges started offering vocational and technical training programs to meet the workforce development
needs of their communities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Koos, 1924; Ratcliff, 1994). Due to this focus on vocational and technical training, many junior colleges began to be called vocational or technical colleges or schools early in their history. Nationally, vocational education and training had found its genesis with the passage in 1917 of the Smith-Hughes Act, which provided for the establishment and promotion of vocational education with programs in agriculture, trades, and industrial education in both secondary and postsecondary education. Although these vocational programs grew slowly, by the 1960s their enrollments outpaced those of liberal arts courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The growth of vocational and technical education was augmented by federal funds made available to community colleges through the Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its later amendments. Today, vocational education remains prominent in community college curricula, thereby supporting one of the colleges’ main functions, i.e., workforce development (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

The labels, junior college and vocational or technical school, still exist to some degree in the minds of some people when speaking of their community college (Levin, 2001). The perception sometimes associated with these labels is that the quality of education provided by community colleges may be less than that of a four-year degree-granting higher education institution, thus suggesting that community colleges are inferior, less prestigious, and of lower quality than other institutions in higher education (Brooks, 2009; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2009; Levin, 2001). These perceptions of inferiority and lower quality than four-year institutions may have several
sources. One such source may be the established criteria associated with the passing of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act and the 1937 George-Dean Act that determined the allocation of federal funds for vocational and technical education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). These criteria referred to programs and courses approved to receive federal funding and offered at junior or community colleges as less than college grade. Cohen and Brawer report that, at the time, the U.S. Office of Education considered programs of trade and industrial education to be lower than college standard if they met the following criteria: a) college entrance requirements are not prerequisites for admission, i.e., admission is ‘open admissions’; b) the program objective is to prepare students for employment in industry; c) the program does not lead to a degree; and d) the program is not required to conform to conditions that govern a regular college course.

A review of the literature reveals a variety of perceptions and views of the community college that are held by scholars and the public. Cohen and Brawer (2008) posit, “The public’s view of community colleges … seems to be shifting toward a view of the institutions as occupational training centers” (p. 279). Brooks (2009) suggests that community colleges enjoy little prestige, and Fitzpatrick (2009) suggests that:

Many politicians and their well-heeled constituents may be under the impression that a community college — as described in a promo for NBC's upcoming comedy Community — is a ‘loser college for remedial teens, 20-something dropouts, middle-aged divorcées and old people keeping their minds active as they circle the drain of eternity.’ But there's at least one Ivy Leaguer who is
trying to help Americans get past the stereotypes and start thinking about community college not as a dumping ground but as one of the best tools the U.S. has to dig itself out of the current economic hole. His name: Barack Obama.

(para. 2)

Fischer (2008, 2009) suggests that community members view community colleges as anchors in their communities, which is a desirable view that is not supported by empirically derived evidence. Fitzpatrick (2009) reports that President Obama believes community colleges to be one of the best tools the nation has at its disposal to help the current economy. Other citizens and leaders see community colleges as leading the nation out of the current economic crisis (Boulard, 2009; Dembicki, 2009a, 2009b; “Duncan, Biden team,” 2009; Fischer, 2009a; Latham 2009; Synder, 2009), as economic engines in the community (“In tough times,” 2008), and the gateway to greater economic opportunity for the nation’s diverse communities – urban, suburban and rural (Chong, 2010). Further, Katsinas (2007) suggests that rural community colleges are the land grant institutions of the 21st century.

Do these views, labels, and perceptions accurately reflect those held by community members and, specifically, those of community leaders? How do community leaders perceive the community college and its president? Knowledge of such perceptions could serve to inform community college leaders and, in turn, be used to help establish and educate advocacy groups, whose members can then advocate and lobby for the community college.
Organized advocacy and lobbying efforts by community members have proven beneficial for colleges that have sought an increase in their local tax levies (Miller & Holt, 2005). However, Gould (2008) posits that “… too few colleges have organized effective advocacy efforts” (para. 2) and that more investment in advocacy is needed. Michael McCall (2009), Chief Executive Officer of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, stresses the importance of increased advocacy and suggests that constituents do not understand how community colleges are funded, and that in these critical economic times, increased advocacy efforts by colleges are needed. Additionally, Katsinas (2005) concludes that community college operating budgets have been and will continue to be threatened, and that a contributing factor is the “… institutions’ diminished capacity to lobby effectively for increased funding” (p. 29).

The evidence of the need and urgency to support community colleges and develop advocacy strategies for funding and setting policy is clear. Such advocacy strategies should include well-informed community leaders in the college’s service area who will support and speak out for the college. An initial step in developing advocacy strategies is to explore community leaders’ perceptions of the college and its president, to assess their understanding and opinions about the college, and to use this information to mold and train community leaders in the advocacy process.
Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions held by community leaders of the role of their community college, with particular emphasis on the views that these leaders hold as to how well the college serves the educational needs of the people residing in its service area. Attention is directed also to discerning the values that these leaders assign to their community college in building and sustaining the local economy. Another important thrust of the study concerns the expectations held by community leaders about the role of the president of their community college in involving the college in the affairs of its service area community. Understanding community leader perceptions and expectations can assist community colleges in developing much needed strategies to enhance and improve the advocacy efforts of the college. The research objectives of this study, stated as research questions, are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions held by community leaders of the role of their community college in contributing to the quality of life of citizens who reside in the service area?

2. Do community leaders value their community college’s programs in contributing to and building a dynamic economy for its service area and making education accessible to the citizens who reside in the service area?

3. Are the perceptions held by these leaders about the role of their community college congruent with the documented mission of the college?
4. Given the multitude of community organizations and agencies within the service area of the college, is the community college viewed as a team member in collaborating with these community-based organizations in serving the needs of the citizens who reside in the service area?

5. How do community leaders perceive the president of their community college as a community leader who connects the college to the community through his or her active participation in the affairs of the community and collaboration with leaders of other community-based public and private organizations?

**Significance of the Study**

Today, the nation’s community colleges face a plethora of challenges that can affect their ability to meet the needs of their communities. Many of these challenges have their genesis in public policy and funding issues at the local, state, and national levels. Some of these challenges could possibly be met, averted or altered by a strong advocacy effort on behalf of and led by the college (Gould, 2008; Katsinas, 2005). Such advocacy should include well-informed community leaders and members who are knowledgeable about the college and its programs.

Currently, few studies exist in the literature that explore and describe community leaders’ or community members’ perceptions and knowledge of the community college. The findings of this inquiry will be significant for practice first by providing information for community college leaders regarding ways that selected
community leaders perceive the college in their service area community and to what extent the college is connected, or is perceived to be connected, to its service area community. Second, the findings can inform community college leaders about selected community leaders’ perceptions of the college president in terms of leadership in the community. That is, the findings can show the ways that community leaders perceive the president’s ability to connect with and involve the college in the affairs of its service area community. Third, college leaders can use the findings to develop marketing strategies and public relations programs to inform and educate community leaders and other community members about the programs and services of the college that may be misunderstood or not known. Finally, the findings will add to the body of research by broadening and clarifying the understanding of community leaders’ perceptions of the community college and its mission, and by describing the expectations held by community leaders of the president’s external leadership responsibilities (Vaughan, 1986). The findings may have implications for further research that relate to the perceptions of other external stakeholders of the college and of the president.

Limitations of the Study

As part of this study, interviews were conducted with participants who were identified as community leaders in the community college’s service area. The choice of participants for the study was restricted to those community leaders who held positions as elected or appointed community leaders and who were identified as positional...
leaders, as defined in the literature (Boone and Associates, 1997). These positional leaders were assumed to have knowledge of the college and its president and to have influence in their communities. However, in reality they may not necessarily have had such influence in the community or possess a working knowledge of the community college or its president, which, as such, is a limitation of the study. In addition, the study is limited to those positional community leaders who agreed to be interviewed (the majority of which were Caucasian males) and, therefore, does not necessarily represent a cross-section of community leaders. Therefore, care must be taken in evaluating the findings and not generalizing them to represent all community leaders; the findings are representative only of those leaders who participated in the study.

Any research involving participant interviews is limited to the interpretation of the questions by the participant, the potential of the interviewer to lead or guide the questions asked during the interview, and the bias of the researcher in interpreting the data. Therefore, interpretation of the data from the interviews may have led to inconsistencies in the findings.

Finally, the study is limited both geographically and categorically. Geographically, the study is limited to community colleges whose service areas are in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Categorically, the study is limited to rural community colleges (Katsinas & Lacey, 1996). Therefore, the findings should not be generalized or extended to be representative of all community colleges and their service areas.
Glossary of Key Concepts

**Community:** Community is defined in geographical, social, and political contexts for this study. First, a community is a geographical area that can be mapped with identifiable physical boundaries within which individuals reside and interact. Second, community can refer to a specific group of people with common interests, identities, and shared values (Boone, 1992b, 1997). Third, for this study, community is sometimes referred to as the *service area* of the college, and is defined by districts or counties that have separate identities and governance, and have been grouped together by legislation.

**Community-based organizations:** Community-based organizations in both the public and private sectors are groups formed to provide specific functions in the community. These specific functions support social, cultural, educational, public service, or economic development goals within the community.

**Community leaders:** Community leaders are individuals who represent social, cultural, educational, economic, or other public interest groups in the community. They are considered guardians of the values, customs, and beliefs of the groups they represent and may serve in formal or informal positions. Community leaders influence, help shape, and direct the plans and growth of their organizations and the community (Boone, 1992b; Boone and Associates, 1997).

**Comprehensive community college:** The comprehensive community college is a two-year public institution of higher education that is regionally accredited. It offers
certificates, diplomas, and associate degrees in college transfer and occupational and technical terminal curricula as well as short-term workforce development programs and community interest courses. The comprehensive community college provides programs and services that helps lead to stronger and more vital communities, is a member of a regional accreditation agency, and may be a member of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Vaughan, 2006).

**Linkage:** Linkage is the temporary blending of two systems into one system through planned interaction to achieve common goals. Systemic linkage is the process whereby the elements of at least two systems come to be articulated so that in some ways they function as a unitary system (Boone, 1992b; Loomis, 1959).

**Open systems organization:** An open systems organization has an interdependent relationship with its external environment and is sustained by the flow of energy from its environment, then through the organization, and back to the environment. In this study, the community college is an open systems organization; that is, the college’s service area is the college’s external environment, and the flow of energy represents the inputs or resources the college needs to produce outputs for its external environment, i.e., its service area (Scott & Davis, 2007).

**Perception:** Perception is the way that people make sense of and acquire knowledge about their external environment. It is the process of interpreting information gathered from external stimuli and developing an internal representation of the perceiver’s world (Levine, 2000; Maund, 2003).
**Service area:** The College’s service area is the geographical and politically defined area or areas identified by districts, counties, municipalities, and regions, in which the community college provides educational services (Boone 1992b). In this study, counties that are contiguous and have separate identities and governance and that have been grouped together by legislation or Community College State Board action are referred to as the *service area* of the college.

**Social System:** A social system is an aggregate of people linked together in a network or system of social relationships guided by a pattern of structured and shared symbols (Boone, 1992b).

**System:** A system is any entity, conceptual or physical, which consists of interdependent parts that together form a unitary whole (Boone, 1992b). The programming process and community-based programming are systems. The community college service area also is a system.
CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework for this exploratory descriptive study is derived from concepts gleaned from the professional fields of adult, community college, and higher education, and the disciplines of sociology, psychology, economics, and political science. The study investigates ways that selected community leaders perceive the community college and its president in the community.

Concepts

The concepts that frame this research are: a) perception, b) open systems theory of organizations, c) community-based programming, d) community, e) community leaders, f) linkage, g) community college, and h) community college president.

Perception

Perception is the process through which individuals assign meaning to the world around them. Bartley (1980) describes perception as the process by which an organism interprets, assigns meaning to, and relates itself to its environment and surroundings. Asch (1946) describes perception as the selection and organization of environmental stimuli to provide meaningful experiences to the perceiver. According to McBurney and Collings (1984), perception involves five processes. First, perception is selective; that is, individuals are selective of all the events around them. Second, perception is adaptive; animals and human subjects learn to adapt to their environments. Third,
perception is veridical; individuals perceive the world as it really is. Fourth, perception is controlled by patterns; a response to stimuli can be affected by their distribution in time and space. Lastly, perception is active; individuals spend time exploring, reviewing and structuring their environments and, in the process, develop perceptions of their environments.

Perception is a decision process based on stimuli that humans process (Bruner, 1973). Bruner describes this decision process as one in which the perceiver or his nervous system decides that something is perceived as one thing or another. Bartley (1980) postulates that everyone is aware of his or her environment, but all elements in this environment may not be of equal value in the perception process. This phenomenon leads individuals who have knowledge in common, identical environments, and shared real world experiences to perceive their worlds and situations differently from each other.

Perception is dependent on preferences and expectations of what is to be perceived and on previous experiences. Forgus (1966) suggests that perception is the superset, with learning and thinking as subsets. In the process of obtaining information about its environment, an organism stores facts that are used to develop models against which cues are judged. Neisser (1976) describes these internal models as schemata that are internal to the perceiver, modifiable to experience, and specific to what is perceived. A schema may be considered to be an idea or hypothesis that guides the process of perception. However, a schema is not perception itself, but a frame that guides
perception. Similarly, Geert (1983) argues that perception is the particular process of experiencing and organizing stimuli into some type of order in one’s mind (i.e., learning). This organization of stimuli is different for each individual and, thus, affects each person’s ability to formulate identical perceptions of objects and events.

Central to this descriptive study are the perceptions that community leaders hold of the role of both the community college and its president in the community. It is assumed, for the purposes of this study, that community leaders are knowledgeable about the educational needs of the people who reside in the community and can accurately define and describe the role of the community college in responding to those needs. Community leaders’ perceptions are the product of their experiences in the community and other contexts, the meaning assigned to those experiences, and the sanctions or rewards vetted out by peers (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997). Considerable truth is manifest in the axiom, ‘Facts do not reside within the person but in the person’s perceptions of the facts.’ Thus, perception is personal but generally viewed as framed within the context of experiences and the meaning assigned to those experiences. Perceptions held by community leaders of the community college are the products of their exposure to and experiences with the college, their understanding of community needs, and their aspirations for their community.
Open systems theory of organizations originates in general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1956; Boulding, 1956) and was introduced by Katz and Kahn (1966). Modern organization theorists use open systems theory concepts in a framework to model organizations (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006; Scott, 2008; Scott & Davis, 2007). Bolman and Deal (2008) state that “… organizations are open systems dealing with a changing, challenging, and erratic environment” (p. 31). Scott (2008) posits that open systems theory of organizations emphasizes the importance of the environment as it constrains, shapes, penetrates, and renews the organization. Scott and Davis (2007) suggest that in the open systems perspective of organizations: a) great attention is devoted to information flows from, and sense-making activities of, the organization’s environment; b) organizations create and appropriate knowledge, know-how, and meaning from their environments; and c) an interdependence exists between the organization and its environment.

In the open systems conceptual framework, an organization’s environment is considered the ultimate source of resources, such as materials, energy, and information, which are vital to the success and survival of the organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Scott & Davis, 2007). The fundamental premise of open systems theory is that organizations are sustained by the flow of energy and resources that comes from their environment (either internal or external), through the organization, and then back to the environment. This flow of energy and resources is cyclical, whereby organizations
receive inputs from their environment, transform them, and export outputs (products) back to their environment. These outputs may return to the organization as revised or complex inputs (Birnbaum, 1988; Scott & Davis, 2007).

The Community College as an Open System

Organizational and systems theories have been used as conceptual frameworks to study higher education institutions, including community colleges (Birnbaum, 1988; Fairchilds, 2001; Levin, 1997). Birnbaum used the open systems perspective to model colleges and universities and their internal environments. Levin studied the community college in four organizational cultural frames, and Fairchilds used an open systems model of organizations to investigate the effects of community on community college programs resulting from informal inputs. Thus, the open systems conceptual framework of an organization aligns with higher education institutions as organizations (Birnbaum, 1988; Fairchilds, 2001).

In framing the community college as an open systems organization for this study (see Figure 2.1), the college is the open systems organization, and the environment is the college’s external environment, defined as its service area. As a community-based organization, the community college relies on its service area (external environment) to provide inputs such as information, knowledge, financial resources, materials, and community support in order to fulfill its mission while providing a demand for its
Figure 2.1 Open Systems Organizational Framework for the Community College
programs and services, or outputs. Organizational inputs needed from the college’s external environment come in the form of, but are not limited to: a) students, b) employees, c) demands for services, d) demands for labor, e) financial support, f) political support, g) information and knowledge, and h) social legitimacy (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The community college uses these inputs to develop outputs that are exported back to its external environment in the form of, but not limited to: a) educational programs and services, b) workforce preparedness programs, c) cultural programs, and d) support for small businesses to meet the educational, economic, social, and cultural needs of the community.

The ebb and flow of demand for a constantly changing variety of college programs and services is an ongoing dynamic and cyclical process (Bolman & Deal, 2008). An integral and critical part of this cyclical process is the interdependence and flow of information between the college and its service area and the knowledge gained by the college of its service area (Scott & Davis, 2007). This reciprocal information flow enables the college to make adjustments in its programs and services to meet changing community needs (Vaughan, 1997).

The open systems model of organizations – with its elements of interdependence with the environment, information flow with the environment, and knowledge appropriation from the environment – aligns with the community college’s role as a community-based organization. This alignment of the open systems framework and the community college is supported by: a) the President’s Commission on Higher
Education (1947) report, which addresses the need of the college to adapt to its community environment via its course offerings; b) Gleazer’s (2000) description of the college’s symbiotic relationship with its community; c) Boone and Associates’ (1997) community-based programming model for community colleges; and d) Vaughan’s (1997) statement that “[n]o community college exists in a vacuum; as a community-based organization, the community college must interact with the sociocultural, economic, technical, and political environments in which it functions” (p. 40).

Therefore, in the open systems conceptual framework, the community college is highly dependent on its external environment (i.e., service area), which is its ultimate source for all of the inputs such as resources, materials, energy, and information needed for the college’s survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Scott & Davis, 2007). Thus, maintenance and support of its service area should be of utmost importance for the community college. How then does the college gain knowledge and information and identify needs from its service area? One proven method used to analyze and scan the external environment is the process of community-based programming for community colleges (Boone and Associates, 1997).

**Community-Based Programming**

Using Boone’s community-based programming model, community colleges can link with their service area community members and identify key leaders to gather information, gain knowledge, and make sense of and create meaning from their external...
environments. In this way, the community-based programming model is integral to the community college as an open systems organization and, as applied in this study, is critical to the identification and development of leaders who can help acquire the necessary inputs and determine the outputs for their community college.

Community-based programming is a conceptual process that can be used by community colleges to link with their community and its leadership in order to improve the quality of life of the people residing in their service area (Boone and Associates, 1997). Community-based programming is issue-driven, involves collaboration and coalition building, and defines the community college as the leader or catalyst for initiating and facilitating collaboration among its external environment’s leaders, community members, organizations, and agencies to address identified critical community issues (Boone and Associates). Desired community improvements may be achieved through social and economic changes that reflect the interests of both community leaders and members (Boone and Associates, 1997).

Community-based programming involves a series of interconnected processual tasks that, for community college leaders and administrators, include: a) studying the external environment to gain knowledge of the service area, b) scanning the environment, c) mapping the college’s publics, d) identifying community leaders, e) forming coalitions to address external environmental issues, and f) providing leadership in measuring outcomes attained in the resolution of community issues (Boone and Associates, 1997). Desired outcomes of the community-based programming process
are: a) the identification of major issues important to the community and its members, b) the creation of a unified force that cultivates teamwork among all members and stakeholder groups in the community, c) the acceptance of community expectations and the development of a broad-based community system to address current and future issues, and d) the emergence and development of broadly representative community leaders (Boone and Associates, 1997, p. 4).

In the community-based programming model for community colleges, community leaders are critical components of the process of accessing and involving the community in gathering information about the college and its external environment. In this study, the concept of community-based programming is used to provide a framework to help define the context of community and to narrow and focus this study on community leaders (which is discussed later in its own right as a concept in the framework of this study).

**Community**

Community is a key descriptor in defining and mapping the external context and dynamics of the geographic, political, social, and psychological areas in which the community college functions, particularly in terms of providing educational services and programs to the people. The geographical context defines community as an area that can be mapped with identifiable physical boundaries within which individuals reside and interact, and which has a political designation. The societal context of
community refers to the grouping of individuals by socioeconomic characteristics and the ways that these individuals acquire and maintain their identities through common interests and shared values. The psychological context of community acknowledges that over time individuals develop strong bonds and a sense of climate, feeling, or emotional connection, as in the phrase, ‘developing a sense of community’ (AACC, 1988; Boone, 1997; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Furthermore, the concept of community is central to the designation of the community college and its mission, as identified in the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education. The identification of the larger community and the many smaller communities that the community college serves, and with which it must connect, is critical to fulfilling its mission (Boone, 1992a, 1992b, 1997; Miller & Kissinger, 2007).

Loomis and Beegle (1957) define community as a social system that encompasses a territorial unit within which members perform most of the day-to-day activities in order to meet common needs. Homan (2004) identifies a community as a number of people who have something in common that connects them. Lofquist (1993) suggests that a state of community exists when two or more people work together to reach mutually desirable goals. Such goals may include, among others, providing for a vibrant economy that assures members of the community a reasonable standard of living and lifelong education (Boone, 1992b; Gleazer 1980; Vaughan, 2006). Loomis (1960) and Boone (1992b) use the concept of a social system to define and analyze community and the several elements and master processes that hold the community
together and assure its continued functioning and the continuing socialization of its members. The contexts and characteristics that define a community of individuals in a society help in defining the community or communities that make up a community college’s service area.

Boone, Safrit, and Jones (2002) identify five characteristics that may be used to further define community: a) a group of people, b) individuals with shared interests, attitudes, goals and activities, c) individuals with a common identity, d) frequent and continuing interaction, and e) people who live in an identifiable territory. Within this defined context of community, Boone, Safrit, and Jones further describe a variety of functional communities, or *subcommunities*, that exist in the college’s service area and with which the college must link in order to fulfill its community-based mission. These subcommunities are identified as: a) the political community that designates the geographic areas, systems of governance, and city and town districts, b) the educational community that includes the educational organizations and institutions in the service area, c) the economic community of business and industry, chambers of commerce, and finance, d) the support services community that supports health facilities and other aspects of human services, e) the social control community that includes law enforcement, the courts, and correction services, and f) other subcommunities, such as cultural, religious, philosophical, and ethnic communities.

In the open systems framework for this study, the college’s service area community represents the college’s external environment in which the college must
interact with and support with its products and services. It is in community, a social system, where all societal, political, cultural, economic, and educational activities occur that ultimately affect the college. It is through these activities that the college and community are linked in their interdependent and symbiotic relationship (Gleazer, 2000; Scott & Davis, 2007). Understanding the concept of community enables one to grasp and map the dynamics of interactions among and between members of the community as well as among and between formal and informal leaders of the organized groups in the community (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997). An understanding of community allows an understanding of the ways that these patterned interactions are an integral part of the social organization and culture of the community.

Community Leaders

Leaders constitute an important element of the notion of community as a social system. Leaders, by reputation and heritage, as well as a host of other means, manage to acquire the skills needed to persuade and to influence the decisions and actions of members of the community. Community leaders represent a particular culture and that culture’s concerns about community issues, and they have influence among community members (Boone, 1992b). Leaders are sometimes referred to as the ‘gatekeepers’ of the community, whose opinions are highly respected and, importantly, mirror the beliefs and values of their followers (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997).
Community leader support is critical for the community college to be effective in its service area and to identify and resolve issues in order to improve the quality of life and social well-being for all members of the community (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002; Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997). Boone, Safrit, and Jones emphasize the importance of identifying formal and informal community leaders who, by position and reputation, have acquired an ability to identify the needs of their followers, serve as spokespersons for relevant stakeholder groups, and play a critical role in transforming their respective organizations and communities. Formal leaders are highly visible, are accepted in their leadership roles, and are recognized within the community. They are identified as those community members who have become leaders by virtue of their position, social participation, and/or reputation. Typically, they have access to and are in control of the resources that the college needs in order to operate and fulfill its mission (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997). In contrast, informal leaders may not be visible to the groups or organizations they represent, but they wield considerable influence on the behavior and actions of their groups. Their opinions are highly valued, and they are often considered gatekeepers of the values, customs, and beliefs of the social or community-based organizations that they represent (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997).

Identifying and connecting with formal and informal leaders is critical so that their support and input can be obtained to direct the college in its role in the community. Boone, Safrit, and Jones (2002) offer five categories for identifying formal and informal community leaders: a) positional, b) reputational, c) personal influence, d) decision-
making, and e) social participation. Positional leaders hold positions of authority, make key decisions, and are highly visible in the community. They are considered formal leaders because of their positions. These leaders have the power to influence decisions in their organizations and control the resources of the organizations that they represent, which could be directed to support the college in its role in the community.

Reputational leaders are those leaders whose influence on decisions is based on their reputation alone. Reputational leaders may be visible and easily identifiable, or they may work quietly behind the scenes to influence decision-making in the community.

Personal influence leaders are community members who are respected by their fellow community members. Their opinions and advice are considered valuable and they are able to influence the decisions and behavior of others. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) suggest that such influential leaders may have a high degree of social status and social participation. Decision-making leaders contribute and participate in decision-making in the community and are active and instrumental in community issues. Social participation leaders are those leaders who hold membership, participate, and hold office in volunteer organizations.

A continuing and sustained reciprocity exists between the community and its leaders. Community leaders are viewed as reliable sources of information and their opinions about courses of action to be taken in response to community needs and issues are highly valued (Boone, Safrit & Jones, 2002). In this inquiry, the identification of and interaction with selected community leaders is critical to obtaining and recording
their perceptions about the role of the community college and its president. In the conceptual framework of this study, community leaders are assumed to be the lynchpin between the community college and its external environment, i.e., its service area. Furthermore, community leaders’ perceptions of the college and its president may be critical for the college in its efforts to acquire the necessary resources and inputs to fulfill its mission.

Positional community leaders were selected as participants for this study to represent leaders in the college’s service area. The selection of positional leaders, classified as formal leaders, is a limitation of this study because they may not necessarily reflect the opinions of informal community leaders whose opinions may be more highly valued by members of the community than those of formal leaders (Pettitt & Gillett-Karam, 1997). The selection of positional leaders as participants in this study is based on the following criteria: a) they provide leadership for a variety of community-based organizations and institutions; b) they make decisions for and influence the direction of their organizations; c) they are either elected or appointed by community members and other leaders in the community, which suggests that they are respected and identified by community members as leaders; and d) they are easily identifiable. Positional leaders can influence the role and actions of their organizations in support of the community college. Moreover, by virtue of their position, they have an established platform from which they can speak to support the college and help in creating advocacy groups for the college.
The concept of linkage may be defined as the process whereby the elements of two or more social systems can be blended so that they function, in some ways, as a single system, sharing resources and services to achieve common goals and objectives (Boone, Safrit, and Jones, 2002). In the conceptual framework for this study, linkage connects the college with the community, and the president with community leaders. Community leaders, through the process of linkage, are identified, interact with the president, learn about the college, and collaborate with college staff to set community-based goals and specific goals for their organizations.

Linkage is a key concept in the conceptual framework of this study in which the community college is framed as an open systems organization (see Figure 2.1). As an open systems organization, the community college must appropriate knowledge, know-how, and meaning from its external environment/service area community (Scott & Davis, 2007). Within this framework, interdependence exists between the college and its service area community, which is assumed to be the ultimate source of all materials, resources, and information for the college’s survival as a system (Scott & Davis, 2007). That is, linkage provides a process for the college to acquire information from, make sense of, and maintain its interdependent relationship with its service area.

Boone (1992b) uses linkage in his community-based programming model, which can be applied to linking the community college with its external environment within the open systems framework of this study. Boone’s linkage model consists of
five elements: a) scanning the external environment of the organization; b) studying, mapping, and analyzing an organization’s publics; c) identifying and ranking the target publics and stakeholder groups; d) identifying and interfacing with leaders of the target publics and stakeholder groups; and e) collaborating with leaders of the target publics and stakeholders to identify, assess, and analyze their specific needs.

First, external environmental scanning, as applied in this study, provides critical information for the community college regarding current trends and issues in the social, cultural, economic, political, and technological contexts of its service area. As part of this process, the external scan tests the congruency of the college’s mission and management structures with emerging trends and forces that affect the college’s service area. Second, studying, mapping, and analyzing the college’s publics and stakeholder groups helps gain an understanding of the people who reside in the service area. This understanding is derived from a study of the lifestyles, heritage, socioeconomic status, culture, and patterns of interaction and normative standards of members of the community served by the college. These patterns of interaction, social differentiation, leadership, power, values, and value systems are important to the understanding of the diversity of social, cultural, and political subdivisions within the college’s service area. Third, identifying and ranking the target publics and stakeholder groups served by the college serves to ascertain those groups and publics whose goals and objectives align with the mission of the college. Although the goal of the college is to serve all members of its service area, priority should be given to those community members and
stakeholder groups who best align with the college’s current mission. Fourth, identifying and interfacing with leaders of each target public and relevant stakeholder group are critical steps in the linkage process. Leaders hold the key to the adoption of practices and policies of their groups and thereby are instrumental in guiding their organizations or groups to support and partner with the college to accomplish common goals. Finally, once community leaders are identified, the college can begin to collaborate with them to identify and determine the needs of the community in terms of programs and services that the college should develop, enhance, or grow.

Linkages occur between the college and the community and between the president and community leaders through planned interaction and collaboration for the identification and pursuance of common goals. Through the process of linkage, the community and its leaders can learn about the college and its programs and staff, and from this experience form their opinions and develop their perceptions of the college. Linkage is therefore an essential component of the local community college’s planning, mission development, and programming process. The overarching goal of linkage is first to identify and second to connect with the college’s publics and stakeholder groups for accurately determining the educational, social, cultural, and economic development needs of the service area. To be effective in reaching this goal, the president must link with the target publics and stakeholder groups. In this study, linkage provides information about ways that community leaders perceive the college and its president in connecting with the community and its leaders. In addition, linkage is a process through
which the college can maintain its interdependent relationships with community leaders and the community.

Community College

The role of the community college in the community is “to provide access to postsecondary education programs and services that lead to stronger, more vital communities” (Vaughan, 2006, p. 3). In this role, the college and its president work with community members, their leaders, and other community-based organizations to resolve community issues by addressing the social, cultural, intellectual, and economic needs of the community through educational services (Boone, 1997; Katsinas, 2007; Levin, 2001; Vaughan, 2006). Community colleges are sometimes viewed as vital to the future of America as the knowledge-based global economy continues to develop and emerge from the current global economic crisis. Frank Chong (2010), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Community Colleges, U.S. Department of Education, posits that “community colleges [are] the lynchpin in the economic recovery and promoting prosperity of this great country.”

The educational needs of individual communities throughout America are in a mode of constant change, and community colleges are challenged to meet these ever changing needs. Although the missions of community colleges contain similar overarching concepts, each college’s mission should be localized for its service area community; that is, the mission should be community-based. Having an individualized
and community-based mission is the hallmark of the local community college. The missions of many community colleges are shaped by similar commitments: a) to serve all members of society through open access, b) to provide comprehensive educational programs, c) to serve the community as a community-based institution of higher education, d) to serve as an institution that focuses on teaching and learning, and e) to foster lifelong learning (Vaughan, 2006). As such, the community college is often referred to as “the people’s college” (AACC, 1988; Boone, 1997; Vaughan, 1997). This designation implies that through ‘open door’ admissions, anyone is accepted who wants to come to the community college and who can benefit academically or through other skills programs offered at the college. This concept of open access, or open door admissions, ensures that the community college, as a true democratic institution, serves community members in their quest to receive low-cost, accessible education and training programs. This accessibility to the college and its programs allows community members to pursue educational goals that may assist them in achieving a better quality of life and economic prosperity that will support and help improve their community’s local economy.

The comprehensive mission of the college is to offer a variety of educational programs and services for its service area. That is, the college’s commitment to fulfill the differing needs of multiple constituents and remain comprehensive necessitates offering a variety of educational programs and services. Fundamentally, the college’s role should be to provide programs and services that help lead to strong, vital
communities (Vaughan, 2006). Bouge (1950) suggests that the primary role of the college is to serve the people in the community. In its community-based role, the college’s responsibility is to scan its service area to determine the needs of stakeholders, community groups, and the at-large community, and to develop appropriate programs, services, and partnerships that address identified community needs (Boone, 1992a, 1997; Vaughan, 2006).

The general educational needs of people residing in most communities include: a) college programs that permit students to take courses in technical and vocational training; b) specific training that fulfills the workforce development needs of local and international businesses and industries; c) credit and noncredit courses for certificates, diplomas, and degrees; and d) programs that permit students to transfer to a bachelor’s degree program (Vaughan, 2006). Other needs include course offerings and activities that relate to recreational, cultural, and social needs of the community. In many communities, the community college is viewed as the area’s cultural center, because it offers programs in the arts and other cultural activities that add to the quality of life of the community.

Roles of the community college that have been identified and discussed in the literature include leader, catalyst, anchor, citizen, and problem solver (AACC, 1988; Boone and Associates, 1997; Fischer, 2008, 2009; Gleazer, 1980; Vaughan 2007). In these roles, the college’s charge is to help in leading community renewal and rebuilding efforts. This leadership role in community renewal is presented in the report by the
Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, published by the AACC, entitled, *Building Communities: A Vision for the New Century* (AACC, 1988). The report suggests that the community college should help build communities and stresses the importance of its leadership role in building partnerships with local community-based organizations and their leaders who have shared values and common goals. The Commission proposes “. . . that *Building Communities* [italics added] become the rallying point for the community college of America” (p. 7). The process of providing leadership to build communities in the service area of the college, as the Commission recommends, supports the idea of framing the community college as an open systems organization (see Figure 2.1). In this framework, the interdependence between the environment and the organization illustrates the symbiotic relationship and reciprocal ties that bind the college with its community.

A joint study by the AACC and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) entitled, *The Knowledge Net* (AACC, 2000), reaffirms the ‘building communities’ call from the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (AACC, 1988). This study concludes that the ‘building communities’ concept encapsulates the mission of community colleges in the 21st century, and that community colleges hold the key to maintaining healthy communities and managing change. “No other institution is situated more favorably than the community college to help bring about necessary changes in knowledge, skills, perspectives, attitudes, and values” (AACC, 2000, p. 35). Also, Katsinas (2007) posits that “[Rural] community colleges are the land-grant
institutions of the 21st century. They provide both practical and liberal education for the working classes of our nation” (p. 71). Thus, the pivotal role of the community college in and for the community is both clear and critical.

In summary, the role of the community college in the community is to provide leadership to prepare the people of its service area, through education, to navigate the rapidly changing societal, educational, economic, political, and cultural environments of the 21st century. This role includes developing programs to help build and maintain a well-prepared and current workforce, promoting and contributing to economic development, providing academic programs that prepare students to enroll in and complete four-year education programs, creating civic and social support through education, and providing cultural enrichment (Boone, 1997; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). To be successful in its community-based mission and role also requires the college and its leadership to commit to linkages with community leaders and their organizations in collaborative efforts to determine the issues that confront the community and to develop the programs necessary to address the identified issues. Through connection and involvement with community leaders and their organizations in addressing these community issues, the college can cultivate and develop advocates to help in building continuous grassroots support for the community college.
**Community College President**

Community college presidents help direct and chart the educational, social, cultural, and economic life of the communities that their colleges serve. In this leadership role, community college presidents interact and link with community leaders, faculty, and students while making decisions that affect the lives of the citizens in the service area. A study by Vaughan (1986) of community college presidents found four specific leadership roles prevalent among presidents: a) to establish and interpret the college mission, b) to serve as the educational leader, c) to set the campus climate, and d) to be the external leader of the college in the community. This fourth role is critical in establishing relationships, partnerships, and coalitions with community leaders and organizations and is a focus of this study. This external leadership role requires much of the president’s time to build relationships with external constituents who, typically, are members of the business, financial, political, economic, governmental, social, cultural, and educational communities (AACC, 1988, 2000; Boone, 1997; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

A 2007 American Council on Education (ACE) report on the American college president posits that the college presidency combines two full-time jobs: managing and leading the on-campus constituencies (faculty, students, and staff) and working externally in the community with elected officials at all levels, leaders of community-based organizations, and potential donors (ACE, 2007). Each of these two roles has separate but equal responsibilities that require different skills, talents, and knowledge.
In this dual role, the president faces a multitude of challenges that have changed radically and multiplied drastically over the last two decades (ACE, 2007). These challenges are a result of dynamic changes in the socioeconomic, technological, and political forces in America and, indeed, the global community, which are reflected in changes in the economy and workplace, diversity of the people, standards of living, and societal norms. In addition, the constituencies with which college presidents are expected to work have expanded, thereby increasing the demands on college presidents and their institutions. Presidents today find themselves holding positions simultaneously as a “CEO of a large corporate enterprise, mayor of a multifarious polity, and academic leader of the college’s intellectual community” (ACE, 2007, p. 1).

In their external role in the community, college presidents report an expectation by community members that they become a part of the community’s leadership by serving on various boards, being members of civic organizations, and being visible (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Leist, 2007a; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Weisman and Vaughan (2007) report that presidents spend 34 percent of their time on external relationships, which includes time with high-ranking business and industry officials. In addition to building relationships with business and industry representatives, 97 percent of all community college presidents serve on corporate, nonprofit, or national advisory boards (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). These data are consistent with those found in the ACE (2007) report, which indicates that 92.8 percent of presidents of public associate degree institutions serve on at least
one nonprofit board. Additionally, community college presidents typically are members of service and civic clubs. The list of community activities for the community college president’s involvement and leadership is seemingly endless (Vaughan, 1986).

The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges report, *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century* (AACC, 1988), identifies the president as a vital link between the college and the community and, therefore, key to the process of community renewal and rebuilding. In this role, the president is expected to lead the efforts of the college in defining the college’s role in meeting constantly changing community needs. The community college, as a key player in helping with community renewal and rebuilding, and as led by its president, is charged to establish the *community* in which these community transformations occur (AACC, 1988, 2000; Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1989; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

Thus, as indicated in the literature, a 21st century community college president is encouraged and expected to take a leadership role in the college’s service area to link and build relationships and coalitions with community leaders and their organizations. Through these connections, the president can a) lead the college in developing educational programs and services, b) adapt the college’s mission to ensure that the college is responsive to the challenges of the rapidly changing external environments within its service area, and c) cultivate and identify community leader advocates that can speak out for and support the college (AACC, 1988, 2000; Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1989; Vaughan, 1986).
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 2.2) for this study was developed from the concepts presented in the previous sections: a) perception, b) open systems theory of organizations, c) community-based programming, d) community, e) community leaders, f) linkage, g) community college, and h) community college president. Central to the conceptual framework of this descriptive study is the perception of community leaders about the role of both the community college and its president in the community. It is assumed, for the purposes of this study, that community leaders are knowledgeable about the educational needs of the people who reside in the community and can accurately define and describe the role of the community college and its president in responding to these needs.

The overarching conceptual theory for this study is the open systems theory of organizations, which frames the community college as an open systems organization (see Figure 2.1) (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Scott, 2008). Within this framework, the college has an interdependent relationship with its external environment, or service area. Another concept that guides the development of the framework for this study is the community-based programming model for community colleges, developed by Boone and Associates (1997). This model guides and focuses this study, from the college as an open systems organization operating in its external environment to the college that links and collaborates with community leaders in its external environment. Through the
Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework for the Study of Selected Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the Role of the Community College and the Community College President in The Community
concept of linkage the college president and the college’s faculty and staff can
collaborate and connect with community leaders and community members to maintain
the interdependent relationship between the college and its service area.

The conceptual framework displayed in Figure 2.2 is comprised of concepts that
are defined as variables. Although no relationships are assumed among the effects of the
variables, the independent variable in the conceptual framework is community. It is
within the context of community that community leaders, a primary focus of this study,
evolve and acquire influence and that the college receives all of its resources to survive
and function as an open system. Although secondary to and representative of the
concept of community, community leaders have influence in shaping the thoughts and
actions of members of the community. As displayed in Figure 2.2, a continuing and
sustained reciprocity exists between the community and its leaders in this study’s
conceptual framework.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on the role of both the community college and its
president in the community, as perceived by community leaders or other key
stakeholders, reveals that little attention has been given to either topic. Studies on the
community college presidency that focus specifically on perceptions held by external
stakeholders are not readily found in the literature. Rather, recent studies on the
community college presidency focus on internal organizational perspectives and the role
and leadership aspects of the presidency as they relate to leading the college and leadership traits. These studies are derived from data and input gathered from college faculty, staff, and college presidents (Athans, 2000; Eddy, 2005; Esters, 2007; Fox, D., 2008; Fox, R., 2008; Hoopes, 2008; Kincl, 2007; Leist, 2007a, 2007b; Rowley, 2007; Snuggs, 2006). Therefore, the gap that exists in current research regarding external stakeholder perceptions of the role of the community college president in the community further justifies the significance of this study.

Recent studies that focus on the perceptions of the role of the community college have investigated stakeholder satisfaction and perceptions of the community college’s role in workforce, business, and economic development (Gossett, 2002; Lavender, 2007; Spencer, 2004) and state-wide strategic planning for community colleges where stakeholder perceptions were solicited (Corcoran, 2005; Ebbers & Gardner, 2003). Although studies on stakeholder perceptions of the community college are limited, the role of the college in the community, as defined by mission, has been discussed and debated in the literature for decades. For example, Dougherty and Townsend’s (2006) theoretical and historical perspective of the mission of the community college provides insight into this role. According to Dougherty and Townsend, the basic questions and discussion regarding the mission of the college have changed little over the years. They suggest that a college’s mission may be assessed by reviewing several aspects about the college, such as: a) public statements about the
community college made by authoritative public figures or organizations, b) a review of
the college’s programming, and c) actual college outcomes.

The college mission may be affected by many factors, such as the self-interest or
special interests of government officials, community leaders, and the community
college leadership (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994; Dougherty & Townsend,
2006). Vaughan (2007), in his discussion on the citizenship role of the college, supports
the notion that the college mission can be driven by special interests. Vaughan
concludes that the citizen role of the college is not guided by logic or planning but is
driven by the special interests of college administrators. The role of such special
interests in determining the mission of the college is at odds with the concept of a
community-developed and community-based mission. Ideally, the college mission
should be directed by and towards the needs of the community (Boone, 1997; Vaughan,
2006).

Boone puts forth the process of community-based programming to facilitate
obtaining community input in helping direct the mission of the college (Boone, 1992a,
not always guide college outcomes and mission, that stakeholders are not necessarily
represented in the development of the college mission, and that the concept of
community is unclear to some community college leaders. Although debate and
discussion continue in the literature regarding the multiple and conflicting roles of the
community college mission (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006) the studies and research
that have focused on external stakeholder perceptions of the role of the community college have been limited and focused on specific activities or functions such as workforce, business, or economic development. A review of the literature reveals that little work has been published to date on how community leaders perceive the role of the community college and the president in the community. The goal of this study is to add to the body of literature that addresses external stakeholder perceptions on the role of the community college and its president in the community.

Summary

Boone (1997) predicted that community colleges would have a bright future and would become a dominant force in shaping the nation’s communities. The current economic crisis, coupled with the ever-growing demand for education beyond high school, a growing minority population that needs access to low-cost educational services, and a declining middle class (College Board, 2008), support Boone’s prediction of the growing importance and significance of the community college in shaping and rebuilding communities and their local economies. As a result of these and other factors, community colleges are finding an unprecedented number of policymakers and philanthropic organizations advocating for them and looking to them to be central players in reinvigorating the national and local economy as well as communities (Chong, 2010; “Gates Foundation,” 2008; Latham, 2009; Miners, 2009; Pope, 2008; “Wal-Mart focuses,” 2008). Long considered the stepchild of American
higher education, the community college is now front and center as a relatively inexpensive alternative to earning a bachelor’s degree and key to preparing the workforce for emerging industries in the current troubled economy. Chong (2010) suggests that now is a unique and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to elevate community colleges as significant components of the nation’s economic recovery.

The importance and rising prominence of community colleges is indicated by organizations and foundations such as Lumina, Kellogg, Ford, Wal-Mart and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, all of which have made significant investments in community colleges (“Gates Foundation,” 2008; Miners, 2009). Also, during the 2008 United States presidential campaign, three of the top candidates for the presidency made major speeches and met with community members on community college campuses. In 2009, President Barack Obama nominated a community college president, Martha Kanter, for Under-Secretary of the United States Department of Education, the first time in history a community college leader has been nominated to this level in the Department (Field, 2009). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced in 2008 its College Ready Education Plan and indicated that its focus would be community colleges (“Gates Foundation,” 2008). The plan includes investing hundreds of millions of dollars over a five-year period into community colleges.

National, state, and local leaders see community colleges as a nexus for job training and workforce development to help people return to work in communities across America as the economy rebounds from the current recession (Snyder, 2009).
Senator Tom Harkin has suggested that community colleges should be the focus of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Senator Harkin posits that the community college will train workers for jobs that will become available in the new economy (Dembicki, 2009a). Also, Arne Duncan, the United States Secretary of Education, and Jill Biden, a community college faculty member who is the wife of the United States Vice President, together met with community college students in early 2009 and told the students that they viewed community colleges as extremely important in restoring the nation’s economy. They ensured the students that they will be able to compete with their peers in China and India in the fiercely competitive workforce of today’s global economy (“Duncan, Biden team,” 2009).

While the stature of community colleges as institutions of higher education appears to be rising, and community colleges are being recognized for their importance in reshaping America’s communities (Boone, 1997), conflicting opinions remain in the perceptions people hold of their quality and prestige, as discussed in Chapter One. The variety of perceptions, however, has not diminished the importance of community colleges’ goals of workforce preparedness, economic development, providing access to higher education, and meeting the social and cultural needs of the community.

Likewise, the views, beliefs, and perceptions that community leaders hold with regard to the community college and its president reflect the expectations they hold for them in the achievement of these goals. Passionate support and advocacy for the college from these community leaders will be necessary for the college to acquire the resources...
needed to fulfill critical community roles and achieve its goals during these difficult budgetary times and struggling economy. The findings of this study seek to describe community leaders’ perceived role of the community college and its president in the community. The results of this study may help community colleges and their leadership develop strategies to reinforce and expand support and advocacy from the community’s leaders and its members.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research methods used to design and conduct this study. Topics include: a) research design, b) sample and population, c) instrumentation, d) validity and reliability, e) data collection, and f) data analysis.

Research Design

A basic, interpretive, qualitative, multisite study design was developed for this research to investigate selected community leaders’ perceptions of the role of their community college in its service area community. Merriam and Associates (2002) state that in conducting a basic, interpretative, qualitative study the researcher seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and views of those involved. A “rich descriptive account of the findings” (Merriam and Associates, 2002, p. 7) can be developed by identifying recurring common themes that cut across the data. The data for this interpretive qualitative study were collected from individual, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews with selected community leaders in the community colleges’ service areas.

Sample and Population

The research sites selected for this study were restricted and include rural community colleges and their service areas, as classified by Katsinas and Lacey (1996). Publicly controlled rural community colleges represent 68 percent of the community
colleges in the United States (Katsinas, 2003), and according to Hardy and Katsinas (2007), 70 percent of the rural colleges in America are located in the north central and southern accrediting regions. The southern accrediting region is the location of the research sites for this study. The literature on rural community colleges emphasizes the vital role of rural colleges in their communities and the rural areas they serve (AACC, 1992; Cavan, 1995; Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007; Katsinas, 2007; Miller & Kissinger, 2007; Miller & Tuttle, 2007; Reichard, 1995; Valadez & Killacky, 1995). Rural community colleges often are considered centers for community and economic development and the primary catalyst for improving the quality of rural life (AACC, 1992; Leist, 2007b; Miller & Kissenger, 2007).

Counter to this important and identified role of community colleges in rural America is the lack of resources and public policies to support them (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007; Katsinas, 2007; Katsinas & Alexander, 2003; Miller & Kissinger, 2007; Miller & Tuttle, 2007). Rural community colleges are under more fiscal strain and have experienced greater decline in their per student funding levels since 1980 than their suburban and urban sister institutions (Katsinas, Alexander, & Opp, 2003; Katsinas, Tollefson, & Reamy, 2008). These cited authors argue that access to and the quality of rural colleges have been particularly threatened by state and federal policies related to institutional support, tuition, and student aid. The importance of the rural community college to the local community is well established, and the perceptions of community leaders about the college and the president may prove critical for rural colleges in
expanding their much needed advocacy efforts. These factors justify and support the selection of rural colleges as research sites for this study.

Six research sites, each comprised of a community college and its respective service area, were selected for this multisite study using random sampling techniques (Agresti & Finlay, 1997; Krathwohl, 1997). Two research sites were selected in each of three states: North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. The sample states’ community or technical college systems have many similarities. They were all established in the late 1950s and mid-1960s when the economy of each state was mainly agrarian and rural. Each state’s initial goal was to establish a system of community or technical colleges in which local college campuses would be within a reasonable driving distance of each citizen in the state. These new colleges would provide open access to higher education with low tuition and offer programs for all adult residents in the college’s service area who wanted to learn or upgrade their skills (Bassett, 1997; Brooks & Others, 1997; Department of Community Colleges, 1966; Duffy, 1997; Graham, 1995; Puyear, 1990; Vaughan, 1987). The guiding principles for new college growth would include: a) the development of programs for technical and vocational training, with an emphasis on occupational training in order to attract industry; b) provision of access to higher education; and c) preparation for an industrial economy.

North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia were selected as states for sample research sites in this study based on the following criteria: a) the number of community and technical colleges in each state that are considered rural, based on Katsinas and
Lacey’s (1996) classification system for community colleges, b) their accessibility to the researcher, c) their location in the southern accrediting region, i.e., the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and d) their participation in the Academy for Community College Leadership Advancement, Innovation, and Modeling (ACCLAIM), founded and located at North Carolina State University (Boone, 1997; Boone & Associates, 1997; Boone, Pettit, & Wiseman, 1998).

ACCLAIM was established in 1991 to develop, test, and validate community-based programming, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, involves the process of increasing and facilitating the community college’s collaboration with community leaders, community members, and community-based agencies and organizations in identifying and resolving critical issues that affect the quality of life of the people residing in the college’s service area. Four states in the upper South, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland, have participated in ACCLAIM. Thus, ACCLAIM, with its focus on community-based programming, has relevance to the sample and population of this study.

**Site Selection**

For the purposes of this study, *research site* is defined as a rural community college and its service area, with the following demographic characteristics: student enrollment in credit programs and courses ranges between 1,500 to 3,000 students; and the population of the college’s service area does not exceed 150,000. These site
characteristics are consistent with classifications for rural associate degree awarding institutions, as presented by Katsinas and Lacey (1996).

The community colleges and their service areas included in this study were randomly selected using the AACC (2004) membership directory. The selection process of a college and its service area as a research site for this study consisted of six steps:

1. Each AACC member community college listed under North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia in the membership directory was numbered sequentially with a two-digit number, starting with 01, and listed in alphabetical order. North Carolina colleges were assigned 01 through 58, South Carolina 01 through 16, and Virginia 01 through 23.

2. A sample state was selected: for example, North Carolina.

3. A random number was generated (Agresti & Finlay, 1997).

4. The random number was used to select a college by matching it to the number assigned to colleges in Step 1. If this comparison did not yield a match, another random number was generated and compared until a match was made.

5. The college (and its service area) selected by this random process was then tested to determine if it met the site demographic criteria.

6. If the randomly selected college (and its service area) met the criteria for a research site, it was assigned a site code. If the college did not meet the criteria, then Steps 3 through 6 were repeated until two research sites were selected for each state. To ensure anonymity for the participants throughout the study,
references to research sites are by site location code only. Refer to Appendix E for research site demographics.

Study Participants

The participants selected for this study are identified community leaders who reside in the college’s service area. According to Boone and Associates (1997), multiple approaches can be used to identify community leaders and categorize them as either formal or informal leaders. The study participants are positional leaders and are referred to as formal leaders, as defined by Boone and Associates (1997). As explained in Chapter Two, positional leaders hold a formal office or position of influence in the community, are highly visible, and usually wield influence over the resources of the group or organization they represent. By virtue of their positions of leadership, these participants were easily identifiable for the purposes of this study. Moreover, the fact that the participants, at the time of selection, held formal positions and were highly visible facilitated gaining access to them, their organizations, and their contact information.

It should be noted here that, as explained in Chapter One, selecting only positional leaders is a limitation of this study. Although positional leaders are formal leaders, highly visible, and are assumed to have influence over the resources of the organizations they lead, informal leaders also have considerable influence over the actions of their groups and may be even more influential in their groups and
organizations than the positional leaders who participated in this study. Informal leaders operating behind the scenes may have considerable influence in determining who will become formal, positional leaders.

Community leaders or elite members of the community, as defined by the literature on qualitative research, are informed, educated (i.e., formal or self-educated), and knowledgeable (Ostrander, 1995). Research shows that once the goals and basis of a study are understood, and the individuals associated with the study are known, community leaders are then willing to participate, if they perceive that the study has merit for their own benefit and for the welfare of their respective community (Ostrander, 1995; Sinclair & Brady, 1987; Thomas, 1995). Twenty-eight community leaders participated in this study and included chairs, vice-chairs, and executive directors of boards and organizations, such as chambers of commerce, economic development commissions, the United Way, cultural arts councils, county commissioners or supervisors, and the local community college board of trustees and foundation board. State legislators and mayors also are included in the study (see Appendix F).

Instrumentation

The primary data gathering tool for this study is a semi-structured interview guide, presented in Appendix A. This interview guide facilitated the process of having each participant describe his or her perceptions of the college and its president. The
interview guide and overall research design were tested at a pilot site, selected by the researcher, which has similar site characteristics as the research sites in this study. At the pilot site, interviews with selected community leaders were conducted, recorded, transcribed, and coded, after which all the associated processes of data collection and analysis were reviewed and revised as appropriate to improve the design of the study.

While conducting research at each site, minor adjustments were made to the interview guide. These revisions, although not changing the intent of the questions, did include changes to the order of the questions and clarification of local terminology regarding community colleges and related community connections to ensure that the participants understood the intent of the questions and could respond to them effectively.

Data Collection

Community leaders identified as potential study participants received a letter, presented in Appendix B, from the researcher that describes the proposed research and inquires about their possible interest and participation in the study. Approximately one week later, the researcher contacted the potential participants by telephone and email as follow-up to the letter. This contact not only inquired again about their interest in being a part of the study but also solicited their participation and inquired about their availability for an interview. Six community leaders were scheduled for interviews at each site in the spring and summer of 2006, with the anticipation that an average of five
community leaders per research site would be interviewed. This flexibility in design allowed for last-minute scheduling and personal emergency conflicts that could arise on the day of the scheduled interview.

Gaining access to some of the community leaders proved to be a challenge, especially when attempting to accommodate a desired cross-section of all leader categories designed to include diversity of race and gender. Obtaining a commitment from women and individuals from minority groups proved difficult. In all three states and at each research site, women and minorities were more reluctant to participate in the study than Caucasian males. Thus, most of the community leaders in each of the community college service areas who agreed to participate in this study are Caucasian males. This factor contributes to the limitations of the study.

Personal visits with study participants helped gain access to other community leaders. At each site, the contacts and rapport that were established with participants helped to identify other potential leaders for the study. When community leaders agreed to be part of the study, and their names were mentioned by the researcher when talking with other potential participants about the study, access to community leaders improved, as did overall interest in the study. These findings reinforce the importance of building rapport with research study participants (Pridham, 1987).

Each participant was given a brief overview of the research topic. The semi-structured interview guide and its open-ended questions were bound by context, as developed from the study’s conceptual framework. The bound context provided a level
of cognitive organization to the interview process and data collection to ensure that the discussion followed topics related to the research questions.

Interviews were recorded electronically for transcription later (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998). Data obtained from each site were transcribed and analyzed prior to the next site visit. The transcribed interviews were reviewed for accuracy prior to the coding process. Using the constant comparative method, results were reviewed and analyzed for existing themes and categories as well as for new emerging themes. In addition, the interview guide was reviewed and revised as appropriate in order to investigate developing themes identified in the early phase of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Krathwohl, 1997). Each community leader category was assigned a code for the purpose of categorizing and analyzing the data. The participants in this study remained anonymous, and the community leader codes served to organize the data while supporting the validity and reliability of the study (Krathwohl, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two criteria used to judge qualitative data and data analysis (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Validity is concerned with the accuracy and value of the interpretations, and reliability is concerned with the extent to which the researcher’s findings can be replicated. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), validity is confirmed if the study: a) proves useful, that is, if the study is enlightening, b) is
contextually complete, that is, if the study is comprehensive, and c) is authentic, that is, if the interviewee’s remarks are reported credibly and authentically. In this study, validity was ensured by exploring community leaders’ perceptions in the following ways: a) usefully, by reporting the results so that the reader will find the study informative, b) comprehensively, by interviewing a cross-section of community leaders at each of the six research sites, and c) credibly, by representing the study participants’ remarks accurately. Reliability can be confirmed by consistency. Consistency is ensured by following the same research procedures throughout the study. In this study, reliability and data accuracy were achieved through consistency in the use of procedures for collecting, recording, confirming, and archiving data. The same interview guide was used for each participant and verbatim transcriptions of each interview were transcribed within one week after each site visit. Each transcript was reviewed while listening to the audiotape to ensure accuracy of the data and was archived in the researcher’s personal library. These processes contribute to the trustworthiness of this study by ensuring accurate and complete data.

Miles and Huberman (1984) describe twelve methods to confirm the findings of qualitative studies. This study uses at least two of those methods. First, in this multisite study, replication of the findings was tested early in the data gathering process. Early emerging patterns could thereby be tested at other sites as well as tested for researcher effects and biases. Second, the data were organized in such a way that comparisons of the perceived roles of the community college and the president in the community
obtained from the different research sites could support the verification of the findings. The data collected in this study have a well-defined audit trail traceable to each interview, which includes archived audiotapes of each interview, text transcribed from interview tapes, coded interview forms, and data analysis forms.

Data Analysis

Qualitative studies consist primarily of words, many of which have multiple meanings. Geertz (1973) suggests that words provide a “thick description”, implying that words provide more meaning than numbers alone. The process of reducing qualitative data to a form from which useful meaning can be extracted is called coding. Codes are categories derived from the conceptual framework and research questions to facilitate the process of organizing data and developing theory (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Strauss (1987) states that coding is much more than simply assigning categories to data; it is also about conceptualizing the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about the relationships among and within the data, and discovering the data.

For this study, audiotaped participant interviews from the field were transcribed and typed onto interview coding forms. This format allowed the transcribed text and coding blocks to be included in the same document. The interview transcripts were analyzed and coded using data and analysis methods that discern patterns and clusters. This process initiated discovery of meaning from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Each interview transcript was coded for the geographical
location, leadership position, age, gender, and race of each participant. Codes for the descriptive categories or themes that developed from the participant interviews were placed in the coding block next to the appropriate data on the interview transcript form. These themes indicated key concepts from the conceptual framework and served to identify selected community leaders’ perceptions while also identifying emerging themes from the data that facilitated the organization and retrieval of data for analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Once the basic coding categories were established, the objective was to discern connections or patterns that could help describe leaders’ views and perceptions of the college. This process was ongoing and included looking for new categories to emerge while developing links to patterns from other research sites and noting patterns that were site-specific.

In summary, the data analysis in this study includes: a) constantly comparing emerging coding categories and recoding on an ongoing basis, b) reducing data at each site into smaller units by identifying pattern codes, c) analyzing pattern codes and describing leader perceptions at each site, d) identifying and analyzing patterns that occurred across sites, and e) generating propositions or explanations of discovered themes about leader perceptions across all sites. Refer to Appendix C, Interview Coding Form Example, and Appendix D, Data Analysis Form Example, for the methodology used to code and analyze the transcribed verbatim interviews for this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter Four presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight selected community leaders from the service areas of six selected community colleges. The findings are presented thematically under the five research questions that are used to guide and inform this study. The research questions were derived from the study’s conceptual framework, which is based on open systems organizational theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Scott & Davis, 2007) and community-based programming (Boone, 1992b). In open systems organizational theory, the survival of the organization, which in this study is the community college, is dependent upon the organization’s ability to acquire resources or inputs from its operating environment, which in this case is the college’s service area, in order to provide the outputs expected from its environment. For the community college within this conceptual framework, a key component of the interdependent relationship with its external environment is its relationship with and support from community leaders. This relationship is found in Boone’s community-based programming model (Boone, 1992b; Boone and Associates, 1997) as linkage. The concept of linkage, as employed within the conceptual framework for this study, is a methodology and process that allows community college presidents to identify, interact, collaborate, and connect with community leaders to monitor, maintain, and enhance the interdependent relationship that exists between the college and its external community (i.e. service area).
The five research questions that are used to guide this study in determining the selected community leaders’ perceptions of the college and its president are:

1. What are the perceptions held by community leaders of the role of their community college in contributing to the quality of life of citizens who reside in the service area?

2. Do community leaders value their community college’s programs in contributing to and building a dynamic economy for its service area and making education accessible to the citizens who reside in the service area?

3. Are the perceptions held by these leaders about the role of their community college congruent with the documented mission of the college?

4. Given the multitude of community organizations and agencies within the service area of the college, is the community college viewed as a team member in collaborating with these community-based organizations in serving the needs of the citizens who reside in the service area?

5. How do community leaders perceive the president of their community college as a community leader who connects the college to the community through his or her active participation in the affairs of the community and collaboration with leaders of other community-based public and private organizations?
Overview of the Research Sites

The six research sites in this multisite study are located in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, with two randomly selected sites in each state. For this study, _research site_ is defined as a rural community college and its service area. Each of the six research sites were selected based on the following demographic criteria: a) student enrollment of 1,500 to 3,000 in college credit courses; and b) service area population not exceeding 150,000 citizens.

Four of the community colleges in this study are single-campus institutions and two have more than one campus. For each of the six colleges, the main campus facilities are located in or just outside of the jurisdiction of the largest municipality in the college’s service area. At two of the research sites, the community college provides the community’s only direct access to higher education, and at one research site, three senior institutions of higher education are located in the same county as the community college.

The service areas (or communities) of the community colleges in this study vary from single-county service areas to multiple-county service areas. The economies of the communities at each research site are comprised of a variety of businesses and industries, and three communities have a large tourism component. Thus, the research sites in this study represent diverse communities, cultures, economies, and educational environments with which the local community college must link and collaborate to fulfill its community-based mission.
Description of Participants

The participants in this descriptive study are selected positional leaders from the service areas of the community colleges who, in their formal positional leadership roles, represent their organizations in the community (Boone, 1992b). Twenty-eight positional leaders agreed to participate in this study, and they represent community-based organizations, civic organizations, and city, county, and state government in their respective college’s service area. The community-based and civic organizations represented by the study’s participants are: a) chambers of commerce (five participants), b) city councils (four participants), c) community colleges (six participants), d) arts councils (one participant), e) county commissions or supervisors (two participants), f) economic development commissions (four participants), g) regional councils of government (two participants), h) State legislatures (two participants), and i) the United Way (two participants). The study participants hold leadership roles in the organizations they represent, as follows: a) board chair (11 participants), b) board member (two participants), c) executive director (nine participants), d) mayor (four participants), and e) State legislator (two participants).

The age ranges of the participants in this study are from 30 to 39 to 70-plus years of age, with 17 of the participants over 60 years of age. Most of the participants in this study had held or were holding multiple positional leadership positions with other community-based or civic organizations. Some of the participants had been a positional
leader in their organizations for consecutive decades, and one board chair had held his leadership role for 43 years.

Through their responses, the community leaders in this study communicated a passion for identifying and discovering ways to improve the quality of life for their communities. The participants identified collaboration with other community-based organizations as well as economic, educational, and social growth as means by which the community and college could help build a dynamic economy and improve the quality of life for residents of their community. The study participants described their knowledge of the college’s activities in the community and how they, as leaders, had partnered with the president or other community college faculty and staff members in a variety of community activities and projects. Participants shared that their experiences included working closely with the president and other college staff in civic, community, cultural, and economic development projects and activities.

Interpretation of the Data

The findings of this basic, interpretive, qualitative, multisite study are presented thematically as they relate to the five research questions that guide the inquiry of this study. The five research questions provide a framework for organizing the findings in terms of one or more themes, patterns, or sub-themes, as developed from each participant’s responses. The themes that emerged from the participants’ comments form
a comprehensive perspective of their collective experiences and their perceptions of the
community college and its president.

The findings that relate to the first two research questions for this study are
combined due to the consistent themes that emerged from the participants’ responses
that related to both of these questions. These first two questions guide the study in
describing participants’ perceptions of the role of the community college in contributing
to the quality of life of the people in the community (Question One), and building a
dynamic economy and providing accessible educational services to the citizens of the
college’s service area (Question Two). Therefore, these two questions are
complementary and inextricably linked, because quality of life is dependent on
economic stability and access to education. Helping to improve the quality of life of the
citizens of the community, while helping communities renew, rebuild, and become
strong and vital, are recognized roles (missions) of the community colleges, as found in
the literature (AACC, 1988, 2000; Boone, 1997; Vaughan, 2006).

 Contributing to the Quality of Life of Citizens in the Community College Service Area

The first theme, as addressed by Question One, can also be described as an
overarching goal of the community college that is an outcome of the multiple roles that
the college plays within its community, as described by the community leaders in this
study. These community leaders perceived that one of the roles of their community
college is to contribute to the quality of life of the community it serves through its
accessible educational programs and services. The following statement from one of the leaders in this study captures the college’s perceived role in contributing to the quality of life of its service area residents:

I think the primary goal of any educational institution is obviously for higher learning, and for the advancement of those students that want to improve their quality of life, their earning potential, and support their families. I think the community college is an integral part of our community.

In addition to contributing to the quality of life of the college’s service area residents, other themes developed out of the participants’ descriptions of their perceptions of the role of the community college. These additional themes also relate to the contribution the community college can make to its service area and are: a) developing the workforce; b) making education accessible; c) offering two-year technical and college transfer degrees; and d) cultural programming.

**Developing the Workforce**

Workforce development is the theme that study participants identified as the primary role of the community college in the community. Under the theme of workforce development, several programs and services provided by the college were described by participants as important. Such programs and services include: a) training area citizens for new industries that locate in the community, b) developing specialized and customized training programs for existing business and industry, c) teaching vocational
and trades skills, and d) staying current with new technology. The board chair of one college states, “The original mission of the college was to train people for industry in the area, and that business and industry course training is the primary function of the college.” The mayor of another community described the college’s role in workforce development as follows: “The number one role of the community college is, when we have a new industry that comes to our community, to train individuals so that when [that] industry is ready to hit the ground running there’s a trained workforce.”

Most participants identified attracting new business and industry to their communities as very important for the economy, growth, and viability of the community. They perceived the college as a key asset in adding value to the community and contributing to the quality of life of its residents and helping to build a dynamic economy. Also, the college’s ability to offer programs for new business and industry was an expectation of the selected leaders in this study. A mayor related his perceptions of the role and value of the community college as follows:

We consider the community college to be one of the outstanding assets in town. Our relationship has been good, and we work closely together, and if we had a problem the college could help us with, it was taken care of. If they had a problem we could help them with, we did all we could to help the college. So, our relationship with the community college was good, and the community college itself is an asset. The role of the local community college, as I understand it, is to prepare local people for local job opportunities to keep them
in the area. That is, I think, the primary purpose, although that doesn’t always work. Our community college is very sensitive to what the community needs and also its educational needs in an effort to try to keep our people [service area citizens] local.

Another role of the college that leaders described also falls under the theme of workforce development. The community leaders perceived that providing specialized or customized training, meeting specific business and industry needs of the area, and staying current with technology were important contributions that the community college should make. The participants cited examples, such as working closely with industry and area business leaders to tailor the training to be provided by the community college to specific business and industry needs, and filling the gaps between the jobs that are needed in the community and the existing workforce. A regional economic developer described his experiences with the local community college in the area of industry training as follows:

The college’s job is training our new workers coming into the community, as well as our existing workers as far as ongoing training for them. Oftentimes, to stay with the changes in technology, ongoing continued education is in essence kind of lifelong learning, because technology is constantly changing. The college should maintain a very good working relationship with the area business and industry – at least the companies we deal with – we deal with manufacturers, so that when they do have some sort of ongoing training need,
the college works with them. The college also has the ability to adapt programs for specific needs. You know, if they have a certain training program that’s not currently offered at the college, they will develop a special program for area business and industry. In addition to that function, they’re involved at the university, the hospital, and lots of [other] things. They are in touch with the community.

Several of the leaders described the importance of the college in providing programs and courses for trades, such as welding, plumbing, and electrical skills. Some leaders noted that the college’s initial start in the community was offering courses for occupational skills, and added that the mission of the college includes offering programs for skilled and technical occupations. A State legislator noted, “It seems that everyone wants to focus on technology and other types of jobs, the higher paying jobs I guess, but there is still a large need for craftsmen and mechanics and all that are involved in the construction and other businesses here in town.”

The importance of the workforce development role of the community college is evident by the recurring themes and patterns in participants’ responses and can be summarized with the following statements from two executive directors of economic development. The first director’s response describes his perception of the role of the community college in promoting economic development:

From a purely economic development perspective, the college’s role is to provide the labor force to meet the needs of industry and business in the
community. I feel like it’s almost a left or a right arm to economic development.

There is very little that we do in economic development that doesn’t depend on
the community college.

The second economic development director further describes the perception that the
community college contributes to the quality of life in the community by preparing a
skilled workforce and making education and training accessible to community
members:

I see the role of the local technical college as a catalyst for additional training
opportunities, which ultimately leads towards a better quality of life through
employment – the ability to advance the skill sets of the citizens and provide
opportunity that otherwise would not be provided to them based on their
geographic location in a rural community. Also, from a financial or
socioeconomic level, it provides an immediate opportunity for them to have
advanced educational training without having to go to a major metropolitan area.

Workforce development was identified by all of the community leaders in this
study as the primary role of the local community or technical college. The participants
perceived that having a trained workforce in their communities has a positive impact on
the economy and attracts better jobs, improves the potential income of community
members, and ultimately contributes to the quality of life in the community.
Making Education Accessible

The second most common theme that emerged under both Question One, as a quality of life component, and Question Two, as part of the combined workforce development and education component, is the leaders’ perceived role of the college to make its education programs accessible. The community leaders who participated in this study identified accessibility to higher education and training as an important and expected role of the community college. Making education accessible was perceived by most participants as an economic factor for students and community members. This perception is based on their belief that area citizens do not necessarily have the financial means to attend colleges and universities outside of their communities. Adult students who want to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families usually must work, and as such, they work either part-time or full-time while attending college. Their community college provides an opportunity to stay in their local community and work, save money accordingly, and have access to higher education.

The leaders in this study value the programs at their community colleges and believe that those programs support a dynamic local economy based on relevance and accessibility. A chair of a local economic development commission describes the college’s role in providing accessible higher education programs and its positive economic impact for community members: “I think the role of the local community college is to provide access to those students who cannot afford to leave their community and go off to a college or university.” Further, as the chair of the county
commissioners at one research site states, “The college educates our young folks – it
gives them an alternative to four-year colleges and universities, which is at a higher
cost, and gives them streamlined technical knowledge and more specialized fields they
can go into.”

Two-Year Technical and College Transfer Degrees

Complementary to the theme of providing access to education is the theme of
providing access to two-year degrees in both technical and college transfer programs,
which also developed from the participants’ combined responses to Questions One and
Two. Providing two-year degree programs for both entry into the job market in a
specialized field and college transfer was an expectation that leaders held of their local
community college and one that could help improve the local economy. Several leaders
noted that providing access to college transfer programs would save money for students
and their families. A community college foundation board chairman offered his
perceptions:

If you go to a community college for two years and take courses that are
required, then you can transfer right into one of the four-year state schools. And,
that’s wonderful, because it keeps the student – not that it’s great that they stay
home, but it’s a heck of a lot cheaper for them to stay at home for two years and
sort of get their feet under them and save money.
An executive director of the chamber of commerce at one research site describes his perception of the role of the college in helping students work toward the bachelor’s degree for two years while continuing to support business and industry with technical training programs:

I think the role of the college has always been to provide the technical skills for industry and businesses in the area, including the two-year technical degree. I think it’s also been very important in providing associate degrees for transferring to other four-year institutions so they can get their four-year degree. It’s been excellent for those students who have lacked the resources to leave home or leave the community to get an education.

A study participant who is an economic developer also sees the role of the college as one that offers the two-year degree for college transfer while preparing community members for jobs in technical fields:

The role of the college would be helping folks get their two-year degree and going on to a four-year university – also, taking folks [who], after getting their two-year degree, help them get prepared for work, whether it’s nursing, office positions, or law enforcement – preparing them to go out and get a job.

Cultural Programming

The final reoccurring theme that emerged from the participants’ perceptions of the role of the community college and from their responses to Questions One and Two
is cultural programming, which was discussed by some but not all of the leaders in the study. Several, but not all, of the colleges in this study have facilities such as a civic center or auditorium for performing arts, and can provide cultural activities. The leaders in this study who identified cultural programming as a role of the college cited performing arts programs, festivals, and courses in arts and crafts as the types of course offerings provided by the college for the citizens of the community. One leader indicated that the college should be responsible for providing cultural leadership in the community:

Well, I think the mission of the community college is to provide the educational needs of the people who need help. You know, you have people that had to drop out of school. Give them a chance. It’s also, you know, to provide an upgrade in education and training for people wanting to better themselves in jobs and so forth. And, it’s also to provide some sort of cultural leadership to the community.

Although this cultural component of the role of the community college was not identified by all of the study’s participants, it was nonetheless the fourth most common theme that emerged from these leaders’ perceptions of the role of the college in the community. One participant in the study described the extent of the activities of his college’s cultural programming:

I’m Chairman of the Cultural and Humanities Committee, and we bring programs to the college for the students and the community, since it’s a
community college. We’ve had some interesting things through the years. We bring many opportunities to the community in ways other than education. We have Crafts Day here that is just a tremendous turn-out of people, so people can display their crafts and sell them. We have all sorts of programs. We work with community groups to bring things to the county. Various programs are also brought to the college at noontime, so the students are able to attend. We’ve had some really good programs. We’ve had singing groups, storytelling. We also provide art in the form of paintings, sculptures, and that sort of thing.

Thus, some leaders see the role of the community college as one that provides some level of cultural leadership for the community as well as the courses and programs that offer exposure to a variety of cultural events and personal enrichment activities.

In summary with regard to Questions One and Two, the selected community leaders, in describing their perceptions of the role of the community college in their communities, identified five themes that they believe are the primary roles of the college: a) to contribute to the quality of life of service area residents, b) to provide workforce development, c) to make education accessible, d) to provide two-year technical and college transfer degrees, and e) to provide cultural programming at the college for the community.
The third research question in this study addresses the comparison between the documented mission of the community college and the perceived roles of the community college, as described by selected community leaders, to check for consistency and congruency. With regard to Question Three, the role of the community college in the community may also be described as its mission; hence, the terms *role* and *mission* are used interchangeably in this study. The perceived roles are discussed here in terms of the five recurring themes discussed in the previous section. A document review and analysis of the mission statements and goals of the six colleges in this study confirm that the majority of the commitments that Vaughan (2006) suggests do indeed shape the mission statements of these community colleges. Vaughan (2006) suggests that most communities want programs and courses that meet the needs of local and international businesses, provide vocational and technical training, and allow students to transfer to bachelor’s degree programs at senior institutions of higher education. Vaughan also states that communities want courses that meet the recreational, social, and cultural needs of the community. The mission statements and goals of three of the community colleges in this study are enumerated below as examples of the mission and goals statements of the colleges in this study. The three colleges are identified as Community College A, Community College B, and Community College C.

The mission statement of Community College A is to *provide diverse educational and workforce opportunities that enhance the quality of life for students*.
and citizens. The goals that Community College A developed to achieve its mission are to: a) provide accessibility and opportunities for student success, b) offer occupational and technical programs that respond to employers’ needs, c) provide university parallel programs, d) provide workforce training and lifelong learning, e) expand partnerships for development, growth, and renewal of the service area, f) provide adequate personnel to support its programs, and g) enable students to strengthen the skills needed to function in a diverse world.

The mission statement of Community College B is: [Community College B] is a public, open-door, two-year, comprehensive institution of higher education established to provide citizens of greater [local] County opportunities for educational, economic, professional, social, and personal development. The college educates and trains students to provide an effective workforce to support economic growth and community development through its focus on teaching and service. Community College B developed a purpose statement in lieu of goals to describe the ways it plans to fulfill its mission. Its plan is to: a) secure the necessary resources to support the educational programs of the college, b) offer the associate degree, diploma, and certificate which provide students with the knowledge to enter technical, health related, environmental and social services careers, c) prepare students to transfer to senior institutions, d) cooperate with secondary and four-year institutions to facilitate transition, e) develop customized industry training, f) deliver non-credit course and programs to address needs for occupational, vocational, and personal advancement, g) provide development
educational services to prepare students for college, h) provide student support services to further student success, and i) assist local communities, agencies, and educational institutions to meet specific challenges.

The mission statement of Community College C is: [Community College C] will be a leader in improving the quality of life for all citizens of [local] County by offering high-quality education, training, enrichment, and support to all who need and value these services. The goals of Community College C are to: a) promote student success, b) respond to the changing needs of area employers, c) enhance the quality of life of citizens in the service area, d) encourage diversity, e) integrate technology in all aspects of college life, f) provide an excellent work environment, g) develop and strengthen partnerships between the college and its stakeholders, and h) strengthen accountability and institutional effectiveness.

An analysis of these three colleges’ missions and goals, as well as those of the three colleges not included here, finds common threads that run through their mission statements and goals. These themes are to: a) identify workforce development needs and support business and industry in developing and maintaining a trained workforce; b) provide associate degree programs in career, technical, and specialized fields of study that directly impact the local communities served by the college; and provide college transfer programs for students to transfer to senior institutions of higher education; and c) provide access to higher education and meet community needs. In addition, all of the colleges’ mission statements incorporate language that addresses developmental
education and student success. Several colleges use language that addresses improving quality of life, meeting the social needs of the community, and providing cultural activities and programs.

How do the perceptions of the community leaders in this study compare to the documented missions of the six community colleges in this study? The following sections discuss this congruency question in terms of its applicability to the topics inherent in Research Questions One and Two, which address the topics of quality of life, workforce development, accessibility to education, degree offerings, and cultural programming.

**Contributing to the Quality of Life of Service Area Citizens**

Contributing to the quality of life is a recurring theme in this study that was specifically identified or implied by every leader in their comments about the role and value of the community college in their community. Although no specific definition of *quality of life* or *contribution* in this relative sense was given by participants, most of their descriptions related to building and maintaining a strong economy, providing access to higher education programs, and providing specialized training that would increase the employability and earning power of community members. In addition to the economic aspects, college programs, such as personal enrichment, cultural arts and related programs, were perceived as contributing to the quality of life of the service area citizens. In short, contributing to the quality of life of the community could be described
as a combined outcome of all of the activities and roles of the college. Therefore, after reviewing and analyzing the documented mission statements of the six colleges in this study with regard to contributing to the quality of life of service area residents (Question One), the published and stated missions of the community colleges are consistent with the community leaders’ perceptions of the role of the community college in their communities.

Developing the Workforce

Workforce development is likewise a recurring theme that every leader who participated in this study perceived as the most important role of the community college. All of the leaders were in agreement that the community college is critical to attracting and keeping business and industry in the community. When speaking of workforce development, the leaders included topics such as training for new industry, retraining for existing businesses and employees, specialized training, technical training, and occupational skills. The mission statements of all of the community colleges in this study contain very specific language that addresses their role in developing and maintaining a well-trained workforce for the specific needs of business and industry in their service areas. Therefore, after reviewing and analyzing the documented mission statements of the six colleges in this study with regard to workforce development (Question Two), the published and stated missions of the
community colleges are consistent with the community leaders’ perceptions of the role of the community college in their communities.

*Making Education Accessible*

Making education accessible, known also as access to higher education, is the third theme found from the participants’ responses. The hallmark of the community college is its open door policy and access to programs in higher education that include certificates, diplomas, and associates degrees in technical and specialized fields as well as the two-year degree in liberal arts and science for transfer to senior institutions. When speaking of making education accessible, the participants most frequently referred to providing access to the two-year degree program and specifically to the first two years of the bachelor’s degree. Having these programs available to their communities allows students to stay at home while working toward their degrees and preparing for a job, or allows them to transfer later to a senior institution. After reviewing and analyzing the documented mission statements of the six colleges in this study with regard to making education accessible (also Question Two), the documented missions of the community colleges are consistent with the community leaders’ perceptions of the role of the community college in their communities.
Two-Year Technical and College Transfer Degrees

The fourth recurring theme is the leaders’ perception that one role of the community college is to provide access to the two-year degree or associates degree in technical and specialized fields that are relevant to the needs of the community. Also, the leaders believe that the community college should also offer the first two years of college transfer courses and programs so that students can have access to and transfer to senior higher education institutions, having already attained their first two years towards a bachelor’s degree.

A review of the college’s mission statements finds that the statements of all six colleges contain language that addresses degree attainment, and five of the six mission statements contain specific language that addresses providing two-year degrees in career and technical education and preparing students for college transfer. Therefore, after reviewing and analyzing the documented mission statements of the six colleges in this study with regard to providing two-year degree and college transfer programs, the documented missions of the community colleges are consistent with the community leaders’ perceptions of the role of the community college in their communities.

Cultural Programming

The fifth recurring theme from the community leaders’ responses is the role of the college in providing cultural programming and activities for the community. This concept of providing cultural programming and serving as a site for cultural activities
was not identified by all of the selected community leaders to be a component of the role of the community college. However, one leader stated that the community college should provide the cultural leadership for the community.

Therefore, after reviewing and analyzing the documented mission statements of the six colleges in this study with regard to providing cultural programming, it was found that three of the six mission statements have specific language that identifies cultural programming as a component of the college’s mission, and the other three mission statements make no mention of cultural programming. Thus, with regard to cultural programming, the findings are not conclusive as to the congruency between the leaders’ perceptions and the colleges’ documented mission statements.

In summary, with regard to Question Three that pertains to the congruency of leaders’ perceptions and the colleges’ mission statements, it is found that for four of the five themes identified by community leaders as integral to quality of life (Question One) and workforce development and access to higher education (Question Two), the perceptions of the participants and the mission statements of the colleges are consistent with one another. That is, the contribution of the community college to its service area residents, which is expected by community leaders and is incorporated into the colleges’ mission statements, embraces the identified themes of 1) quality of life, 2) workforce development, 3) access to higher education, and 4) two-year and college transfer degree programs. A fifth identified contribution of some, but not all, community colleges is cultural programming; thus, cultural programming is not a theme
that is consistent between the study participants and the mission statements of the selected colleges.

*The Community College as a Team Member with Other Community-Based Organizations*

The fourth research question in this study investigates selected community leaders’ perceptions about ways the community college links with other community-based organizations in addressing economic, educational, social, and cultural issues in the community. The community leaders who participated in this study provided examples of their respective community college’s involvement with area community-based organizations in working to address social, cultural, human relations, economic, health, and a variety of other community needs in their service areas. Most of the leaders indicated that the college was expected to be involved in the chamber of commerce and other community-based organizations to help resolve community issues and improve community life. The leaders also discussed the expectation that community colleges would engage in relationships and partnerships with public schools in supporting overall efforts to provide access to college programming while students are still enrolled in high school. Other examples that were given by participants include partnering for grants to support economic development, community revitalization, downtown development, and cultural development. One leader shared ways that the college and its staff had worked with other community members to pursue grant funding for a project to obtain high-speed internet access for the community, as follows:
The community college participated as a member of a study group in pursuing some grant monies to try to improve the data access within the area – high-speed data access. We participated with them in that, and I think we were successful in expanding it somewhat.

An example given by a mayor demonstrates the college’s role in its community efforts to support other community-based organizations. He states:

We’ve had a number of initiatives in the community that the community college has taken the lead in that were community-based and [brought] various aspects of the community together. Whether they were racial issues, socioeconomic issues, or for the betterment of the community issues, the college was pulling the community together to eliminate any division.

Further, participants identified college administrators who worked with health and human services organizations, such as the hospital board, community health organizations, and the employment security commission, and who supported welfare programs with educational services.

In short, community leaders in this study perceived that the role of the community college is to collaborate with a variety of the community-based organizations that are active in the communities served by the college. The six community colleges in this study were perceived by these community leaders to be
team members in working with other community-based organizations to support community development.

The Community College President as a Community Leader

Question Five of the research questions that guide this inquiry addresses the role of the community college president as a leader in the community, as perceived by the study participants. Vaughan (1986) identified the external leadership role as one of the four fundamental leadership roles of the community college president. This external leadership role requires significant time of the president in developing relationships and linking with community leaders, community members, community-based organizations and the multitude of subcommunities in the college’s service area (as discussed in Chapter Two). Community college presidents report that service area citizens expect the president to be a community leader, serve on various boards, become a member of civic, social, and cultural organizations, and to be visible (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Leist, 2007a; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). In the conceptual framework for this study, these expectations are addressed by the community-based programming model whereby the president links, connects, and collaborates with community leaders to build relationships, gain knowledge of community needs, and to monitor and maintain the college’s external environment (Boone and Associates, 1997; Scott & Davis, 2007).
The findings of this study describe ways that selected community leaders perceive the community college president in his or her community leadership role, which includes linking and collaborating with community leaders and the community. Five themes emerged from the data analysis of the community leadership role of the president: a) community involvement, b) community leadership, c) visibility in the community, d) identifying community needs, and e) leadership traits.

Community Involvement

Community involvement is a major theme that emerged very quickly from the data analysis. When selected community leaders spoke of the president’s involvement in the community, a variety of comments surfaced in regard to the type of involvement the leaders perceived to be important or that met their expectations of the president’s role in the community. A State legislator noted, “I think the president should, as any community leader should, become involved in civic affairs, such as the Chamber and different charitable organizations, United Way and those types of things.” The types of involvement described in this leader’s comments reoccurred in all of the study participants’ descriptions of the president’s role in the community. That is, the community leaders in this study believe that the president should be involved in a variety of civic organizations and be a member of one or more civic or other community organizations. A civic leader expressed his thoughts on the president’s involvement in the community:
I think the president needs to be out there as much as time will permit, understanding that he’s hired to run that college, and there will be a lot of times when he won’t be able to make an appearance. But you will find out that a lot of boards want the community college president on their board. That within itself, believe it or not, brings credibility to that board to be able to say that the community college president is on the board.

An economic development leader states:

The president definitely needs to be active in participating with organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce. There are some civic organizations that, given the opportunity, they should be willing to give time to as a member, whether it be Rotary or some other organization, because of the contacts and the exposure that that gives the college president and that it gives others to him or her.

Membership in the Rotary Club was cited more than any other civic club or organization as desirable for the college president’s involvement. Its mention corresponds with Vaughan’s (1986) study, which reports that the majority, or approximately 65 percent, of college presidents were members of a Rotary Club. Other specific organizations identified by participants as ones that community college presidents should join include economic development commissions or boards, chambers of commerce, the United Way, and arts or cultural councils. Participation in community events, charitable efforts, as well as social and religious activities was another common
thread in the participants’ descriptions of the president’s role in the community. A mayor’s thoughts on the president’s community involvement exemplify the variety of community activities that leaders expect the president to consider:

The president should get involved in different areas of the community, like United Way, Rotary, and being involved in a church and in the social interaction of the community. The president of the community college is the person that emulates the perception people have of the institution, so if that person demonstrates a good, positive image, then the perception of the college is kind of what people perceive with the president.

A summary of the findings demonstrates the importance that the selected community leaders place on the college president’s involvement in the community. It also supports the tenets of community-based programming, which leads to the next two factors that are integral to the theme of the college president as a community leader: community leadership and visibility in the community. When participants spoke about the president’s involvement in the community, their comments typically were followed by their perception that the community college president is a community leader who should be visible in the community.

*Community Leadership*

The role of the president as a community leader was identified by the study participants as one whereby the college president is not only involved in the
community, but is active as a leader. This expectation is perceived in terms of serving on one or more boards of community-based organizations and working with state and local leaders to advocate for the college and the community. The study participants perceived that the college president should interact with other community leaders to help them with a variety of community activities, such as the recruitment of new business and industry. Several leaders expressed that the president should take a leadership role in economic development, as described by one participant: “The community college president in any community should be part of the economic development board, or the EDC, whatever exists in the local community, because they do play such an important role in worker retraining.” Another leader states:

Obviously, the president has to be a leader in economic development. Sometimes the president’s role as a change leader gets into problem areas with politics, but in some communities – and again, I relate back to other communities that I’ve been involved with – the community college president can be a change agent. In some communities it’s more difficult because of politics. And, the more political the community, the less the president of the community college can take that role. A community college president needs to be as visible as the president of the Chamber of Commerce or the Chief Executive Officer of the Chamber of Commerce. He needs to be extremely visible because he is the community college, period.
In this community leadership role, several leaders perceived the president to be the main contact for the college, and several leaders referred to the president as the symbol of the college, as indicated in the following statement:

I think the president is an image of the college. I think if it’s a good image, you tend to rely on that even more. If it’s a bad image, you kind of tend to discount it, just kind of work around, but yes, I think he is the symbol of the college, because people know he’s the president of the college and he’s calling the shots and he’s directing the program, so I think definitely he’s that. He’s kind of the marquee of the college.

A statement from a leader in the economic community further demonstrates the perception of the community college president as a community leader:

A college president has to be involved in the community, but they also have to be involved in community leadership, because as a community college president they are, by default, a community leader, even if you are new to a community.

The community leadership theme is the second most described role of the college president after community involvement, and most participants perceived these two themes as synonymous. As provided by the community leaders, examples of areas in which the president plays a community leadership role include economic development, civic, social, cultural, and charitable organizations. The president’s community leadership role can be summarized by the following comments from a board chair of the foundation of a community college:
The president needs to understand and realize they are going to be a focus, a focal point of the community. That person will be looked upon for probably many roles besides being a community college president. Just as an example, I think that person would be asked to serve on several boards, be involved in different types of studies, or whatever other activities. It may be the hot topic of that community that needs to be addressed, whether it be downtown revitalization, whether it be something to do with recreational/cultural aspects of what’s going on in the area. I think they would look upon the president as being somebody who needs to be multifaceted. Besides having the education and training and focus of making sure that the school is run properly, the president has to branch out and infiltrate into that community to show a leadership role in many other areas beside education.

Visibility in the Community

In addition to being involved in community-based organizations and assuming a variety of community leadership roles, the community leaders who participated in this study expected the president to be visible in the community and be present at community events that do not necessarily relate to education. For the study participants, visibility was associated with being accessible to community leaders and members for collaboration on projects and addressing the needs of the community. Visibility was perceived to be a means by which the approachability of the president could be
enhanced. Some leaders felt the president should try to attend a multitude of functions, engage in community projects and activities, visit different churches, community fundraisers, and attend cultural events that support the community. The types of comments offered by the participants regarding the community college president’s visibility include: “I think in that position as a president, it’s not usually a 24 hour-a-day job, but it’s kind of close to it. You have to be available; you know, at breakfast meetings, you have to be available for a dinner, and so forth.” Another leader felt the president should:

Show up at everything that you could possibly show up at. Reach out to as many people as possible. Act as if you are running for office, so that as many people get to know you and see you and know that you’re accessible and approachable. . . . Be visible in the service area, not just in a particular location.

Identifying Community Needs

The conceptual framework for this study frames the community college as an open systems organization that has an interdependent relationship with its external environment, specified as the service area of the college (Scott & Davis, 2007). This interdependent relationship requires that the college must determine the needs of its service area and the demands placed on the college by the community it serves. As the lead contact and liaison for the college in the community, the president must be able to identify critical community needs and guide the college in developing the programs and
services required in meeting them. In so doing, the president must partner with community-based organizations, as described in Boone’s community-based programming model (Boone and Associates, 1997). A community leadership role identified by most of the participants in this study confirms one in which the president, either as a leader or a partner, is out in the community and can identify issues that the college could help resolve, and in so doing, seeks input as to ways the college can help meet community needs. As a mayor in the study states, “The president should look for input from the community – soliciting and asking ‘how might we serve you better’— and look for ways to offer service by bringing things, and looking for, and asking for ways that the college can expand what it does.” Another participant stated that the president should “... get out in the community and be a part of the community that they’re in, and look at the needs in the community.” Another leader stated that the president should also “...be willing to step up and then work with others and, having the ability to work with others because you have a good relationship with them, you’re more likely to find the resources that you need to put something together.”

The findings demonstrate that these community leaders perceive that one of the roles of the college president is to seek out and identify community needs that the college, through its programs and services, can help resolve, either in partnership with other community-based organizations or in taking specific actions using its resources.
Leadership Traits

In describing the community college president as a community leader, a wide variety of personal attributes and leadership traits were identified by the study participants. These community leaders expressed that the college president should reflect characteristics that they identified as positive, and should be a respected leader in the community and of the college. The leadership traits, as perceived by the study participants and that emerged from the data, are categorized into two areas of leadership: a) personal attributes and b) leadership skills.

The personal attributes that community leaders perceive to be desirable for the college president to have include being approachable, outgoing, positive, sociable, and polished. Other personal attributes that leaders desire of their president are trustworthiness, honesty, respectfulness, having high character and morals, and humility. A board chair of a chamber of commerce stated that the college president must be a good citizen: “The college president has got to be honest and truthful in everything they do, and they’ve got to have high morals and be a good example, a good citizen.” As already established, the president is expected to be out in the community collaborating with community leaders, members, and politicians. Thus, the community leaders in this study believe that these personal attributes are necessary for the president to be successful and effective in his or her roles both as a community leader and leader of the college. A board chair of a community college states:
As president, you present a good picture as far as high character and high morals in the community. I would love for the president to be a strong member in a church, maybe a Sunday school teacher. I think it would be good to present that type image.

Leadership skills that community leaders perceive as important include being a good communicator, listener, and problem solver, as the president is expected to speak to community groups about the college, its mission, and vision and to be able to identify community needs that the college can help resolve. Other traits identified include being a team builder who serves both in the community and on campus, behaves professionally, and is a good administrator, as well as being organized. In addition, leaders believe that the president should be a fundraiser and a politician in working with political leaders to advocate for the college and the community. However, while being a politician, the president is expected also to be apolitical and to keep the college out of political campaigns and controversial topics and situations that are not necessarily the purview of the college in fulfilling its mission. In short, the leadership traits of the community college president, as perceived by these leaders, reflect a president who is engaged, visible, demonstrates high moral character, and is a model community citizen.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study are presented thematically, as categorized under the five research questions that guide the inquiry. The data provide insight into the
perceptions of the selected community leaders who participated in this study about the role of the community college and the role of the community college president in the community. The two key focal points of this study are: a) community leaders’ perceptions of the community college and b) community leaders’ perceptions of the community college president.

Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the Community College

The primary finding of this study is that community leaders perceive that the community college contributes to the quality of life of its service area residents. The college’s contribution to the quality of life of the community residents is described from several perspectives. One perspective is that the college provides educational programs that can help improve and update the workforce of the communities served by the college and, as such, can help make the service area more attractive to new business and industry that may locate to the area. Secondly, for those community members who choose to avail themselves of the college’s programs, earning a certificate, diploma, or degree may increase their earning potential, thereby allowing them to provide a better standard of living for themselves and their families. Thirdly, several leaders believe that having access to two-year technical degree programs and college transfer programs allows students to stay at home and save money while working in an occupation as well as working towards a two- or four-year degree, thus improving their quality of life. Lastly, while working collaboratively with other community-based organizations to
promote community development, the college also adds to the quality of life of the entire community by providing cultural programs and activities.

The second finding of this study is that community leaders perceive that the primary component of the mission of their community college is to support economic development in the community with courses and programs that prepare community members for future and current workforce needs. When the leaders in this study spoke of workforce development, they mentioned training for new industry, training for existing industry, and providing trades and vocational training programs for the construction and service industries of the local economies. They stated that the community college should stay current in terms of technology and provide ongoing training for its service area citizens, and that they expect the college to provide specialized training for specific businesses and industries in the community. Furthermore, the leaders in this study expect the community college president to be involved and visible in economic development efforts, especially in the recruitment of industry, and to serve on boards of the chamber of commerce and economic development commissions, as appropriate for the college’s service area, to support economic and workforce development.

The third finding is the importance that community leaders place on the accessibility of the community college in offering its educational programs and services. The leaders in this study believe that the community college is an asset for supporting community growth, improving the quality of life of service area residents,
and helping to increase the educational attainment rate of the citizens in the service area. Most of these leaders acknowledge that many community members are not able to travel or move to attain access to colleges or universities, and realize that the community college is the pathway to higher education such citizens.

The fourth finding of this study is that community leaders expect the college to offer the two-year or associates degree in career and technical programs that are relevant and support the business and industry in the service area of the college. According to the participants, the two-year program would offer degrees in specialized fields that would allow the graduates to obtain better jobs and thereby better educate the workforce, which would promote economic development for the community. Also, these leaders expect the college to offer the two-year degree for college transfer so students can stay in their community the first two years of working towards a bachelor’s degree and then transfer to a senior institution of higher education if they choose to pursue a higher degree.

The fifth finding of the study is that the perceptions of the community leaders in this study on the role of the community college in the community, its mission, are consistent with the colleges’ documented missions in several key areas: a) contributing to the quality of life in the community, whereby most of the mission statements contain language that addresses quality of life, b) preparing a trained workforce and supporting economic development, c) providing accessible education to community members, and d) offering the two-year or associates degree in both the technical and college transfer
areas. The outcome of these findings is that the community leaders in this study support the comprehensive mission of the community college in trying to meet the educational needs of a diverse community, which is the service area of the community college.

The sixth finding of this study is that community leaders expect the community college to provide necessary leadership, as may be appropriate, and partner with other community-based organizations in identifying community needs, helping to resolve critical community issues, and promoting community development.

*Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the President of the Community College*

Community leaders offered a variety of perceptions of the community college president and the role of the president in connecting the college with the community. The leaders expect the president to be a model citizen of high moral character, who is active, visible, and a recognized community leader. These demands are similar to those described by sitting presidents in several studies, as indicated in Chapter Two.

The seventh finding of this study, then, is that the community college president is expected to be involved and visible in the community. The study participants described the president’s involvement in a variety of ways; however, common threads emerged from their responses. Most leaders believe that the president should be involved in identified civic and community organizations, such as Rotary Club, the United Way, the chamber of commerce, and church. Rotary Club is the organization most cited by the participants in this study, which is consistent with Vaughan’s (1986)
findings where 65 percent of presidents surveyed reported that they were members of Rotary Club.

The eighth finding of this study is the community leadership role that these community leaders desire to see demonstrated by their community college president. The participants in this study perceived that the community college president should be a community leader who assumes a variety of leadership roles outside of education. Such community leadership roles may be in civic, nonprofit, or other community-based organizations in the service area of the college. The community leadership role most frequently cited by these community leaders for the community college president is to serve as a board member of the chamber of commerce or economic development commission.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five provides a brief summary of this study, its design, sample, and site selection process. The summary is followed by the conclusions drawn from the findings, implications for practice and suggestions for future research, and recommendations. The five research questions that have guided this study are:

1. What are the perceptions held by community leaders of the role of their community college in contributing to the quality of life of citizens who reside in the service area?

2. Do community leaders value their community college’s programs in contributing to and building a dynamic economy for its service area and making education accessible to the citizens who reside in the service area?

3. Are the perceptions held by these leaders about the role of their community college congruent with the documented mission of the college?

4. Given the multitude of community organizations and agencies within the service area of the college, is the community college viewed as a team member in collaborating with these community-based organizations in serving the needs of the citizens who reside in the service area?

5. How do community leaders perceive the president of their community college as a community leader who connects the college to the community through his or her active participation in the affairs of the community and collaboration with leaders of other community-based public and private organizations?
Summary

An interpretive, multisite, qualitative study research design was used to explore the five research questions that constitute the framework of this study. The data from twenty-eight semi-structured participant interviews have been analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Six research sites were selected for this investigation, two in each of three states: North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. Each research site is comprised of a rural community college and its service area, and was selected at random by state. Each of the six research sites was selected based on the following demographic criteria: a) student enrollment of 1,500 to 3,000 in college credit courses; and b) service area population not exceeding 150,000 citizens.

The participants selected at each site were formal community leaders, identified as positional leaders in the service area of the college, who represented a cross-section of the functional communities that the college serves (Boone, 1992b). Positional leaders were selected for this study based on their formal leadership roles in the community, ease of identification, and potential access to the researcher. The participants of the study included eleven board chairs and two board members of a variety of organizations, nine executive directors, four mayors, and two State legislators.

The findings of the study are organized under recurring themes that relate to the research questions and that emerged from the participants’ responses. The five themes that developed under Questions One and Two address the community college’s role in:
1) contributing to the quality of life of service area residents; 2) providing workforce development; 3) making education accessible; 4) providing two-year technical and college transfer degrees; and 5) providing cultural programming at the college for the community. No additional themes developed under Questions Three and Four other than the topic of investigation for each question. For Question Five, the description of the community college president as a leader falls under two thematic categories: personal attributes and leadership skills.

The two key focal points of this study are: a) community leaders’ perceptions of the community college and b) community leaders’ perceptions of the community college president. Within the purview of these two focal points, eight findings emerged from the data analyzed in this study; the first six findings fall under focal point (a), and the last two findings fall under focal point (b). The findings of this study are: 1) community leaders perceive that the community college contributes to the quality of life of its service area residents; 2) community leaders perceive that the primary role of the community college is to support economic development; 3) community leaders place importance on the accessibility of the community college to service area residents in offering educational programs; 4) community leaders expect the community college to offer programs that lead to the two-year associates degree in technical and specialized fields and college transfer; 5) the perceptions held by the community leaders of the role and mission of the community college are consistent with the major components of the documented mission statements of the community colleges; 6) the community college is
expected to provide necessary leadership, as appropriate, and partner with other community-based organizations in identifying community needs, helping to resolve critical community issues, and promote community development; 7) the community college president is expected to be involved and visible in the community and community affairs; and 8) the community college president is expected to take a leadership role in the community.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the findings of this study are: a) the community college is a valued asset of the community and contributes to the quality of life of its service area residents; b) the primary role of the community college is to support economic development; c) community leaders support the comprehensive mission of the community college, and d) community college presidents are expected to be leaders in the community.

The community leaders who participated in this study perceive the community college to be a valued asset in the community. The community college, in performing its multiple roles, is perceived by these community leaders to contribute to the quality of life of the community. One way the college contributes to the quality of life of residents in its service area is by providing educational programs that support a dynamic economy. The college’s educational programs help community members enhance and improve their education and their potential income earning ability while helping the
service area of the college become more attractive for potential new business and
industry due to an educated and well-trained workforce. Existing business and industry
remain competitive, improve their survivability, and retain jobs as a result of the
training the college provides to residents. Such training includes enabling students to
use new equipment and technology and preparing them for the changing global
economy. Additionally, as a team member with other community-based organizations,
the college helps identify and resolve critical community issues and supports
community development activities that help improve the quality of life in the
community. Also, the college offers and provides access to programs and courses for
personal and cultural enrichment, all of which may not be available if it were not for the
local community college. In short, by providing relevant programs and services to
business and industry, supporting community growth and development as a member of
the community, and providing access to cultural and personal enrichment programs, the
community college contributes to the quality of life of the community and its members.
This conclusion confirms what is espoused in the literature with regard to the
community college’s role in helping communities rebuild, renew, and become strong
and viable while helping improve the quality of life in the community (AACC, 1988,

The second conclusion drawn from the findings of this study is that the
community leaders in this study perceive that the primary role of the community college
is to support economic development. As already indicated from the first conclusion,
community leaders value the college and its contribution to the quality of life of the community, and this view is founded on the expectation that the college helps the service area create and retain jobs, improves the employability of community members, and supports business and industry in specialized and customized training and, therefore, helps in the growth, stability, and renewal of the local economy. The role of the college in economic development, as perceived by the study participants, is consistent with the views and beliefs of the founders of the community college systems in the three states of this study (Brooks & Others, 1997; Bassett, 1997; Department of Community Colleges, 1966; Duffy, 1997; Graham, 1995; Puyear, 1990; Vaughan, 1987) and is also supported by the current literature regarding the community college’s economic development role in the current global economic crisis (Boulard, 2009; Chong, 2010; Dembicki, 2009a, 2009b; “Duncan, Biden team,” 2009; Fischer, 2009a; Latham 2009; Synder, 2009).

The third conclusion drawn from this study is that the community leaders in this study support the comprehensive mission of the community college. Their descriptions of the college’s role in the community are consistent with the documented mission statements and goals of the community colleges in this study. The study participants identified perceptions and expectations of the college’s role in economic development, education, and in the social and cultural realms of the community. They described the primary role or mission of the community college as one that supports economic development with its workforce development programs. Second to the economic
development role is that of making education accessible to the community. The ‘open

door’ admissions concept was not described *per se* by these leaders, but was implied in

eyour comments. Likewise, the concept of the ‘people’s college’, where all community

members have access to the college and the variety of programs it offers, was implied

by the participants’ comments. The selected community leaders also expect the college
to offer two-year degrees in both technical programs and college transfer, and that a
student can work towards a bachelor’s degree for the first two years at the community

college. Other roles of the college in its community-based mission that were described
by community leaders include the college’s role as a partner in collaborating with other
community-based organizations to help resolve a variety of critical community issues
and provide cultural programs for the community. The perceived roles of the
community college held by these leaders are consistent with the documented mission
statements and goals of the colleges in this study and with the literature on the role and
mission of the 21st century community college (AACC, 2000; Boone, 1997; Cohen &
Brawer, 2008; Vaughan, 2006; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998).

The fourth conclusion of this study is that the community college president is
perceived as a community leader and that he or she is expected to be active in the affairs
of the community and visible in multiple settings and activities outside of the education
community. The findings of this study indicate that the selected community leaders
view the president as a liaison between the college and the community. In assuming
leadership to resolve community issues, the president, in a neutral role, can act as a
liaison among diverse groups to help bring resolution to a variety of issues. The president is also expected to take a leadership role in economic development and to be a member of the chamber of commerce or an economic development board. The president is expected to seek input from the community to identify community needs and lead the college in developing programs that are relevant to the needs of the community. Lastly, the community college president is expected to be a model citizen in the community and to reflect a positive image for the college. The perceptions of and the expectations held by community leaders on the president’s external and community leadership role described in this study are consistent with the literature on the president’s role in the community (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Leist, 2007a; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Implications for Practice and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study suggests ideas that have implications for community college leaders in that they should: a) understand the ways that the community college is perceived by community leaders, b) understand the ways that the college is connected to the community and community-based organizations in the college’s service area, c) develop strategies that can be used to engage and gain support of current and future community leaders so that they may become advocates for the college, and d) understand the expectations that community leaders have for the community college president in his or her role as a leader in the community.
An implication for practice for community college leaders that is derived from the findings of this study is that developing strategies to investigate the ways that the college is perceived by community leaders will inform college leaders so that they can implement effective advocacy opportunities for the community leaders in the college’s service area. Conversely, community leaders who are well-informed about the community college and its comprehensive role and mission are critical to the college’s success, especially in difficult economic times. The findings of this study indicate that the selected community leaders in this study are knowledgeable about their local community college and its programs and have worked with the president or college administration and faculty in a variety of community and civic activities. Knowing their perceptions and beliefs about the college, its role, and whether or not the college is meeting their expectations will be critical for the college in its efforts to develop community leader advocates.

Community leaders in this study hold the expectation that the community college has a role as a team member with other community-based organizations in resolving critical community issues. The implication for practice is that the community college and its leadership should look for ways that the college can enhance its involvement in the affairs of the community and its support of community organizations and community development activities. This effort would expand the support of community leaders, extend the reach of the community college in the community, and generate positive support for the community college. This expectation by community leaders is important for the college to consider in its planning and decision-making processes.
leaders confirms the need for community colleges to engage in some type of community-based programming.

Community leaders who are well informed and understand the college’s mission are a key asset of the college in its efforts to acquire the necessary financial resources for its operations. The community leaders in this study were well informed about various aspects of the college, and their perceptions of the college’s mission were consistent with the actual mission of the college. Some of the study participants had held their positions for decades and had good working relationships with the college president and administrative staff and faculty. As new leaders emerge within the service area, the college leadership should develop strategies to educate and inform both the current and future community leaders regularly and systematically. That is, the college leadership should begin to focus on community leaders who are new to their positions and not necessarily knowledgeable about the role and mission of the community college in the community.

The demands on the community college president are well documented in the literature. The findings of this study confirm that the community leaders who participated in this study hold expectations that the college president will be a model citizen of the community, involved in many of the community’s affairs, and visible in community leadership roles outside of the educational and economic development communities. The implications for practice are that presidents should determine the types of functions and activities in which they can effectively become involved, and
send a member of the college’s staff to represent the president and the college for other appropriate events where college representation is desired.

Suggestions for future research into the topic of community leaders and their perceptions of the community college are reflected in the following questions: a) Are the perceptions of the selected community leaders in this study consistent with community leaders in general in the service areas of all community colleges? b) How do the perceptions held by community leaders of the community college and its president affect their support of the community college? and c) How do community leaders obtain information about the college?

The findings suggest that community leaders generally are knowledgeable about the community college and support its mission. Most of the leaders in this study have held their community leadership positions for some time, and over time they have grown to appreciate the college’s value to the community. The question remains whether the views and perceptions of the selected leaders in this study are representative of community leaders in general for all community colleges’ service areas. That is, are the perceptions, as described by this study’s participants, different when investigating a larger sample of community leaders?

Another area for research investigates whether or not the perceptions held by community leaders of the community college and its president affect their support for the college, and if so, whether or not efforts need to be made to change those perceptions. Such information would be helpful to the college leadership in developing
strategies for working with current and future community leaders in gaining their support of the college and actively and effectively helping those leaders to become advocates for the college. Thus, a related question for future research is: How do community leaders obtain their information and gain knowledge about the college? In order to develop strategies that can better educate and inform community leaders, with the goal that they will become advocates for the college, research into the ways that community leaders gain knowledge about the mission and role of the college would be helpful to college administrators.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of this study provide a foundation for recommendations for community college leaders at the local level as well as for educators in the field who are studying community college leadership. Three recommendations have emerged from this study: a) community colleges need to increase their advocacy efforts and develop community leaders as advocates for the college; b) community colleges should review and inventory their current roles in connecting with the community and the ways that they support community development, and c) community college presidents – current, newly appointed, and those leaders who aspire to become college presidents – should review the expectations that community leaders hold of the president’s role in the community.
Community colleges need to improve their advocacy efforts and build a base of community members and leaders who will support and advocate for the college. The community college needs advocates from a cross-section of the community to support its efforts to obtain financial, physical, and other resources, as well as to support policy decisions that help meet the local needs of the community. The findings of this study indicate that the selected community leaders believe that the community college is an asset to the community and that it supports economic development with its educational programs. The results also indicate that these community leaders are informed and knowledgeable about the major roles and mission of the community college. Based on these findings, therefore, it is recommended that community colleges identify leaders in their service areas who are knowledgeable about the college and will support the college. Community college leadership should build relationships with these community leaders so that together the college leadership and community leadership can advocate for the college at the local, state, and national levels. Also, in this process, the college leadership should seek out those community leaders who are not knowledgeable about the mission and capabilities of the college and educate them accordingly about the college and its valuable role in the community.

The need for advocacy will only increase as the demands for financial resources continue to grow while revenues dwindle, based on the current condition of local, state, national, and global economies. As reported by Katsinas (2005, 2009), the education budget allocations at both the local and state levels for community colleges will
continue to be strained as other social program costs continue to rise and take a greater share of these budgets, and as the demand for educational services at the community college grows as colleges experience record enrollments resulting from high unemployment.

The second recommendation from this study is that each community college should review and inventory the ways that it connects with the community. The findings from this study reveal that the community leaders in this study have an expectation that the college should be a partner and team member, if not a leader, in helping the community address and resolve a variety of critical community issues. Colleges should assess the ways they are involved in the community and to what extent they are meeting expectations. They should then develop strategies to become active community partners in community development activities and implement some form of community-based programming.

The third recommendation is that current and new college presidents should examine and review their own community roles and determine to what extent they should and can be involved in community affairs. The expectations are that the president should be active in the community, visible at many locations and functions, and serve as a community leader. The president cannot attend every community and fundraising activity in the college’s service area, nor be a member of every community-based organization. However, in every community and at various times, programs and events will occur that will require the president’s involvement. For those leaders who
aspire to become a community college president, the findings of this study will help them prepare for their future presidential leadership roles as they begin to understand the community’s expectation of the external leadership role of the community college president.

Reflections of the Researcher

Upon reflection on the findings and conclusions of my research, I have found that some aspects deserve further discussion. The first point is the overwhelmingly positive views and perceptions of the community college and its value to the community, as described by this study’s participants. Of the 28 positional leaders who participated in this study, only one leader had a few negative comments about the role of the community college president in the community and the president’s relationship with the community. This lone voice appeared to emerge from a difference of opinion regarding how the college was spending its local budget on college facilities. In the same community, a community leader refused to talk to me when I asked that he discuss with me the role of the college and the president. These isolated cases are the only perceptions of the role of the college and the president that appear to be negative from the selected participants in this study.

Another element of this study that deserves further discussion is the demographic profile of the study’s participants. In reviewing the demographic profile in Appendix F, of the 28 participants in this study, 23 were male and 5 were female. Of the
23 males, two were African-American and the rest were Caucasian. All of the females were Caucasian. Therefore, the majority of the participants were male Caucasians, and their primary interest was the college’s role in economic development. Although the intent of this study was to have a diverse group of leaders as participants, two primary factors led to Caucasian males being the majority of participants. First, within the communities selected for the study, which were rural communities in three southern states, the number of African-Americans and women in key leadership roles was limited. Also, the African-American and female leaders who were invited to participate in the study either declined to be interviewed or did not return calls and correspondence requests to be considered as participants. In short, the participants in the study volunteered to participate; that is, only those positional leaders who wanted to talk about the community college were interviewed. A more diverse selection of leaders would be desirable for future studies. Due to not having a diverse group of participants, bias was inherent in the results regarding perceptions of the majority of the participants in the study.

As underscored in this paper, the findings of this study indicate that the community leaders in this study had an expectation that the college and the president should be connected to and should collaborate with the community and key community-based organizations. Likewise, the community or service area of the college had an expectation that the college will be a part of the community, especially in the rural areas that are a focus of this study. This fact emphasizes the importance of community-based
programming of some type to be an ongoing activity of the community college. As such, community-based programming should be a part of professional development for the college’s faculty and staff. In addition, community-based programming and the importance of connecting and collaborating with all of the various communities served by a community college should be a requirement for all graduate level programs that focus on community college administration and leadership. This requirement should especially be targeted to individuals who aspire to be community college senior administrators, in particular, community college presidents.

Finally, the goal of this study was to determine how the college and its president are perceived by community leaders, and to use this information to start the process of strengthening and building advocacy programs to develop community leaders as advocates for the college. The results of this study indicate that selected community leaders are knowledgeable and value the community college, and therefore, should be ready to be recruited to support and help lead advocacy efforts for their college in the community.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

1) What is your current position?

2) How long have you been in your current position?

3) Briefly describe what you do in your position and how it is related to the local community college?

4) What is the highest diploma or degree level you have obtained?

5) What does the local community college do to support your community, and what do you see as the mission of the community college?

6) Please share with me some examples of how and when you work with the local community college president?

7) Tell me about your involvement with the local community college and experiences working with community college staff.

8) As a community leader, what community leadership roles would you like to see the president take?

9) What are some examples of presidential actions or behaviors that would influence your perception of the president either positively or negatively?

10) How does your perception of the president influence the way you view the college?

11) Please give some examples of how your support of the community college would be affected by your perception of how the president is received and accepted in the community?

12) What are some of the aspects of the president’s job that you feel if they are not performed properly would impact the way you perceive the president’s performance in the community?

13) In your opinion, how will the college be affected by the president’s perceived role within the community?
14) My research will be reviewed by individuals who are looking to be first-time presidents. What would you tell these future presidents they need to do to insure that he/she is viewed as a positive leader of the college?

15) In what ways do you view the community college president as a symbol of the college?

16) How do you perceive that the college’s ability to acquire the necessary resources for its operation will be impacted either positively or negatively based on how the president is perceived by leaders in the community for each of the following factors: financial, political, social, donor support, overall community support, and student enrollment?

17) In your opinion, will the ability of the college to fulfill its mission be affected by the way the president is perceived by key stakeholders in the community, such as yourself?
APPENDIX B

Sample Participant Letter

Dr./Mr./Mrs. Board Chair
ABC Community College
1500 Apollo Drive
Raleigh, NC  XXXXX

Subject: Research for Doctoral Dissertation

Dear Dr./Mr./Mrs. Board Chair:

I am a doctoral student at North Carolina State University. My dissertation is a three-state study on the community college and its presidency entitled, *Community Leaders’ Perceptions of the Role of the Community College and the Community College President in the Community*. The study will investigate and describe how community leaders perceive the community college and its president in three southeastern states. The benefits of this research will provide insight for community college leaders in their efforts to meet critical community needs and enhance their advocacy program.

Downhome County, NC was selected for this study in a random sampling process. You were selected as a potential participant in this study because of your community leadership role and position as Board Chair of ABC Community College. Please consider being a participant in this exciting study. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, and the findings or data published in the study will not be linked to you in any way.

The primary method of collecting data for the study is to conduct interviews with community leaders. The interviews will be recorded on tape for transcription at a later time. Upon completion of the interviews the data will be reviewed, summarized, and interpreted to describe community leaders’ responses to the research questions.

I will be in contact with you within the week to learn of your decision regarding participation in this study.

Thank You

Randy Parker
## Appendix C

### Interview Coding Form Example

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Interview Transcribed to Coding Form</th>
<th>Theme Code</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Number: 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leader Code: EDED</td>
<td>ROC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race: W Gender: M Age: F</td>
<td>WFD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Well, from a purely economic development perspective, the college’s role is to provide the labor force to meet the needs of industry and business in the community. I feel like it’s almost a left arm or a right arm to economic development. There is very little that we do in economic development that doesn’t depend on the community college. Specifically there are two areas that this economic development council is focused on, and again they are just almost hand-in-hand with the community college.

Notes: 1) EDED, code for Executive Director of Economic Development; 2) Age code F, 60-69 years of age; 3) ROC, Theme code for Role of the College; 4) WFD, code for Workforce Development; 5) Site codes identify the research sites in each state; 6) Participant number is the number assigned to each study participant i.e. 1-28
Appendix D

Data Analysis Form Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data</th>
<th>Theme Code</th>
<th>Sub Theme Code</th>
<th>Leader Code</th>
<th>Site Code</th>
<th>Part. No.</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well, from a purely economic development perspective, the college’s role is to provide the labor force to meet the needs of industry and business in the community. I feel like it’s almost a left arm or a right arm to economic development. There is very little that we do in economic development that doesn’t depend on the community college.</td>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>WFD</td>
<td>EDED</td>
<td>NC02</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college educates our younger folks, it gives them an alternative to four-year college at a high cost, and it gives them more streamlined technical knowledge and more specialized fields that they could go into.</td>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>ACCESS</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>SCO1</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1) ROC, Theme code for Role of the College; 2) WFD, Subtheme code for Workforce Development; 3) EDED, code for Executive Director of Economic Development; 4) Age code D, 50-59 years of age and Age code F, 60-69 years of age; 5) ACCESS, Subtheme code for Making Education Accessible; 6) CCC, code for Chairman, County Commissioners; 7) Site codes identify the research sites in each state; 8) Participant number is the number assigned to each study participant i.e. 1-28
### Appendix E

**Research Site Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Site</th>
<th>College Enrollment</th>
<th>Service Area Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College A</td>
<td>1547</td>
<td>119234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College B</td>
<td>2455</td>
<td>142600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College C</td>
<td>1704</td>
<td>59360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College D</td>
<td>2279</td>
<td>106691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College E</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>82555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College F</td>
<td>3014</td>
<td>105592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX F

## Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Leader Position</th>
<th>Leader Code</th>
<th>Age Code</th>
<th>Race Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Community College Board of Trustees</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Community College Board of Trustees</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Community College Board of Trustees</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Community College Foundation</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, Council of Government</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, County Commissioners</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, County Commissioners</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, United Way</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Chair, United Way</td>
<td>BC</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Member, Community College Foundation</td>
<td>BM</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Member, Community College Foundation</td>
<td>BM</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Council of Government</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Council of the Arts</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Economic Development</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Economic Development</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Economic Development</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director, Economic Development</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>MAYOR</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>MAYOR</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>MAYOR</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>MAYOR</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislator, House of Representatives</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Legislator, House of Representatives</td>
<td>SL</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>CAUC</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
1) Leader codes; 1a) BC, code for Board Chair; 1b) BM, code for Board Member; 1c) ED, code for Executive Director; 1d) Mayor, code for Mayor; 1e) SL, code for State Legislator;
2) Age codes; 2a) B, 30-39 years of age; 2b) C, 40-49 years of age; 2c) D, 50-59 years of age; 2d) F, 60-69 years of age; 2e) G, 70-plus years of age;
3) Race Codes; 3a) Cauc, Caucasian; 3b) AA, African America;
4) Gender code; 4a) M, male; 4b) F, Female