

DISSERTATION

SELECT ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE ELECTED TRUSTEES'
PERSPECTIVES ON HOW PREPARED THEY ARE TO SERVE THEIR TERM OF
OFFICE

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

SELECT ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ELECTED TRUSTEES' PERSPECTIVES ON HOW PREPARED THEY ARE

TO SERVE THEIR TERM OF OFFICE

Community college trustees are officials entrusted by the public to oversee the resources and property of community colleges; the board of trustees is seen as the link between the institution and the community they serve. Trustees make decisions that affect every aspect of an institution; therefore the accountability of these individuals at the local and state level is a high priority.

The purpose of this study was to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as an elected official. The study explored trustees' understanding of their college's mission and culture, and the principles that shape higher education. An emphasis was placed on their responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of their constituencies. And finally, the study explored whether trustees feel their past experiences have prepared them, and if professional development will assist them, in their role as a trustee.

Findings indicated that when a person decides to run for the office of a community college trustee many do not realize the magnitude of the commitment they are making. Stewardship was important and engagement, at the appropriate level, was also very important. Trustees should make strong ethical commitments to their organizations, their constituents, their values, and to the work of leadership. While doing so they should also understand the difference between the role of a trustee and the role of college administrators.

There is the need for internal orientations so trustees have an understanding of how different departments of a college operate and are funded. Trustees agreed that organized professional development activities are a true value and trustees would benefit with participation. Many licensed professionals are required to participate in continuing education, and while trustees are not licensed professionals, they are entrusted to make decisions that affect stakeholders financially, personally, and professionally.

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Mom, I know you have been watching and encouraging me from heaven—Thank you for teaching me that I can do anything I set my mind and my heart to.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Research is readily available on the topics of leadership traits, roles and responsibilities, communication, finance and governance views, and other educational issues of community college presidents and trustees (Englert 2007; Helgesen, 1995; Ingram, 1993; Sample, 2002). There has been limited research, however, regarding the relationships of trustees and college presidents as team members; furthermore there is little research related to any specific professional development requirement for elected trustees of community colleges.

Community members who are elected to serve as community college trustees are not generally experienced in the operation of a college, yet are placed in the position of making decisions that affect the college and its community. While trustees make decisions that affect the students and staff, the resources, and property of community colleges, they are not required to have any specific background or training to be elected. Additionally, there is nothing to enforce their attendance, if they are required, to attend an orientation or professional development.

Statement of the Problem

Community college trustees' leadership roles require the ability to come to consensus and decision making on serious matters such as tuition, personnel, curriculum, finance and other policy issues; however they are not always offered the tools required to

make such decisions. Furthermore, dealing with these decisions when consensus is not present can make it even more difficult. The role of an elected community college trustees is very significant and the decisions they face are extremely important, yet trustees may not receive the orientation or training necessary to effectively prepare them to engage in the decision making and overall governance process.

Community college trustees are officials entrusted by the public to oversee the resources and the property of community colleges; the board of trustees is seen as the link between the institution and the community that they serve. Trustees make decisions that affect every aspect of an institution, therefore the accountability of these individuals at the local and the state level is a high priority. In addition, the federal government has issued guidelines in areas such as financial aid, grants and specialized funding, safety, labor and employment, and student/employee rights. The sheer volume of rules, regulations, and accountability issues points to the seriousness of the trustees' role.

Mortorana (1963) has stated that:

As stewards acting for larger interests in the society, the trustees themselves must maintain an awareness and understanding of the changing character, not only to the institutions which they direct, but also of higher education as a totality. (p. 13)

In addition, the “great philosophical, ideological and technical shifts” (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGBUC], 1998) in American higher education, along with the demands of economic development and accountability, indicate the importance of having well-informed trustees as members of institutional governing boards.

The citizen board—regardless of whether its members are appointed or elected—has emerged as the best alternative to governmental control of higher education. Public institution trustees stand at the center of a system of checks and balances that permits them to delegate their authority, but not their responsibility, to their chief executives, faculty, and students (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1999).

The present structure for the governance of higher education institutions in Illinois is based on the control of lay boards, whose primary focus is making policy. The community college trustees in Illinois are elected by their community college district residents to participate on an eight-member board. Under Illinois statute (110 ILCS 805/3-8), boards elect their officers at an organizational meeting. The statute says the board shall elect one of its members as chair and another member as vice chair. Trustees have the opportunity to work with a broad range of people and are called upon to deal with a host of problems and challenges. Trustees are officials who are elected to oversee the resources, property and future of their community college in trust for the citizens who elected them (Illinois Community College Trustees Association [ICCTA], 2007).

The College President and Board of Trustee Relationship

The board of trustees set policy and oversee the action of the president. A good relationship between the president and the board is important as community college effectiveness is related to the effectiveness of the president-board relationship (Piland, 1994). The president assumes many responsibilities, one of which is to lead development and to nurture the president-board relationship. Because board members bring diverse

perspectives and understandings of what a college should be to their community, interesting leadership challenges arise (Smith, 2000).

The Board Chair

The board chair sets the tone for board governance and acts as the “liaison” between the board and the president (Orlikoff, 2000). Furthermore, the chairperson plays an important role in the professional relationship between the two entities. The chair ensures that there is a positive communication flow between them. Nevertheless, when there is miscommunication between the board and its president, it ultimately leads to conflict and other negative tensions.

The quality of leadership can either make or break a board. Good governance requires sound leadership and is inhibited by weak leadership. Although an excellent board chair does not guarantee superior governance, a poor or inadequate one nearly always thwarts it (Orlikoff, 2000).

To truly understand leadership, one must also realize that power is related to the ability to lead. Legitimate power is power granted through the organizational hierarchy; it is the power accorded people occupying positions as defined by the organization. (Griffin, 2002). A board chair recommends something to a president, and a president who refuses to respond can be reprimanded or even fired. All managers have legitimate power over their subordinates. Such outcomes stem from the manager’s legitimate power as defined and vested in her or him by the organization. Legitimate power, then, is authority (Haque, 2007). “Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and argue about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively” (Malm, 2008, p. 617).

History of Community Colleges in Illinois

The American higher education system is capable of delivering postsecondary education and training to a large portion of the country's population. Each of the higher education institutions, from community and technical colleges to liberal arts colleges and universities, have their own unique mission and a wide range of offerings. Of these institutions, some are public, supported by the state or local government, while others are private. Regardless of the institution's structure, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGBUC) noted that because of the Morrill Act of 1862, which established the land grant colleges, there was an opportunity for people to attend institutions of higher education who might have otherwise not been able to do so. Followed by the establishment of financial aid, affirmative action, and other opportunity-oriented programs, the community and junior colleges rapidly expanded. Governments at all levels made mass higher education a pillar of American democracy in the twentieth century (AGBUC, 1998).

With the establishment of Joliet Junior College—the first junior college—in 1901, junior colleges became significant players in American postsecondary education. In 1965, the Illinois Public Community College Act was passed, which enabled community colleges to exist as separate units of government. With this act, the Illinois Community College Board was also created, charged with coordinating activities in districts created throughout the state. With the enactment of the 1965 Public Community College Act, and the transition from junior colleges to what are called community colleges today, the final important elements codifying comprehensive community colleges for Illinois were in place.

Illinois community colleges are expected to offer a wide array of programs in baccalaureate, occupational, adult basic and remedial education, non-credit continuing education offerings, and business and industry training. Community colleges also offer community service activities (ICCTA, 1997).

The duties and responsibilities of the community college trustees in Illinois are part of the Public Community College Act. College boards are faced with critical decisions that affect students, staff, and community members on multiple levels. Trustees vote and make financial decisions related to spending tax dollars and setting tuition rates. Boards also have hiring and firing capabilities and oversight to salary and benefit packages of community college employees. While there is no list that includes all of the responsibilities that a board member must undertake, the following responsibilities are included in a handbook that is given to newly elected Illinois community college trustees: (ICCTA, 1997).

1. Define the role and mission of the college.
2. Evaluate institutional performance.
3. Approve college plans.
4. Establish tuition rates.
5. Establish tax rates.
6. Hire the president.
7. Evaluate the president.
8. Establish institutional budgets and approving contracts and expenditures.
9. Set the tone for institutional leadership.
10. Monitor the colleges' performance.

11. Represent the community to the college and the college to the community.

The board of trustee's leadership at Illinois community colleges is crucial to the success of a community college. The manner in which the board functions can enhance an institution's ability to be an outstanding college. The college's board of trustees and president need to develop a positive working relationship with one another. For that relationship to remain a success, the chair must act as a key liaison between the president and full board. The style in which a president manages his/her responsibilities within a college setting can enhance the current state of the college and affects all levels within the institution.

Critical Decision Making

Making decisions is an important part of the life process, whether it involves making decisions at home, work, or in other aspects of our daily lives. The decision-making process is not always simplistic, and may in fact be rather complex. Critical decision-making requires sound expertise and sometimes requires a person to have experience in order to master it. Community college trustees are individuals entwined in superstructures in which critical decision-making is a significant portion of the responsibilities to which they have been entrusted.

Critical decision-making requires that the person or persons in charge explore every possible outcome of a decision before it reaches its final stage; however, Arora and Allenby (1999) believe that

From a managerial standpoint, instead of exclusively focusing on the group member with a higher overall influence, it may be more beneficial to communicate with members who have lower overall influence, but higher influence on specific aspects of the decision. (p. 476)

For this reason, it is especially important to remember that critical decisions may require the input of other members of the organization in order to be effective.

Conflict Management/Resolution

Although conflict appears to be inevitable in the professional world, there are various ways to counter it to prevent extreme discordance among members of an organization. The theoretical and empirical literature on conflict empowers leaders with multiple conflict management alternatives. Conflict management is a vital skill for College Board presidents and trustees to embrace.

Professional Development for Community College Trustees

Weisman and Vaughan (2001) determined that only 14% of community college boards require their new trustees, whether elected or appointed, to participate in a structured orientation to assist them in their new role. New trustee orientation is voluntary for 70% of the community college boards; 16% do not offer a formal orientation. When those board members who choose to participate do complete an orientation, 86% of the time it is conducted by the college president or staff; in 36% of the cases, professionals are brought in to provide professional development training.

The Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA), established in 1970, proposes to accomplish two major tasks: to provide community college advocacy and to provide trustee development opportunities (ICCTA, 1997). Among 14 items listed on the ICCTA's website under the community college advocacy heading are tasks such as organizing Lobby Day, publishing a legislative directory, and honoring outstanding faculty and graduates. There are also 10 items listed as what the association offers for trustee development including seminars and roundtables, a board self-evaluation, and

trained retreat facilitators. There is nothing however listed about critical decision making or conflict resolution processes that board members can use for their teams.

Proper training helps to create a more informed confident and successful board. In addition to briefing boards on their own procedures, Chait (1993) found that effective boards are occupied by trustees with competency in six key areas:

1. Appreciation of the college's context of history and current setting,
2. Curiosity and appetite for trustee education,
3. Familiarity with effective group process techniques,
4. Inclination to engage in step by step, logical analysis,
5. Interest in communicating with key college constituencies, and
6. Appreciation of strategic planning.

In addition to this, Chait noted that good professional development programs nurture these qualities in each trustee.

There is no mandate for board members to participate in orientation or professional development and they are often under prepared when it comes to making critical decisions that affect the stakeholders of the college. There is no identified orientation to assist in handling any conflict that might be present during the critical decision making process. Considering the critical nature of the decisions that are made by the board of trustees, professional development would be an asset.

Equipping future leaders with tools for making critical decisions and utilizing conflict management measures provides value for boards. Professional development can assist future presidents and board members in establishing and nurturing a very important relationship—the president-board relationship. Professional development for critical

decision making and conflict resolution would arm trustees with skills allowing them to work as a team to make the best decision for all stakeholders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as an elected official. The study explored trustees' understanding of their college's mission and culture, and the principles that shape higher education. An emphasis was placed on their responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of their constituencies. And finally, the study explored whether the trustees feel their past experiences have prepared them, and if professional development will assist them, in their role as a trustee. There will be a "president's review" conducted with a few Illinois community college presidents to ascertain if they are in agreement or disagreement with the perspectives of the trustees.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer these questions.

1. How familiar are Illinois community college trustees to their institution's mission and cultural heritage, and in what way do they feel this meets the needs of stakeholders in their community?
2. How knowledgeable are Illinois community college trustees with the transcendent values and principles that guide and shape higher education?
3. How comfortable are Illinois community college trustees with their understanding of the public interest and the public trust? And if so, in what ways is this demonstrated?

4. How prepared, and in what way, do Illinois community college trustees feel they are able to address the legitimate and relevant interests of the institution's various constituencies?
5. How do Illinois community college trustees feel that their past experience, career pathways, and professional development have prepared them for their role as an elected trustee?

This final question was used for the presidents' review, but is not a research question.

How, and in what ways, are community college presidents in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official?

Scope of Study

Delimitations

The study scope has been limited to interviewing nine Illinois community college trustees, who were elected governing board trustees and who have been voted by fellow board members to serve as the board chair at their respective community colleges. The majority of boards serving Illinois community colleges are elected, therefore, appointed boards, of which there are a very limited number, were not included in this study.

Participants represented a variety of career paths, tenure in current position as a trustee, gender, and academic emphasis of study. In the scope of this study, career path refers to the path the trustee followed to ascend to trustees in their respective roles. This diversity will offer varying personal perspectives on each participant's capacity for consensus building, decision-making and dealing with conflict.

Limitations

Responses received during interviews may be influenced by the events of the day, time of day, or other extraneous factors surrounding the interview. With some questions, interviewees were encouraged to think of past experiences in general; when responding to those general questions it is noted that the chance that the response of a specific experience does exist. Likewise it is possible when asked to think of a specific instance the interviewee may not think of anything specific and respond with general statements. The results of the interview will also be limited by the respondents' willingness to provide honest and accurate information related to their personal experiences.

Because the population was confined to trustees from elected independent boards of community colleges in Illinois, generalizing results to a broader community college population is not possible.

Because the interview questions that were used were predefined the responses were, in most cases, related to the questions asked. During the final piece of research when the presidents were asked if they were in agreement with the trustee's perspectives, some presidents thought that the trustees avoided certain topics whereas the topics the presidents referenced were not actually part of the interview questions.

Significance

The research provided a general understanding of the expectations and accountability of the Board of Trustees at Illinois Community Colleges. The research offered information surrounding the consensus building ability, and the decision making and conflict resolution skills utilized by trustees when making decisions affecting their institution's stakeholders. Stakeholders can be persons, groups, neighborhoods,

organizations, institutions, societies, and even the natural environment that have an interest in the issue or concern present.

The study explored how trustee chairs perceive an orientation and/or professional development could influence their communication and decision making skills, thus affecting the overall organizational effectiveness.

Researcher's Perspective

The study developed out of my personal and professional experience involving board leadership and the impact board decisions have had on my life. I have experience serving on a variety of boards including chambers of commerce, nonprofit entities, and professional development organizations. I have also served as an elected member of a unit school board in a public school system in Illinois. During my tenure, serving on boards, I often observed peer board members voting on agenda items without sufficient background information. It appeared that what I consider sufficient information about the agenda items, which at times were extremely critical to stakeholders, was not present and questions were not asked. I witnessed board members vote without question on financial and human resource agenda items.

As a community college employee, I have held several positions throughout my career including support staff, adjunct faculty, and administrator. For the last five years, I have served in an executive leadership role. In all cases, I have been impacted by decisions made by the trustees at my institution. Experiences from these roles, in addition to those of a taxpayer and voter, have contributed to my interest in understanding what influences trustees when they make decisions, specifically critical decisions.

Subsequently, I have an interest in learning what training might assist board members to be effective leaders overseeing an organization.

Relative to this study, my personal biases include my beliefs that (a) board members often make hurried decisions without proper research; (b) board members often make decision based on their own past experiences and biases rather than on factual data reflective of the current situation; (c) board members may demonstrate a pattern of opposing votes (decisions) that reflect the rival board members' decisions; and (d) with proper professional development, board leadership teams can be developed to maximize effectiveness. I feel the elected trustees in the community college system have a wonderful opportunity to make a significant contribution and that with appropriate professional development these contributions can be enhanced profoundly.

I am a trained mediator and instructor for the Balanced and Restorative Justice model of conflict resolution. I believe this background allows me to see things differently than others because as a mediator I assist stakeholders bypass their personal biases by locating and understanding how to prevent latent issues prevent them from making decisions that might affect others unjustly. As a result of my background and training, it can become frustrating to watch board members make decisions that impact people so seriously, when at times a board member appears to make decisions to either go with the flow or to disagree with someone else on the board for their own personal reason. Personally, I feel strongly that there is a need to educate the board members of the severity of their actions.

To conclude my perspective, I would be remiss if I did not indicate that the aforementioned actions of board members are not, in most cases, ill-willed. I believe that

often actions are a reactive measure as opposed to intentionally wrong. Often board members are recruited to run for office and serve their community and without having a proper orientation to give them the background to make sound decisions and/or sufficient training on how to handle conflict, they make decisions without understanding the result, both direct and indirect, to all stakeholders. Lastly, I hope that this study will optimize the importance and value that trustees bring to the community college and the stakeholders they serve.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership by the governance board is crucial to the success of a community college. A community college needs strong leadership noting that “leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and argue about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively” (Malm, 2008, p. 617).

Leadership

In his book *The Contrarian’s Guide to Leadership*, Sample (2002) writes “The very concept of leadership is elusive and tricky. It’s hard to define in a way that is satisfactory to everyone, although most people believe they know it when they see it” (p. 1). Sample (2002) adds that as a leader, a person should have the necessary skills to obtain followers. “Before one can lead, one must acquire a set of followers; indeed, followers are the sine qua non of leadership” (p. 142). Sample continues

But one of the most important and contrarian points we can make about leadership is that it is highly situational and contingent; the leader who succeeds in one context at one point in time won’t necessarily succeed in a different context at the same time, or in the same context at a different time. (P. 1)

Yukl (2006) defines leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 8). Northouse (2001, p. 3) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” Northouse further identified four basic

components of leadership: “a) leadership is a process, b) leadership involves influence, c) leadership occurs within a group context, and d) leadership involves goal attainment” (p. 3).

Ethical Leadership

For a leader to be trustworthy, he must possess character, competence, and commitment. Character is the combination of moral qualities by which a person is judged apart from intellect and talent. Avolio (2004) finds “Leaders exhibit ethical behaviors when they are doing what is morally right, just, and good, and when they help to elevate followers' moral awareness and moral self-actualization. Indeed, ethical leadership encompasses more than the fostering of ethical behaviors” (p. 2).

Weichun Zhu (2008) wrote “Ethical leaders set high standards for moral and ethical conduct, and for moral emulation. Ethical leaders have strong moral values and goals, which lead to behaviors and decisions to promote ethical policies, procedures, and processes within their organizations.” Ethical leaders appear as high ethical role models or moral exemplars to encourage followers to establish their own internal set of moral principles and ideals, which helps establish a basis for follower moral identity, and ultimately moral action (Avolio, 2004).

Ethical leaders, according to Zhu (2008), also use rewards and punishments to influence followers' ethical behavior. “Research shows that reinforcement plays an important role in modeling effectiveness because observers pay close attention to those who control important resources, rewards, and punishments.” Ethical leaders also focus on coaching and mentoring followers to be prepared to assume greater moral

responsibility, and ultimately develop followers into moral exemplars through moral socialization (Hoffman, 1988).

Servant Leadership

In servant leadership the leader has naturally chosen to serve first; then they make a conscious effort to lead. Patterson (2003) presented the theory of servant leadership as a logical extension of transformational leadership theory. She defined and developed the component constructs underlying the practice of servant leadership, defining servant leaders as “those leaders who lead an organization by focusing on their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral” (Patterson, 2003, p. 5). She defined followers as “those who are subordinate to a given leader within a given organization” (Patterson, 2003, p. 7) and suggests the terms subordinates and employees can be used interchangeably.

Trustees are accountable to all parties and have an interest for the best possible performance of the institution in the service of the needs of all constituents – including the society at large. When empowered to lead an organization, should a trustee fail or weaken, the system should allow for someone to assist or guide them said Greenleaf, (1977) “They are the holders of the charter of public trust *for* the institution” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 97).

Everyone shares in the decision-making process in servant leadership, so there is ownership in the outcome. Involvement is designed to include active participation of faculty, staff, and administration. In this model, according to Greenleaf, trustees are legally in charge and manage an institution. “Administrators operate the institution under

goals and general policies set by trustees and from an executive office designed by trustees” (Greenleaf, 1997, p. 96).

William Griffin (2011) stated that in general, higher education trustees serve as the institution’s stewards. “However, good stewardship is not an easy task because the challenges facing colleges are many and complex.” (Griffin, 2011, p. 21). Darla J. Twale, a professor at University of Dayton, and Joanne E. Burley, former chief campus officer at Pennsylvania State University, contended, “As public institutions of higher education grow larger and more complex, governing them internally and externally becomes ever more cumbersome” (Twale & Burley, 2007, p. 1).

Governance

The community college governing board is responsible for overseeing the institution in its entirety to warrant its success in the present as well as in the future. Birnbaum (1988) discussed the four possible governance models for higher education institutions. Included were the bureaucratic model, the anarchical model, the political model, and lastly the collegial model.

Governance of an educational institution is an important factor in ensuring that every level of the institution is successfully and professionally maintained. Governance, with a wide perspective, refers to “the structures and processes through which institutional participants interact with and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment” (Birnbaum, 1988. p. 4). As Birnbaum also indicated there is no single definition for governance, yet it appears to be the most distinguishing characteristic between educational institutions and other types of organizations. Similarly, McManus and White (2008) reported that “Governance helps the organization

focus on the activities which contribute most to its overall objectives to utilize its resources effectively and to ensure they are managed in the best interests of its principal stakeholders” (p. 14).

According to Birnbaum, the concept that best demonstrates the difference between educational institutions and other organizations is their governance. The “authority to establish a college or university belongs to the state, which exercises it by forming through statute...an institution with a corporate existence and a lay governing board” (Birnbaum, 1988, p.4). These lay boards, which legally are the institution, have become the basis of lay governance structure of American higher education and are part of the political process whether they are elected or appointed.

Birnbaum (1988) indicated that bureaucratic institutions tend to have specific written rules and regulations to help provide a more effective and efficient operation. These institutions also attempt to define measurable goals and objectives and the costs relate to these goals; they are then expected to compare the benefits and outcomes.

Academic institutions operate under a state charter with formal hierarchies, channels of communication, policies, and rules that govern much of their work. Academic institutions are often described as bureaucratic institutions. Individuals within bureaucratic organizations are assigned responsibility for decision-making by the formal administrative structure and inherent chains of command (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1977).

The term “shared governance” began to emerge in the literature following the American Association of University Professors’ pivotal “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” adopted in 1966 (American Association of University

Professors [AAUP], 1966). “Shared governance is both an ideal and an operational reality that pertains to ways in which policy decisions are made in colleges and universities” (Hines, 2000, p. 142). Previous research on governance (Levin, 2000) indicates that although there is limited legal language requiring the practice of shared governance in unionized community colleges, there are formalized processes for faculty to participate in institutional decision-making (Gilmour, 1991).

President and Board Chair Relationships

The relationship between the chair and president is one of the most important factors determining the success of the institution. Generally speaking, creating an effective community college president and board chair relationship can be difficult. Levin (1991) reported that the board/president relationship is important and can have an effect on several areas. These areas include the environment external to the college, which includes the community and government officials; the internal constituencies of administration, faculty and staff; the consistency of the message of the college; the process of governance; and the portrayal of the values of the college. Donahue (2003) stated that the interactions between the board and the president are critical to the image of the institution.

The chair and the president are joined in a partnership, and they “must learn to dance together” (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1996, p. 123).

The board chair acts as the “liaison” between the board and the president (Orlikoff, 2000, p. 25). Leadership exhibited by the chair sets the tone for the board governance (Donahue, 2003). Furthermore, the chairperson plays an important role in the relationship between the two entities. Ensuring that there is a positive communication

flow between the president and the board when there is miscommunication between the board and its president, good communication ultimately leads to a reduction in conflict and other negative tensions.

Historically, leadership studies in higher education tend to focus on the role of the president or other administrators, and the leadership role of the chair has been largely ignored. However, in the past few years, a growing body of literature has recognized the leadership exhibited by the chair in setting the tone of board governance, in contributing to the effectiveness of the president and, ultimately, in ensuring the success of the institution.

The quality of its leadership can make or break a board. Good governance requires sound leadership and is inhibited by weak leadership. Although an excellent board chair does not guarantee superior governance, a poor or inadequate one nearly always thwarts it. (Orlikoff, 2000, p. 24)

Ineffective leadership from the chair can create instability on the board of trustees. One of the criticisms of the trustees of public institutions by presidents is that too often they can be "fractionated and fractionalized" (Bailies, 1996, para. 14). A chair that is unable to form the board into a cohesive unit will not be able keep it attentive to the important governance functions of the institution. Without effective leadership from the chair, a board can easily become divided and distracted from the business of governance by seemingly insignificant issues. (Donahue, 2003)

Greenleaf (1977) provided a statement for leadership when describing the president-trustee relationship: "Trustees lead the administrators. Administrators lead the trustees and the staff" (p. 96). It is this relationship that offers the paradox where the president acts as leader and follower with the same group of individuals at an institution

(Smith, 2000). Both the college board of trustees and the president need to develop a positive working relationship with one another.

The leadership for community college board governance intimately relates to the effectiveness of the president and the background from which he/she derived experience.

Moreover, Eddy (2005) wrote that

The organizational location of the college president at the top of the hierarchy affords individuals in the position a certain amount of power, but presidents wield this power differently based on their cognitive orientation, institutional culture and external constraints. (p.706)

The more knowledge and skill the college president has mastered, the more threatening he may appear to his colleagues, ultimately creating space for conflict between the president and the board of trustees. However, when conflict is present, the effectiveness of the chair can be compromised and the board can easily become separated and diverted from the regular college business of governance by insignificant issues, especially when “the role of the college board president is most often the center of attention” (Eddy, 2005, p. 706).

The chair is closely involved in the operational effectiveness of the president by gauging the pleasure of the board. The chair should be able to professionally “command the respect of the board, to manage difficult or controversial conversations and to calm choppy waters” (Lewis, 2010, p. 34). Kauffman (1993) believes that “Nothing is more critical to the president’s effectiveness than the relationship of the board chairperson to the president” (p. 133). A board of trustees and president that presents a conflict free environment communicates a message of peacefulness and productiveness and allows the entire institution the ability to achieve its goals. In the ideal situation, the chair provides

the president dependable support, trustworthy advice, and even friendship (Ingram, 1993).

Levin (1991) reported that the board/president relationship is important and can have an effect on several areas. These areas include the environment external to the college, which includes the community and government officials; the internal constituencies of administration, faculty and staff; the consistency of the message of the college; the process of governance; and the portrayal of the values of the college. Donahue (2003) stated that the interactions between the board and the president are critical to the image of the institution.

Stakeholder Theory

According to Angeloantonio and Perrini (2010), stakeholders were “those groups who can affect or are affected by the achievement of an organization’s purpose” (p. 209). Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) proposed that stakeholders could be the natural environment or persons, groups, neighborhoods, organizations, institutions or societies.

Freeman (1984) defined a stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (p.46). In comparison, Freeman and Evan (1990) address stakeholders as contractors or participants in exchange relationships, whereas Clarkson (1991) defined stakeholders as those who have placed something at risk in a relationship with the organization.

Stakeholder theory can be used to guide the structure and operation of an organization. Stakeholder theory assists an organizational entity to function better at hosting diverse participants to accomplish the many, and at times incongruent, purposes of that entity (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Angeloantomio and Perrini (2010) believed

that “stakeholder theory taught good managerial and instrumental practices to firms” (p.209). Within the firms or organization all stakeholders have value.

Stakeholder analyst argue that all persons or groups with legitimate interests participating in an enterprise do so to obtain benefits and that there is no prima facie priority of one set of interests and benefits over another. (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 68)

Stakeholder theory serves a purpose to persons with legitimate interests who participate in a project because it is beneficial to them (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Malm (2008) urges that “Leaders must be able to overcome entrenched interests and gain the commitment of stakeholders with different values to meet external demands and change organizations” (p. 615). In stakeholder theory, the focus is mainly directed to top managers in an organization. Thought to be somewhat autonomous decision makers, they are often profoundly influenced by the organizational context in which their decisions are embedded (Daft & Weick, 1984; Katz & Kahn, 1978; March & Simon, 1958).

Community college presidents and board leadership should explore their relationships with all stakeholders to develop strategies and long-term success (Freeman & McVea, 2001). Frooman (1999) proposed that if a range of “influence strategies” were used to disseminate their priorities to the organization, this could be used in their decision making process. Bryson (1995) wrote that stakeholders are of particular importance in public and non-profit organizations, which would include community colleges. Most of these organizations have a more diverse and divergent group of stakeholders than private-for-profit organizations, making it more complicated to identify key strategic issues.

Phillips (2003) argued that in stakeholder theory each organization had constituencies, also referred to as stakeholders, stressing that organizations are dependent

upon these constituencies in order to be successful. Thus in a community college the board, the administration, and staff are all necessary constituency groups. A fundamental tenet of stakeholder theory is that decision makers must continually keep the interests of different stakeholders in balance (Freeman, 1984).

The eventual goal of stakeholder management is for organizations to determine whether or not the organization is inclusive (Mitchell et al., 1997). Does leadership obtain information from all stakeholders for the purposes of the organization's survival and economic well-being? Balancing stakeholder interests is a key factor in an organization "keeping score" (Freeman, 1984); balancing stakeholder interests is a process of evaluation and attending to the varying claims of those involved in the organization. For administrative survival, the distribution of resources in a sensible way among relevant stakeholders is important. If the manager, trustee, or president does not meet occasionally with certain stakeholder groups he or she can lose their support. Therefore ensuring stakeholder interests are balanced is as important to the community college president and board member as it is for a manager or political leader. (Reynolds, Schultz, & Heckman, 2006).

Stakeholder engagement is hard work, complicated by the tough political environments that higher education policy often finds itself navigating. There are many community college stakeholders, including governors, legislators, college presidents, trustees, and other education leaders who are seeking ways to better serve their communities and the regional economy (Ford Foundation, 1998). Community college stakeholders face internal and external pressures, and lack an easily organized constituency. Freeman's (1984) influential work on stakeholder management provided a

framework within which managers could address the pressures and unprecedented amounts of environmental turbulence and change.

Social Conflict Theory

Social conflict theory explores the associations and identification of stakeholders and the interconnections in the organization. Problems in an organization, when using this theory, can be solved only with the support of all members (stakeholders) in the combined network of the organizations (Freeman & McVea, 2001). Weinclaw (2009) reported that “Educational institutions are not solely viewed as altruistic; they are most commonly viewed as ‘institutions’ whose purpose is to maintain the domination of the elite classes within society” (p. 1). In addition, Weinclaw argues that “Conflict theorists tend to see the educational system as a tool of society that socializes individuals to stay within their classes” (p. 1).

Critical Thinking and Decision Making

“Critical thinking is thinking that proceeds on the basis of careful evaluation of premises and evidence and comes to conclusions as objectively as possible through the consideration of all pertinent factors and the use of valid procedures from logic” (Carter, 1973). The concepts of "critical thinking," "thoughtfulness," and higher-order thinking" are all directly associated to people's ability to think carefully about the decisions they need to make. These individual concepts imply something beyond rote memorization or rehearsals of fact and seek additional information as needed, to recognize inconsistencies in problem formulation, to evaluate the truth of claims made in a statement or text, and to combine information and techniques in ways that are not exact parallels of previous situations (Gregory, 1991).

Critical decision-making requires that the person or persons in charge explore every possible outcome of a decision before it reaches its final stage; however, Arora and Allenby (1999) believe that

From a managerial standpoint, instead of exclusively focusing on the group member with a higher overall influence, it may be more beneficial to communicate with members who have lower overall influence, but higher influence on specific aspects of the decision. (p. 476)

For this reason, it is especially important to remember that such critical decisions may require the input of other members of the organization in order for the decisions to be effective. Berry (2006) believed that “Decision-making, team processes, decision outcomes, and communication effectiveness are influenced by various organizational structures, culture, information technology systems, and leadership styles” (p. 345). For example, if critical decisions are made as a group, the better the chances of achieving a more desired outcome. Berry pointed out that “Effective communication is critical to most organizational processes including team collaboration and decision making” (p. 344). Making good decisions during critical moments is an acquired ability that is learned over time. In order to make critical choices that yield outstanding outcomes, one must carefully analyze all of the possible outcomes that may ensue as a result of their decisions.

Conflict Resolution

Julius, Baldrige, and Pfeffer (2007) examined senior executives to find if they were able to exercise power and influence in contemporary colleges and universities. This research was conducted to determine if presidents have sufficient power to make decisions and recommendations and if decision-making authority or influence will be

employed. Power, as Julius et al. used the term, is defined as the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, to get people to do things they would not otherwise do. Pfeffer (1981) argued that politics and influence are the processes, the actions, the behaviors through which this potential power is utilized and realized (Pfeffer, 1981).

Julius et al.'s (2007) research offered two true case studies they believed to be representative of contemporary administrative environments and identified organizational characteristics that impinge upon effective decision-making and influence activities. They provided insight on behaviors and actions presidents might pursue in order to more successfully implement their decisions and ideas and, as well, demonstrate leadership capacities (Julius et al., 2007). While dealing with conflict can be challenging there are several types of conflict resolution that work successfully in a board environment.

Lippitt (1982) said "One of the key elements in modern management is the realization that conflict management and resolution has become an increasingly important competency of organizational managers" (p. 67). It is natural for individuals to endure conflict with another in any relationship, and conflict frequently manifests itself in workplace relationships. According to Fritz and Omdahl (2006),

In one's work environment, one is likely to develop relationships with individuals with whom one does not get along, with whom there is constant or recurring conflict, and which may be harmful to oneself, to others, and to the organization. (p. 3)

These conflicts often lead to undesired behaviors and continuous discomfort while working. Lincoln (2001) revealed that

The core of the problem exists in discovering and revealing the reasons for such acts of impassiveness and being able to treat this type of meaningless

behavior with effective intervention skills utilizing conflict resolution skills and communication skills. (p. 30)

In most cases, organizations intervene in workplace conflict and require that the individuals involved attend a mediation process in order to resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner. Mediation provides relevant skills needed to eliminate altercations and to promote peace among those involved by diffusing such conflicts that produce arguments, altercations, and intimidation in the workplace (Lincoln, 2001, p. 29).

Ocana, Chamberlain, and Carlson (2004) suggested that men in conflict are likely more accepting of the mediation process than women because it is a more logical process, rather than an emotional process, with which women can better identify. Arbitration is often used to resolve conflicts in the workplace and in college environments. Arbitration is a process in which organizational heads listen to both sides of the conflict and “announce a binding outcome” ultimately giving one person the advantage of gaining control over the dispute (Bowles, 2007, p. 7).

In addition to mediation and arbitration, Bowles (2007) suggests mediation-arbitration, in which a third party imposes a solution in which “you’d then step in and settle the remaining points of conflict” in the event that the mediation attempt fails (p. 8). If mediation is not put in place to resolve conflict, “any misstep can create a negative image, affect work relationships, and hinder future employment opportunities” (Stitts, 2006, p. 446). It is especially important to recognize that having good communication has a great effect on resolving conflict in the workplace. According to Stitts, this helps organizations and individuals involved in conflict to find a means of resolve while simultaneously creating a more comfortable and successful work environment.

Leadership styles play an important role in how conflict is managed. In Dee, Henkin, and Holman (2004), four factors of managing conflict among college board presidents and trustees were noted.

Used a range of strategies to manage conflict, including: avoidance (“there is no conflict”), smoothing (“there is no conflict between what we are doing now and what external actors want us to do”), bureaucratic forcing (“roles have to change in a prescribed way”), compromise (“we will split the difference between what we are doing now and what others want us to”), and collaboration (“we will work together to find a new way to define what we do”). (p. 180)

These management styles enable organizational heads to better deal with conflict in a manner that is acceptable and professional. Lippit (1982) held the view that differences of opinion can result in irreconcilable and costly conflict. There is need to develop more sophisticated social institutions that have the capacity to deal constructively with conflicts caused by change or diversity (Lippit, 1982).

According Dee et al. (2004), “Effective leadership may depend, in large part, on capacities to manage conflict at the interface of external presences for accountability and internal preferences for autonomy” (p. 180). If community college board members, together with their college presidents, implement better intervention strategies, they should see an improvement in their conflict management process. Conflict should be handled with communication between the parties involved, “it is through communication that conflict occurs and it is through communication that it should be resolved” (Poots, 2004, p. 300).

Handling Conflict within the College Leadership Team

The need for effective communication within the community college board of trustees setting is vital for all stakeholders within the organization, especially since “communication is at the heart of conflict” (Algert & Stanley, 2007, p. 53).

It is meaningful for the board and the chair to maintain a positive working relationship. During communication between the board and the president, the chair gains insight into the “likely reaction of the trustees” and other actions contemplated by the president (Ingram, 1993, p. 338). When there is conflict between the president and the chair, the effectiveness of the chair can be compromised and the board can become easily diverted from their sole responsibility (Ingram, 1993). Boards of trustees and their effectiveness play an important role at all levels within an organization and most certainly within the board of trustees.

Cohen and Bailey (1997) place conflict within internal processes into two categories: relationship conflict and task conflict. In some cases, when performing non routine tasks, conflict was not detrimental and instead promoted critical evaluation thus reducing thoughtless decision making. When high levels of conflict were present, members of the team lost site of the original goal because they were so overwhelmed. Relationship conflict was adverse to the team satisfaction, but had no impact on the performance. It appeared that in this study group members simply avoided the members with whom they did not agree. “It is not a surprise, then, that interdependence increased the negative impact of relationship conflict” (Cohen & Bailey, 1997, p. 255).

Although conflict appears to be inevitable in the professional world, there are various ways to counter it to prevent extreme discordance among members of an

organization, especially in a university setting. Conflict has been a topic of concern among college presidents, trustees, and other faculty for some time. Fain (2009) revealed that “While conflicts of interest among trustees have been a source of concern in higher education for decades, the line establishing what constitutes a conflict remain murky” (p. 16). Furthermore, while community college trustees take the initiative to prevent conflict or intervene when conflict arises, Stanley and Algert (2007) believe that “Conflict in a university setting is an inherent component of academic life” (p. 49). In addition, they note that “Leaders spend more than 40% of their time managing conflict” (p. 49). For example, if two members/employees were engaged in some form of conflict, it is the organizational head’s responsibility to either act as a mediator or to interpolate a mediator to assist the parties on resolving their issues (Goldring, 2004; Poots, 2004). The matter of conflict must be viewed objectively by a third party because the individuals entwined in conflict will ultimately view the matter from a subjective point of view (Poots, 2004, p. 300).

College trustees and their president should find ways to respond to conflict and find ways to bring the board to consensus. Algert and Stanley (2007) insist that “Superior leadership is required to develop constructive responses to conflict” (p. 50). Moreover, they must ensure that they are always prepared to handle situations that may arise in the workplace. The president or a trustee can attempt to address the concerns of each individual in an attempt to reach a resolution.

Coser (1963), Follett (1918 & 1924), and Simmel (1955) suggested that conflict possesses functional properties that may serve organizational goals and Blake and Mouton’s theory indicated that power relates people (Blake & Mouton 1964; Deutsch

1973; Robbins 1974). Since conflicts are inevitable, Coser (1963) argued that the focus should be on channeling and regulation; that is, on the domestication of conflict.

“Conflict and order, disruption and integration are fundamental social processes which, though in different proportion and admixtures, are part of a cohesive social system (p. 3).

Conflict regulation is an “open systems” approach which incorporates external environments as both stressor and stimulant of organizational innovation. The goal of leadership in this study is not to simply resolve conflict but rather to manage it in a way that enables change.

Team Effectiveness

Cohen and Bailey (1997) reported that team effectiveness is intimately linked to the nature of the team. They list four distinct teams (a) work teams, (b) parallel teams, (c) project teams, and (d) management teams. External perceptions from managers of the teams effectiveness was the most frequently used to measure team effectiveness. Other researchers offered slightly different types of teams (e.g., Katzenback & Smith, 1993; Mohrman, Cohen, & Morhman, 1995; Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990), and their team typologies differ with those presented by Cohen and Bailey (1997). Sundstrom et al. (1990) for example differentiate between advice and involvement teams, production and service teams, project and development teams and action and negotiation teams. Cohen and Bailey’s work teams would correspond to production and service teams whereas parallel teams correlate to their advice and involvement, and project teams correspond to the Sundstrom et al. (1990) project and development teams.

Professional Development

While board members hope to play an integral part in the effectiveness of their institution, college officials may, according to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, fail to articulate clear expectations for qualifications and performance of incoming trustees. This leads to decreased effectiveness of the board. In the opinion of trustees, political, and educational leaders, there are inadequacies in the current appointment and training processes (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGBUC], 1999).

Richard P. Chait, Thomas P. Holland, and Barbara E. Taylor (1996) interviewed more than 100 trustees and presidents on 22 independent college campuses to determine what makes one board more effective than another. Chait et al. (1996) concluded as follows:

First, the vast majority of trustees are not systematically prepared for the role prior to their appointment to a governing board. . . . Second, not many trustees have benefit of a thorough orientation or ongoing board-development programs after joining the board. (Chait et al., 1996, p. 8)

Trustees interviewed for the Chait et al. (1996) study provided enlightening perspectives regarding their preparedness to assume board membership. Chait et al. reported, “‘It’s a bit like parenthood,’ one trustee told us, ‘one day it just happens, and while you can draw on your experiences to date, nothing in life to that point quite prepares you for this role’” (p. 8). Findings showed that although many trustees are accustomed to participating in decision-making roles, whether in the not-for-profit or the business world, the nuisances of the governance system of higher education present a different challenge.

William M. Griffin furthered this research in his doctoral dissertation. Griffin (2011) said, “In other words, trustees come to the table expecting to make far-reaching higher education policy decisions and are often vastly unprepared for the challenges that lay ahead.” (Griffin, 2011, p. 2)

Many trustees are used to a more direct role in making decisions for the college than instead of working collaboratively as a group according to Griffin (2011). The community college governance system involves a vast understanding for the newly elected board member. In the findings of Griffin’s study he said, “A common element that could be offered to all board members was a robust, ongoing, and active professional development program.” This type of professional development would arm the trustees with the additional understanding of the college operation. According to Griffin (2011),

The collegial nature of the governance system of higher education institutions, along with the internal structure and organization, present trustees with many challenges to understanding how the institution’s various departments and employee groups operate within the system. (Griffin, 2011, p.42)

Throughout the United States, a few organizations and individuals do offer professional development activities for trustees. These organizations are commonly called trade associations that offer specific services to their members.

Professional development, summarized by Davis (1997), is a key component to the accretion of a strong leader. Professional development is important to board members who see themselves as leaders of learning organizations. Moreover, self-concept is perhaps the strongest incentive for trustees to become lifelong learners and act as role models in establishing professional development in others. (Davis, 1997)

Orientation

In a study by Vaughan and Weiseman (2001) it was determined that only 14% of community college boards require their new trustees, whether elected or appointed, to participate in a structured orientation. When they do, 86% of the time, it is conducted by the college president or the staff. New trustee orientation is voluntary for 70% of the boards and 16 % do not offer a formal orientation. In 36 % of the situations, professionals are brought in to provide the professional development training. Weiseman and Vaughan (2001) continue that nearly one in every four colleges does not provide any local professional development programs for trustees. Again, there is no identified orientation regarding conflict resolution processes that are utilized in the boardroom.

Public relations, budget, and financial management top the list for those boards that do engage in professional development training (Weiseman & Vaughan, 2001). Other topics for discussion include trustees' roles and responsibilities and board-president relations. Orientations often include goal setting and policy development. Vaughan and Weiseman (2001) indicated that the trustee orientation study did not reveal whether the goals and policy discussions included formulation or simply ways to respond to proposals made by presidents and staff. It was found that 62% of the new orientations included faculty relations and ethics of trusteeship. Less popular topics for discussion include college history, characteristics of community college students, and government relations.

Association and Organizational Training Opportunities

Some trustees begin their term with previous board responsibility experience, while others do not, and should acquire this knowledge through education and professional development. In the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT)

Guide to Electing and Appointing Community College Trustees it is noted: “Throughout their tenure as board members, conscientious trustees will continue to acquire the skills necessary for effective trusteeship. Effective boards encourage and support the professional development of trustees.” (p. 2) The Association believes that trustees are responsible to their communities for the colleges whose assets and operations they hold in trust. The necessary skills for trustee are unending and ACCT is at hand to assist trustees to better understand their role and develop their abilities to best execute that role by providing professional development. The qualities of each trustee have a direct influence on the effectiveness of the board and the institution. Working in conjunction with state associations and community college governing boards, ACCT is charged to continue fulfilling its mission: developing knowledgeable trustees who better understand their role and who can better govern their institutions (ACCT).

The Texas Association of Community Colleges (1996) surveyed state community college associates and determined that they usually address questions related to board policy making, the role and responsibilities of the trustee, laws and regulations, college missions, current issues and trends and the college budget. Unlike Texas and Illinois, some state trustee association’s offer no trustee development training. Those without the assistance of their respective state can look to their local college for professional development as well as other national groups such as the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

Most trustees feel a sense of loyalty toward those who have given them the opportunity to serve (Davis, 1997). Depending on whether the trustee is elected or

appointed by their state's governor, appointed by a local official, or elected encouragement from those patrons will motivate trustees to participate in professional development (Davis, 1997). If voters who elected the new trustees seem disinterested in orientation and training, there seems to be no motivation to pursue it. When the governor's office appoints a trustee or the media takes an interest the trustee then demonstrates an effort to improve their performance and has been duly recognized for the many hours dedicated to earning the public trust (Davis, 1997).

Benefits of Professional Development

Proper training helps to create a more informed, confident, and more successful board. In addition to briefing on the board's own procedures, Chait (1993) found that colleges benefit from effective boards and those effective boards are populated by trustees with competency in six key areas. In addition to this, Chait (1993) noted that professional development programs should nurture the following traits for the trustee: (a) appreciation of the college's context of history and current setting, (b) curiosity and appetite for trustee education, (c) familiarity with effective group process techniques, (d) inclination to engage in step by step, logical analysis, (e) interest in communicating with key college constituencies, and (f) appreciation of strategic planning.

In a descriptive study, Janosik and Dika (2000) surveyed higher education executive officers and state governors to identify trends in the selection and training processes for public higher education trustees. The fundamental assumption of this research was that the board quality of effectiveness is dependent on the constitution of the board, which is dependent on the processes of identification, training and orientation of trustees.

College presidents can be instrumental with the encouragement of orientation and the participation in state and national associations' for their board of trustees. This would help to establish a strong social relationship between the president and his board. The orientation, which is generally a high priority, is best to be offered as soon as possible and should introduce key areas on knowledge for trustees. The boards are ultimately responsible for their own trustee development and some have adopted clear policies that outline what is expected of them. Some look to the leadership from their president, however as their goal is to improve the entire board; each member should accept their own accountability to grow in their roles.

Trustees are advocates for the college and their professional skills need to be continually updated. John Duffy, the 2002 Recipient of Illinois Community College Trustees Association's Ray Hartstein Trustee Achievement Award, mentioned four impressions that he wanted to leave with the audience: exciting moments, rewarding moments, meaningful moments, and challenges. Of the challenges, he talked about the need to stay informed.

Technology, facilities, finance, human resources, quality improvement, economic development, enrollment management, resource development, and diversity are just some of the areas for which we must hold ourselves accountable. In spite of financial hard times, we must continue to champion trustee professional development in order to continue making informed decisions.
(<http://www.communitycolleges.org/duffyremarks.html>)

While professional development is often difficult due to the active trustees' schedules and other family obligations, the trainings can be carefully planned as they consider work schedules, family activities built around trainings, ethnic and ethical responsibilities. Whatever training program is selected it needs to be appropriate for the

board and its culture rather than a generic program that does not address the personal foundational questions as well as professional questions respective to their college and its district. Often the new members need to first feel comfortable in their new role before moving on to learning about fiscal responsibilities and legal concerns. As Anderson and LaVista (1994) have noted, new board members have many basic operational questions that they are hesitant to ask. When a question is not on an orientation agenda, the new board member is left to fend for themselves which may take months and even years. The trustee can better understand and adapt to the new board that they are joining if the orientation includes items about the board culture and traditions in addition to items such as what events they are expected to attend or if they need to let the president know when they are on campus.

Literature Review Summary

The literature review included an examination of literature pertaining to the leadership of the community college board of trustees. The leadership research that was examined included ethical leadership, servant, hierarchical and relational leadership.

There was an examination of the board structure, its governance and how that affected the way that decisions are made by the trustees. While Orlikoff (2000) stated the chair sets the tone for the board governance and acts as the “liaison” between the board and the president, research further demonstrated that leadership by the entire governance board is crucial to the success of a community college. A community college needs strong leadership noting that “leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and argue about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively” (Malm, 2008, p. 617).

Donahue (2003) stated that the interactions between the board and the president are critical to the image of the college and Levin (1991) reported that the board/president relationship is critical to the stakeholders and several areas of the college. There was a further examination of stakeholder theory as well as the social conflict theory

Research about orientations and professional development for trustees was studied in order to examine where or not elected trustees are prepared and have sufficient knowledge to make decisions that affect all stakeholders. While proper training helps to create a more informed, confident, and more successful board, ultimately they are responsible for their own trustee development and some have adopted clear policies that outline what is expected of them.

Board effectiveness appeared in much of the literature, and this effectiveness was generally achieved when the board acted in a unified manner. Decision make by the board of trustees, that affected the stakeholders, appeared to be influenced by good communication and clear understanding of the organization.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used in this study, including how participants were selected, the research design, and the role of the researcher, data collection and analysis. There will also be a brief discussion of credibility, trustworthiness strategies, and ethical considerations.

The purpose of this study was to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as elected officials. The study explored trustees' understanding of their college's mission, its culture, and the principles that shape higher education. Trustees' responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of their constituencies were emphasized. And finally, the study explored whether trustees felt their past experiences prepared them, and if professional development would assisted them, in their trustee role.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

1. How familiar are Illinois community college trustees to their institution's mission and cultural heritage, and in what way do they feel this meets the needs of stakeholders in their community ?
2. How knowledgeable are Illinois community college trustees with the transcendent values and principles that guide and shape higher education?

3. How comfortable are Illinois community college trustees with their understanding of the public interest and the public trust?
4. How prepared , and in what way, do Illinois community college trustees feel they are able to address the legitimate and relevant interests of the institution's various constituencies?
5. How do Illinois community college trustees feel that their past experience, career pathways and professional development have prepared them for their role as an elected trustee?

This final question was used for the presidents' review, but is not a research question.

How, and in what ways, are the presidents in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official?

Research Approach and Rationale

This study was a basic interpretive qualitative inquiry of Illinois community college elected board chairs. There were nine trustees included in the interview process. In qualitative research, it is imperative to identify the approach that best fits the research questions. Merriam (2002) described a basic interpretive qualitative study as one that exemplifies the characteristics of qualitative research where the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation. Utilizing basic qualitative interpretive methods, the researcher sought to discover and understand the perspectives of the trustees and presidents involved. Creswell (1998) described five approaches or traditions for qualitative research and among those five types is phenomenology which was an approach used in this research.

When using the phenomenology approach, according to Creswell (2003), the researcher identified the “essence” of the human experience as described by the trustees in the research. “Understanding the lived experience marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small group of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 15).

Utilizing qualitative methodology allowed the research to “focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings,” which allowed for grounding in reality (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10.) In this study, interviews were utilized and the researcher had the opportunity to be the “instrument” (Janesick, 2001, p. 533; Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The researcher was in a position to describe what was observed with adequate “depth and detail” (Patton, 1990, p. 165). Merriam (2002) claimed, in describing how the researcher is used as the instrument, that the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what those interpretations are at a particular point in time and in a particular context. Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an interpretive qualitative approach. (Merriam, 2002, p. 4)

Merriam (2002) claim that the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on a study. Rather than trying to eliminate these biases or “subjectivities,” it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. This researcher’s biases were noted as having experience serving on a board, employed in a college governed by a community college board of trustees and having experience as in the professional development field.

Peshkin (1988) goes so far as to make the case that one's subjectivities "can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18).

Individual interviews were conducted with nine elected Illinois community college board chairs. This interpretive qualitative inquiry focused on their individual experiences and how prepared they felt they were to engage in the role they fulfill at their college. Upon completion of the trustee interviews, the data was analyzed for the thematic structures; the strategy used was inductive and the outcome was descriptive.

The summarized results were presented to a small review group consisting of presidents at Illinois community colleges. Deductive strategy was used and the purpose was to understand how, and in what ways, the presidents were in agreement or disagreement, with the trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official. These trustees were interviewed during the summer and fall of 2011 and the presidents' review was conducted in early 2012.

Participant Selection

The Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA) assisted in identifying the trustee participants for the interviews. The ICCTA also assisted in identifying the presidents who substantiated their agreement or disagreement with the trustees' perspectives. The heterogeneous selection of trustee and president participants included those serving colleges that have faced financial, personnel, political, and/or institutional challenges of another type. The selection of board chairs was limited to those who had served a minimum of two years at their respective colleges and included a

heterogeneous selection of gender and geographic backgrounds. Further the trustees selected followed differing career paths to ascend to their role as a trustee. For example, the study included trustees who did not all have business, education, or military backgrounds; the participants included a variety of career backgrounds, gender, and longevity. The selection of the presidents for the presidents' review was limited to those from colleges that did not include a trustee interview; there were no duplicate participants from any college.

Interview Questions

The questions were designed to provide an understanding of “the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in their world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The interview questions were selected from questions used in ABG Statement on Board Accountability. The “ABG Statement of Board Accountability” encourages all governing boards and chief executives to examine the clarity, coherence, and appropriateness of their institutions' governance structures, policies, and practices. The questions are “Questions for Boards to Consider” that were adopted by the ABG Board of Directors, January 17, 2007. The structured questions asked during the interviews with each board chair participant were the same. The questions were open ended and provided an opportunity for the participant to elaborate, which definitely caused the order of the questions to change. These questions, located in the appendix, were used to start the conversation and allowed the interviewee the opportunity to talk freely about specific instances or concerns they dealt with on the college campus. (Appendix A).

Throughout the interview process the researcher kept a reflective journal to record the findings with the community college board chairs. Additional sources of data for this study included observations during the interview process and transcripts.

Procedures and Analysis

Once the trustees were selected, two separate interviews were held with each trustee. The initial interview was in person and a series of questions were asked. The questions were selected from those identified in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges “Statement on Board Accountability.” The subsequent meeting, to confirm the researcher understands, was a phone interview. In all instances the interviews were tape recorded.

All recordings were transcribed by an outside transcriptionist. The recordings were listened to multiple times and each time additional pieces of information that had been missed the time before were captured and noted. The transcripts were read line by line and notations were made in the margins. This was the first round of coding which was then interpreted and analyzed, then put in summarized paragraph format for the second phone interview. The trustee had the opportunity to make changes to the analysis or to confirm my understanding. Some of the second interviews were recorded and in most cases, the conversations were brief and the trustees confirmed that the summary provided had captured their perceptions accurately.

Memoing

According to William Griffin (2011), “The recording of the interviews allows the conversation to be heard again and again, creating a reflective process whereby the opportunity to discover themes or patterns can be readily interpreted.” Memoing allowed

the researcher the opportunity to reflect on what was being captured during the interview and to gather a perspective that helped to make sense of the data. In this study memoing was used early in the process as memos were a combination of small notes and reflective entries written after each interview which was then used as a tool to compare the interviews to see where there were repeated notes. Memoing was also used at a later time when the researcher listened to the audio tapes again to ensure that nothing important had been missed; additional reflections were captured and noted.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) described the process of memoing: “Memos are reflective notes that researchers write to themselves about what they are learning from their data” (p. 501). Memoing, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen, should be done as expeditiously as possible, which allows less reliance on the researcher’s memory, which greatly enhances the accuracy and reliability. A written account utilizing both field notes and memoing to create reflective notes from the data should be an ongoing process and greatly enhanced the accuracy and reliability of the data analysis process. Merriam (1998) succinctly described, “What is written down or mechanically recorded from a period of observation becomes the raw data from which a study’s findings eventually emerge” (p. 104).

Describing, Classifying, and Interpreting

Categorizing the data, as suggested by Creswell (2003), may include parceling the data into small pieces to search for themes and patterns. Merriam (1998) concurred: “More commonly, researchers extend analysis to developing categories, themes, or other taxonomic classes that interpret the meaning of the data. The categories become the findings of the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 192). Interpreting the data means analyzing and

understanding what is meant from the participants' perspectives or the insights being conveyed. As Creswell (2003) proposed, "In the process of interpretation, researchers step back and form larger meanings of what is going on in the situations or sites" (p. 154). When the findings were arranged into large or broader categories a coding structure was established. This structure made the relationships in the phenomena clearer for the researcher and helped to construct themes and patterns from the raw data that became more meaningful as they came together.

Representing and Visualizing

Once the findings were organized by categories and coded for themes and patterns, a table was created that separated the qualitative data into categories. Additional tables were created that refined the categories and rearranged to a more logical format. The tables were used to hone the themes and patterns. The next step was to inspect the transcripts again to see if there were missing observations and/or any extreme items that did not fit in one of the refined categories yet was deemed valuable enough to be included in the study.

The research revealed that there were extreme items that did not match the categories but was found to be valuable. These findings confirmed the literature, "each setting has a few properties that it shares with many others, some properties that it shares with some others, and some properties that it shares with no others" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). After conducting the interviews, this researcher created profiles of each trustee participant from the substantial, deep descriptions of the participants' understanding of their role, engagement and accountability expectations, and the boards' approach to conflict and decision making. These profiles were based on the interviews

and the incorporation of the participants' quotations and reactions to the questions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants; the researcher "disguised" individuals' identities as well as the identities of their respective institutions.

According to Stake (1995), "there is no particular moment when data analysis begins" (p. 71). The collection and analysis of data is a "simultaneous activity in qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). The data collection and analysis of the interviews was a joint activity. The analysis of the trustee interviews was presented to the presidents and then, upon completion of hearing their perspectives, the data was further analyzed for agreement and disagreement in the participants' perceptions.

Trustworthiness Strategies

"Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that analyzes information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Crabtree and Miller (1992) say that qualitative research can be used to capture expressive information not conveyed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviors. Qualitative methods derive from a variety of disciplines and traditions. Glesne (1999) stressed that validity should play a key role in the design of any study. There was a respondent validation process embedded in this research that supported the validity. Lastly, a "presidents' review" with a non-participating Illinois community college presidents was used to ascertain agreement or disagreement with the trustees' perspectives.

Validity in qualitative research involves information that is "plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore, defensible" (Johnson & Christiansen, 2000, p. 207). As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in this study, the researcher's

interpretations of reality were taken directly from interviews. “Most agree that when reality is viewed in this manner, that it is always interpreted, internal validity in considered a strength of qualitative research” (Merriam, 2002, p. 25).

A participant contact procedure was used for the selection of participants. This ensured the selection was consistent and systematic for all of the interested participants and ensured validity of the participant selection process. The ICCTA representative sent an e-mail including the background information of the study to those identified to determine if they were interested in participating in the study. The e-mail included the formal letter, which was approved by the IRB (Appendix B) for the study. The participants who were interested in participating contacted the researcher directly and the researcher then contacted each participant and discussed the nature of the research and the timeline of the interviews. Times and locations for the in-person interviews were agreed upon by the participants and the researcher which allowed for participant confidentiality.

Member-checking was part of the process for each of the trustee interviews. A summary of their responses were sent to each participant and a follow up call was completed with each participant. The participants were allowed the opportunity to confirm or change anything in the summary.

A quasi-triangulation was used for the president’s review process. According to Creswell (2003) one of the eight primary strategies used to check accuracy of findings is triangulation; “Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from sources and using it to build coherent justification to themes.” The presidents examined the research finding and were an additional source of information for the study.

A form of peer debriefing was used as the researcher's advisor, methodologist and other committee members participated when they asked questions. The committee provided suggestions and feedback so the study would resonate with people other than the researcher. Peer debriefing is also included in Creswell's eight primary strategies listed to check accuracy. Additional peer debriefings were included by the researcher's presentations at two national conferences. Each of the two conferences included a presentation of the findings and discussion with the audience; the discussion provided additional questions and suggestions about the qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the trustees' perceptions of their experience as elected governing board chairs at community colleges in Illinois. The lived experience of elected community college trustees serving in the role of board chair is heard through their voices and rich descriptions of their experiences as an elected community college trustee. I will introduce the participants through brief profiles, discuss their reason for serving as a trustee, and explore the ways in which participants feel they were prepared for the experience of serving as the governing board chair when they were elected into office.

To perform the research, I used basic interpretive qualitative inquiry to explore the phenomenology of the participants' experience. To address the research questions, I conducted nine face to face in depth interviews with trustees and had follow up phone interviews with each trustee, thus a total of eighteen trustee interviews for the study. An inductive strategy analysis was used with trustee interviews; with this process the data collected is moved from the specific to the general.

Following the trustee interviews was a presidents' review where a few presidents agreed to review the findings and determine if they were in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness. A deductive strategy was used for the presidents' review; this strategy began with the general and then became more specific.

The Trustee Participants

Brief introductions are provided as a way for the reader to become familiar with each participant. This background information provides a snapshot of how I came to know participants as they responded to my open ended questions. Participants are introduced in the order in which they were interviewed. Pseudonyms have been used and their institutions are not named with the intent to protect their identity.

Introduction of Participants

Cora Hamilton. Cora Hamilton was the first board chair who accepted my request for an interview. As a small business owner, Ms. Hamilton feels that she “brings a lot to the board” and has been told by many people that she is level-headed and “the one with a conscience.” She speaks her mind and shows everyone respect. Money is at the heart of her involvement; she does not believe in spending money that the college does not have. Serving in her first six-year term, she is a fairly new board chair. Her main reason for running for the board was to get a board member removed who, in her opinion, was causing turmoil for the college. That individual, who she mentioned, did not get re-elected when Ms. Hamilton was elected to serve her term. As a prior student at the institution, she has a vested interest in the school and supports as many student events as possible by attending functions and participating in fundraising events. In order to prepare for this role and confirm that she did indeed want to run for office, she attended board meetings and observed board action. She feels, however, that you cannot prepare for some things in advance or by observation; you have to learn while serving.

James Dunavin. The second interview was with James Dunavin, who noted he has been involved in the college where he has served as trustee for half his life. Since he

was previously involved with the college foundation, he described serving as a trustee as having a second or alternative career. Mr. Dunavin is self-employed in the agriculture industry and said he is a good “numbers person,” which is an asset in his fiduciary responsibilities at the college. He indicated that he looks forward to committee and board meetings and describes being with other board members and learning everybody’s perspective as enjoyable. He believes he can make better decisions in a respectful environment that engages everyone. He thought the best preparation for a board seat included immersion into the board. Mr. Dunavin summarized that in the beginning of an elected term, a trustee should keep his/her mouth shut, listen for a while, read all the materials, ask a few questions, and then finally, when more acclimated, get involved.

William Lone. William Lone has more than 20 years of experience as an elected trustee and admitted he needed his full first term of six years to learn about the board’s financial responsibility and to feel comfortable knowing what was going on at the college. Further, he stated that trusteeship is a big job; there is a lot to learn. He recommends hanging around with other trustees to learn from their experiences without having to actually experience the exact same thing. According to Mr. Lone, participating in trustee organizations helps educate and encourage trustees to learn. Further he felt that his board, as well as other trustees across the state, has a reputation of being tough. Their tough reputation is that they are not rubber stamp boards and because they are elected, more active, better trained, and more experienced. He stated that there is mutual respect, trust, and communication between the trustees.

Mary Waggoner. Mary Waggoner was the third, and also the oldest, participant I interviewed. Having been an employee at the college for several years before being

elected as a trustee, she believes she came to the board very well prepared to serve her initial term. Now after multiple terms, she feels extremely capable of assisting newly elected trustees whom she described as those who have a lot to learn. Ms. Waggoner expressed that when most people are elected they should know what to expect, yet nobody does. She said she depended heavily on the ICCTA organization for training new trustees, specifically when she needed special assistance with the new trustees. In this example, Ms. Waggoner felt that assistance with her board's internal communication from an outside consultant helped prevent what she referred to as being blindsided at the board meetings by one of her trustees. Ms. Waggoner noted that she and her board are not working for themselves; they work for the college and the students. She feels that the people who work at her college are just different than those whom she has met working in business and industry and since she has made life-long friends; she continues to serve on the board.

Jack Harrison. Jack Harrison said that serving on the board just felt like it was the right thing to do. He admitted before his election he had not ever attended a college meeting and did not know much about the college. Through serving and being involved, he has since developed an affinity for the college. Once elected, Mr. Harrison's initial understanding about the institution and his role as a trustee came about through attending board meetings and having an orientation meeting with the chair of the board and president of the college. He described his orientation as short and said he received a binder, a video tape, and a booklet about being a trustee. He proposed that the people who want to become trustees are usually supporters of the college.

When he ran as an incumbent in the most recent election, he did not attend any public events. In fact, Mr. Harrison was not invited to any public events and the newspapers did not talk about the election other than the fact that there were two people running for two spots. Jack Harrison felt that a successful board requires a degree of respect for everybody that is at the table and that all board members need to participate in deliberations and express their opinion.

Vernon Edward. Vernon Edward brings many years of experience in business to his post. He retired after 31 years in one position, took another CEO position, and then continued his education. Mr. Edward felt that consistent, contextual, professional development training is what prepares a trustee to conceptualize the operations and finances of the college. He works collaboratively with other board members, shares ideas, thoughts, opinions, and concerns. He further stated a trustee needs to be outspoken and assertive, but not necessarily aggressive; trustees should stand for their opinions.

Daniel Haynes. Daniel Haynes serves on a lot of boards; in fact, he joked that he should write a book on “boardmanship.” In preparing for his role he found it helpful to read literature, go to ICCTA meetings, and talk to other trustees. Serving nearly 30 years on the board, he said his career helped prepare him for this role. Mr. Haynes has worked for 20 years as a CFO and more than 15 years as CEO in a large organization; this experience affords him a strong leadership and financial background and the ability to understand the college operation and finances. His interest in community colleges comes from the fact that he went to a community college and was going to be a teacher at one time.

Joseph Nathaniel. Joseph Nathaniel has served on his board for more than 20 years. He currently works in higher education and before that he was an associate director of another large organization. He has experience in finance and grant writing. This experience gave him a good background in which to serve when elected to the role of board chair. Mr. Nathaniel named ICCTA and ACCT as associations that provide trustees a good framework in terms of learning the issues related to trusteeship. Mr. Nathaniel felt that he puts the best interest of his institution at the forefront. Even when the board disagrees, they still aim to act with civility while conducting business. His board, at times, may need to ask: what is in the best interest of the student? Mr. Nathaniel claimed trustees have the responsibility of managing the psychology of the environment.

Bertie Carr. Bertie Carr was the final interview. She is the youngest participant and is in her first six-year term. Having advanced degrees and a vast knowledge of the college district, she felt she was prepared to serve in this role. To further prepare for trusteeship she went to a trustee convention early in her term, but Ms. Carr said she learned the most by watching how the past chair handled things. She admitted that she did not have time to attend internal board orientations when offered, because there were other priorities on campus that called for her attention at that time. Ms. Carr said that serving has been a wonderful opportunity, but also mentioned how hard it was to make a six year commitment. She mentioned that when she finishes her six year term, her son will be grown. Her goal upon election was to better serve the college and although some decisions have been very difficult to make, they were based on her experience, knowledge, and understanding of the issues being brought to the board.

Emergent Themes

McMillan and Schumacher (1993) defined qualitative research as, “primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories” (p. 479). This definition implies that data and meaning emerge “organically” from the research context. Several themes emerged throughout the interviews and research. The thematic topics included: Stewardship, Trustee Responsibility, Working Together, and Preparation to Serve as a Trustee.

Stewardship

Stewardship was an overarching theme; an ethic that embodies responsible planning and management of the community college resources. Under this theme is the “honor thy community” feeling and an exposure to the understanding of why they serve as a trustee. Within this theme there are four subthemes Motivation to Serve as a Trustee, Pride and Connection to the College, Love and Reward, and Sacrifice.

Motivation to serve as a trustee. The data showed there is generally a motive to become elected and the length of terms served is a result of the pleasure the trustees experienced when serving. There were many stated motives that surfaced as reasons why a person might want to be elected as a community college trustee. The reasons included: people who run simply to get someone else off the board, political agendas, personal agendas, it was the “right thing” to do, and for the betterment of the college. Daniel Haynes provided an interesting story:

We had someone elected to the board, in probably the late 90s, and she came with an agenda; she did not like the president and didn’t like some of the things that he’d done. She came in and my God, she was hell bent on, you know, she would vote no on something just because the others were voting yes.”

People who became trustees were usually supporters of the college or had a relationship, such as past employee or alumni, with the college. Cora Hamilton is an alumni and this is what she said, “I’m an alumni at the college. I went through the XXX program. So it’s nice seeing it do a total turnaround now. This is something that should’ve happened over twenty years ago, and I tell our president all the time.”

William Lone said he, and another of his board members, previously taught as adjunct: “we weren’t recruited because we’d done that, it just happened that was part of our life experiences; doing that, I think, gives us a little bit of knowledge from my teaching experience.”

Trustees’ explanations for why they have served multiple terms were that they loved serving, they felt a sense of camaraderie, they experienced a sense of belonging, and they have made lifelong friends; some equated serving as a trustee with a second or alternative career. What appeared repeatedly, without actually being stated as such, was that they were proud of their institution and proud to be a trustee. Mary Waggoner said, “It’s just one of those things that you come here and you stay here.” To further demonstrate this theme, William Lone said, “six of the seven of us have been around together a long time and that makes for a lot of cooperation because we get along well. I guess this is the best way; you learn about each other with longevity.”

Pride and connection to the college. Pride was expressed several ways throughout the coding process. Statements were made about the institution’s collegial culture, and some trustees proudly explained the college’s historical perspective. One trustee talked about his father’s previous involvement in the college and reminisced about his father’s encouraging words for him to follow in his footsteps. Often when I met

participants for the interview, the trustee would give me his/her name and immediately followed up with the number of years he/she served. The trustees were proud of the longevity and dedication to their institution, almost like an award of merit they earned. Mary Waggoner, who has served multiple terms, and was a past employee, bragged about knowing everyone at the college by first name and how the staff could call her on her cell phone. She was very proud of the relationships she had built over the years.

We're elected officials, and so, I knew every employee in the place at that time. I mean it was during my younger days, and the employees used to call me on the phone and say, *I know I'm not supposed to be talking to you*, and that kind of stuff. I told every employee that he/she could talk to me anytime, but my first question will be, if you have a problem have you gone to your supervisor, and if you didn't get satisfaction, to the president; if they said yes they had, then I would talk to them, but I never gave an answer to anybody.

Love and reward. The subtheme love and reward appeared in many of the interviews. The word love was used by trustees to describe events or people they hold dear, and at times, the word love was used to modify a trustee's desire to accomplish something at a future time.

Cora Hamilton said "We love our president." William Lone said "the part-time faculty teach because of the love of what they're doing, not so much for the money." Mr. Lone in a later question described how he and other trustees had a love affair with one of their programs.

Bertie Carr described how she, as a trustee would love to accomplish a work environment at the college similar to her own experience. "I love my job, I love going to work every day; there's no stress in my life as far as job goes, and I wish everyone could

have that opportunity and when somebody says that they despise work or they hate going to work, that breaks my heart.”

Cora Hamilton expressed that she would love to create the opportunity for citizens to address the board, about items that are not on the agenda, during the public board meeting. This type of dialogue between citizen and board is not possible in the current board policy at her college.

James Dunavin validated the theme of reward with his statement, “The most rewarding thing is commencement; they even have us wearing caps and gowns.”

Another trustee described watching the progress at the college as rewarding, he further explained that a referendum with that pass rate in this economy as an unusual but very rewarding experience.

Sacrifice. While trustee comments’ offered motivation to run for office and also demonstrated motivation for trustees to continue to serve, information also surfaced describing sacrifice. Examples were given about what was sacrificed for some trustees and their families when the trustee served his/her term in office. Something motivates that trustee significantly for him/her to spend multiple hours travelling to meetings and conferences and to spend hours preparing for board meetings irrespective of the sacrifice.

Comments by the interviewees seemed to indicate a difference in the level of trustee dedication. Some described a type of trustee who only attends one monthly board meeting while others described the type of trustee who would drive several hours to attend a trustee meeting, spend hours on accreditation preparation, or in one example, sacrifice three days at a trustee professional development training. Joseph Nathaniel said:

I read all the emails that are sent out by ICCTA every day and if there's a learning issue for me, I'm always in the process of learning something. I do talk with officers, so I don't know how many hours I put in to it. This is something that you just incorporate into your day to day lifestyle.

There were numerous accounts of late at night sessions to read past board minutes, learn about budgets, or study past audits. All this service demonstrated sacrifice of time, by dedicated trustees, who were not compensated for their involvement.

Additional personal examples surfaced, such as ways in which trustees sacrificed family time. Whether the words that occurred repeatedly were "wife," "husband," "family," or "son", there was a noticeable number of significant personal events missed due to time the trustees spend on college business. Daniel Haynes explained, "My wife thinks I serve on too many boards and work too many hours, so the agreement is I do no advertising; she says if they elect you, fine; if they don't, I'm happy, too."

There was a personal depiction of how the conviction of one trustee to do the "right thing" during a vote in a board meeting resulted in what was portrayed, by the trustee, as public embarrassment at the college Annual Gala. Bertie Carr described the event:

They announced all the trustees that were there and everybody clapped and cheered and hemmed and hawed and when they announced my name, and the names of the other two trustees who voted with me, nobody clapped. Everybody sat there silent. So yeah, there are plenty of decisions that you know you have to remain objective about and make the decision you know is right; so you sacrifice a lot and no one understands.

In this very personal portrayal, Bertie Carr described the "consequences" that she suffered and indicated that as a trustee you have to be willing to "live with yourself and endure public humiliation" even when you do what you feel is right for the college.

Trustee Responsibility

The trustees' perspectives' on their responsibility and the role they play in that college was an overarching theme and one that included four underlying themes. Presidential Search, Institutional Knowledge, Public Trust and Conflict of Interest are the four subthemes that surfaced.

Presidential search. There seemed to be a common understanding that the board has certain responsibilities and should be held accountable to those responsibilities by its constituents. The interviews showed trustees were aware of two primary responsibilities: a fiscal responsibility and a responsibility to hire a president, who is the board's only employee.

Two common ways were described for the process used when conducting a presidential search: use of a committee structure and use of a professional consultant or search firm. The use of a committee structure was the more frequently noted approach.

Each trustee that was interviewed described a search committee that was inclusive of faculty and administrators; data showed it was common to include community members and trustees on the committee as well. Most trustees responded that their search was fair and legitimate. Joseph Nathaniel said, "We had a cross section of institutional leaders, faculty, administrative staff, support staff, and certainly a couple of board members. So, if that's fair, in the definition of fairness, I would consider our searches to be fair." Additional words and phrases that surfaced were: by the book, group of institutional leaders, outside input, respectable, credible, and trustworthy. Jack Harrison indicated their presidential search process was good because "we had time to plan the search with a time frame that worked best for the college and for the board." Another

trustee described an unsuccessful search when their first choice candidate declined and they essentially took their number two presidential choice. In this example, their candidate pool was not that good to begin with; they had no seated presidents from Illinois apply and they did not take the time to start over. He concluded that this process, and their presidential selection, was a mistake.

Many trustees spoke about the usefulness of utilizing search firm services in the presidential search process. They stated that the process was really guided by the search firm consultant and a committee of college stakeholders participated in the process. Offering a differing opinion was Mr. Nathaniel, a multiple term trustee, who had never participated in a presidential search where a search firm was used. Mr. Nathaniel cited the reason for not using a search firm was the cost. Mr. Dunavin described two presidential searches that were totally different, one using a search firm and the other without; he indicated success was achieved both times because they ended up with very good presidents with whom they were pleased.

James Dunavin reported on two different scenarios:

On the first search there were several on the Board who thought they didn't need to do a full search and spend \$100,000, because they had a good candidate. Others on the Board said let's find out what's out there. So they went that way and they found out what was out there and realized they had the best candidate. On the more recent search our board determined that we did not need to do a full search. We had a good candidate in house, and so we negotiated with that person. I think it went well.

Institutional knowledge. Trustees reported that they had a significant amount of information to learn or understand when they were first elected. The trustees' perceptions was that there is a relationship between the length of time a trustee served and their understanding of college operations, thus a correlation between longevity and

understanding the role of the trustee. There was a differentiation between the understanding of their role as a trustee and need to gain institutional knowledge. There were several specific references to fiscal responsibility and public trust. The trustees indicated there were attempts to gain knowledge via internal stakeholders and also through the use of outside professional organizations and consultants.

The trustees indicated that they looked to internal sources for institutional information. Communication with the president was mentioned in each interview. The clear patterns of timely communication between the board chair and the president appeared both necessary and relevant. In some institutions part of the president's evaluation was based on the relationship and communication with the board.

Communication between the college president and the trustee serving as chair of the board occurred on a regular, recurring basis; the frequency ranged from once a week to multiple times a day. Data showed that for some the trend was to communicate via text or e-mail as opposed to phone calls and face to face meetings. The reason given for most communication was to gain necessary information and to ensure there were no surprises at board meetings. Cora Hamilton described her communication with the president:

When I go out to the campus, I go out there strictly for the meetings, for our workshops and our board meetings. I communicate with the president. I spoke to the president today; she called me on a different matter. She'll call me freely on the cell phones if she has any questions, but then I'm done.

Data also showed that trustees used written updates and monthly board reports from vice presidents and administration to gain information, when necessary, to make decisions about the college. The words data and statistics surfaced on a regular basis during discussions about making decisions for the college.

Some trustees indicated the board updates and reports included in the monthly board packets were deemed valuable. Some trustees also mentioned that receiving board packets in a timely manner was important. It was clear from other responses that trustees perceived delinquent delivery as purposeful, an effort to prevent trustees from having information in advance of board meetings.

Responding trustees felt financial literacy was important as a board. Some trustees felt comfortable depending on another trustee or on the chief financial officer of the college to provide information to them so they could make the necessary decision. Some trustees mentioned that they rely on the vice president of finance to give timely financial information. Trustees expect the financial vice president to tell them when there were some outliers in certain programs or certain cost centers with which they need to be attuned. Daniel Haynes volunteered that he was the financial guru on the board because he spent a significant number of years as a chief financial officer in a previous role. Vernon Edward disclosed, “I was a chief operating officer for a company, a general manager and a senior vice president.” noting that he was from the business world and had sufficient knowledge.

Some inconsistencies surfaced when it came to the understanding the interview question about Sarbanes Oxley (SOX). Some trustees had not heard of the Sarbanes Oxley law and some were somewhat aware. Several trustees indicated that they understood and were familiar with the law; some were able to relate the law to their internal and external financial audit process.

Trustees had knowledge about the ratio of full time and part time faculty and their knowledge was demonstrated in a variety of ways. Some included reference to policies

about the ratio percentages, such as the statement provided by William Lone: “We believe 60% of our course load should be taught by full time faculty, 40% by part time.” Mary Waggoner felt that full time faculty was more committed to the college than part time, and Vernon Edward looked at institutional statistics and data to respond about its ratio of full time faculty to part time faculty. He looked at the retention rate of students and the type of support given to the faculty rather than a ratio of full time and part time faculty.

The majority of boards in Illinois participates in the state trustees’ association and looked to these associations for guidance and leadership. The responding trustees repeated references to Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA), clearly indicating a reliance on assistance provided by the organization during times of need. Trustees named presidential searches, assistance with board conflict, and board professional development training as times they turned to the association for assistance. Mary Waggoner uses ICCTA for retreats and explained a few situations:

We had a retreat in April. We had him [ICCTA facilitator] there and it was right at the time the new board members were coming on, and they asked all kinds of questions which normally you would think are kind of silly questions, but they were new board members; they don’t know any better, and they have to learn like everybody else does, but in the meantime the college can’t quit doing business.

Mary Waggoner continued, “I’ll let ICCTA handle that; I’m not going to fight with him [another trustee.] I’m tired of this; we’ve got to get back to board business.”

The national associations, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), were mentioned fewer times than the state association, but they were still mentioned, and were deemed important for professional development.

Public trust. The perspectives of the trustees interviewed indicated they were well-informed and trustees emphasized the need for public trust in the role they were elected to serve. Inconsistencies were noted however when subsequent actions demonstrated an absence of concern for public trust. Trustees who noted the absence of public trust also explained what they were doing to address this absence.

Transparency in board action was a sub-theme that clearly emerged. The need for communication of board action among all parties involved surfaced consistently. Comments about the need to be transparent about what happens on campus and in the board room were woven throughout the transcripts. One trustee shared, “Our board meetings are videotaped; you can actually go to the college website and click under our meetings and you can watch our meetings on the video.” Cora Hamilton said:

I had one situation, well, we had a critical matter at the college and I called each board member, one on one, I and asked them to speak openly and honestly at this meeting we were having. This was the first time it’s ever happened like that and they did it. I’d have to say by being open and honest with each other helped us all come to an agreement.

The dissemination of information to college stakeholders after a board meeting in order to demonstrate transparency and open communication was a recurring theme. Trends were apparent in websites, press releases, e-mail, and newsletters being the method of distribution. In most examples trustees mentioned the dissemination of information the day after the monthly meeting in an effort to make the college community aware of board actions.

Conflict of interest. Not all trustees gave examples of conflict of interest. Those who did indicated that they should recuse themselves and not vote when potential conflicts were being decided at their institution. Opinions were reflected in participants’ comments

such as this one by James Dunavin, “Trustees must be sure not to influence a decision” and “I make sure I bend over backwards not to play favorites.” James Dunavin further expressed his opinion on conflict of interest in trustee relationships to employees this way:

Some of the school board folks, many of them, have family members that work for the school district, which is not necessarily a conflict of interest. You wouldn’t want the president of your college to be related to one of your trustees. That would be a tough one, although you could refuse to serve on the board and step aside. We don’t really have those issues at our college.

Joseph Nathaniel said you can avoid conflict of interest situations by having a clear ethics policy in place at the college and also by encouraging-trustees to attend the Illinois Community College Trustee’s Association new trustee’s orientation where this topic is discussed. Mr. Nathaniel continued:

The National Association in Washington, and the new academy training, provide training that includes the topic of ethics that trustees need in the content of the program. We also need to explain and bring to the attention of that board member when there’s a potential conflict of interest in what they may be contemplating doing. So it’s always something that’s got to be on the top of the table for all trustees; any appearance of conflict of interest has to be highlighted. You certainly want them to be provided the background so that they understand what may be a conflict of interest. It is up to the chairman and other board members, everyone, to be on high alert on those situations.

One trustee discussed a mentoring system and another discussed a buddy system for new trustees. In both examples they link a new trustee to a sitting trustee. The process in these examples allowed the more seasoned trustee the ability to assist the new college trustee to understand college policies and conflict of interest situations.

Working Together

Working Together was an overarching theme that emerged with two related subthemes. Consensus building and conflict resolution were combined as one subtheme while overstepping boundaries and micromanaging were combined as the other. Within the overarching theme of working together the two sub-themes were each related to conflict. Micromanaging, overstepping and crossing boundaries caused conflict whereas consensus building and conflict resolution both offered ways to eliminate conflict. The similarities and differences within these codes were analyzed multiple times and resulted in the combined themes.

Consensus building and conflict resolution. This sub-theme demonstrated the need for trustees to have conflict resolution skills. The need was consistently present throughout most interviews. A common thread woven throughout reflected the feeling that “one trustee” at each institution caused much of the conflict. Whether the conflict was caused by that one rogue trustee, or by more than one trustee, data consistently showed that experience helped the board chair keep a newly elected, inexperienced, or rogue trustee from positioning themselves to create actual or implied conflict. Repeatedly, the interviews revealed that conflict among trustees could become destructive. Vernon Edward said:

First of all, you have to be prepared. This is a responsibility that you have to be as prepared as you possibly can. A trustee needs to ask questions, get clarification of the things that are not clear, work collaboratively with other board members, and share ideas and thoughts as often as possible. Speak your opinions and your concerns, be outspoken, be assertive but not necessarily aggressive, stand for your opinions but don't get into so much conflict with a particular trustee or another member that the relationship becomes destructive; always keep the student in mind.

Similarly there appears to be a relationship between longevity and the trustees' ability to maintain consensus among the board of trustees. Consensus, vote, agreement, disagreement, divergent, and opinions were all recurring terms that were relevant for a board working toward consensus. As a way to reach consensus, there were multiple demonstrative phrases such as: "do what is best for the student", "keep the student in the forefront", and "always keep the student in mind."

Micromanaging and overstepping boundaries. The data analysis exposed inconsistencies with the topic of micromanagement and with trustees crossing responsibility boundaries. While one trustee stated, "We haven't tried to micromanage," the same trustee later referenced lack of support to fund a program on campus in an attempt to stop it.

One trustee divulged that a trustee on his/her board asked to use a college staff member's office for personal use. "She's been crossing the line for quite some time" and similar statements illustrated this theme throughout the data.

In her interview, Bertie Carr showed sheer frustration as she explained about one of her newer trustees:

We always get that one trustee that has nothing else better to do with his/her life and just shows up on campus and in the president's office. Honestly, you have to keep in mind this time is taking away from the president's time and the office staff's time to get research and material and things that this person [rogue trustee] wants. That trustee [rogue] is just trying to get into the president's ear to create some kind of actual or implied conflict.

Other trustees expressed hope that rogue trustees would learn that campus intrusions take away from a president's ability to do his/her job.

Respondent trustees indicated they were aware that the board was not responsible for the day to day operations of the college. The interviews demonstrated, however, that some trustees did not have a good understanding of boundaries or the difference between their role as a trustee and the role of college administration. One of the trustees referenced a time with a previous president and he said, “The line between being president and the board was pretty blurred because we were working together and we had such a good relationship.” As stated in another example, “They want to micro manage an educational program because they think they know something more about it than the administration.” Jack Harrison said, “When we have the warning signs and when trustees are crossing over, the chair needs to step in; our job is to set the policy for the institution, not to micro manage the educational part.”

Preparation to Serve as a Trustee

The fourth overarching theme was the trustees’ preparation to serve the role they were elected to serve. Preparation included previous experience and professional development training activities after trustees have been elected into office. Some trustees talked about their professional and career experience and how that experience prepared them for their role as an elected trustee of a community college. Other themes emerged that established, and in some cases validated, the need to continue learning about their institution. The trustees confirmed the need to continually participate in professional development specific to the responsibilities of trustees.

Experience. From the trustee perspectives’, their experience, their career, and professional training was an asset to their role as a community college elected trustee. Mary Waggoner said her human resources background has been useful and also noted the

skills of fellow trustees; “We have one of our board members a vice president of a bank, and has been for years and kind of use him when we need his skills.” Some trustees became involved in programs and daily operations at the college because of their background and experience. This involvement was defined by some as an asset but at times was thought of as interference or overstepping boundaries because whether it intentional or whether the trustees are aware they carry influence over employees.

William Lone said this about an example of very active, high performing boards:

If you have an IT person on the board who is really informed and knowledgeable about what’s going on and is providing feedback to faculty, senior faculty and staff on IT issues and so he doesn’t view that that’s an interference as much as it’s let’s say a plus. I think we [William Lone’s board] probably fall into that same category; five of the seven of us have XXXX backgrounds and so we have kind of like a special love affair with XXXX and um so we are kind of involved in what’s happening there in greater detail than we would be in other areas. But I think that’s okay...it’s because we like it and we know that we’re not to make decisions; the president is the person who makes the administrative decisions and we can provide input and our own personal suggestions, and we really don’t have much authority overall.

Continued professional development. The need for professional development surfaced during the coding process. The trustees participated in professional development that was offered by ICCTA, or in other forms of orientations, retreats, and workshops. One of the specific examples referenced was the carousel orientation, which was described as an event where the trustee went from business affairs to academic affairs and was provided an overview in each department by the respective vice president who seemed routine and basic. Trustees asked for involvement with outside facilitation and the involvement of the board chair in the orientation process in an effort to make it more relevant.

Additional ideas related to professional development included forms of consistent, contextual, professional development training. Trustees want, and need, professional development to understand and be prepared to make decisions for their institution. Lastly, Trustee consistently indicated that they gain experience and maintain a proper balance, needed to invest time for training and preparation. An exception was expressed by Ms. Carr who said, trustees serving under her chairmanship would learn everything in a year because “they are going to participate and be involved in everything that I am participating and being involved in” with no mention of training and professional development.

Trustee Responses to Research Questions

The emergent themes were used in the response to the research questions. As the researcher, I took the trustees’ perceptions of stewardship, trustee responsibility, working together and preparation to serve as a trustee in an attempt to address the research questions.

Research Question 1

How familiar are Illinois community college trustees with their institution’s mission and cultural heritage, and in what way do they feel these two things meet the needs of stakeholders in their community ?

Trustee Responsibility. Based on the responses, with longevity came experience, and most trustees made an effort to learn about the institution they served. This relates to the subtheme of institutional knowledge. While all trustees mentioned the important responsibility they hold in this elected position, those trustees who have served multiple

terms demonstrated a broader knowledge of the overall institution's mission that was inclusive of the integrity and fiscal responsibility to the stakeholders.

Trustees acknowledged the college mission multiple times when asked about the ratio of fulltime faculty compared to part time faculty and also when asked about the addition or elimination of a program. Joseph Nathaniel demonstrated his knowledge of the institution's mission in the following statement:

You need to have a fair mix of full time employees per student. At the same time, you have to be able to meet the needs of the students, so this is one way of measuring and determining what are in the best interest of the institution and the students.

Jack Harrison demonstrated an understanding of how his college's mission should reflect the needs of the stakeholders with this following comment:

I would want to look at what the impact of cutting an academic program would have on our students' ability to transfer to a four year institution, and I would want to look at their ability to be competitive in the job market.

Institutional knowledge includes some understanding of the college's cultural heritage. This understanding can be tangible culture, intangible culture and natural heritage and I was able to experience a variety of institutional culture. In several of the interviews, trustees demonstrated awareness of their institutions' mission and cultural awareness. Some interviewees responded with answers that indicated they had general knowledge about their institution's mission and cultural heritage, while others seemed more knowledgeable or offered specific examples. One participant explained the history of a painting in the boardroom and how the rich history of the district related to the painting. In another instance, a trustee talked of doing business in a collegial way was

known as the “XXXX-way,” lovingly referred to as a professional way the board and the institution operated.

During some of the interviews, respondents indicated that their perspectives of their role as a trustee harmonized with the institutions’ culture but felt that other trustees on their board clearly did not. As an example of one trustee’s perspective, James Dunavin stated:

We have no authority as individual trustees to do anything. Our only authority is as a Board. Everything goes back to the Board for approval. So, it’s a culture and if you find a trustee managing the college by walking around, you need to very gently discourage that kind of thing at first. It has been my personal experience, one that’s been relayed to me, that our current Board and the past trustees have understood that line. We’re not educators, and our job is not to walk into classrooms and evaluate teachers or anything approaching that. And any interaction we have with staff, the president’s is always in the loop.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. Most trustees felt that it took a long time to learn about their role, indicating there was a lot to learn about the institution. Some said it took a full term to understand their role; some trustees indicated longevity was linked to understanding the institution’s operation, the board’s culture, and the stakeholder relationships.

Most of the trustees interviewed gave examples of their participation in an orientation and committee meetings on campus with the intent to learn about their institution. There was a range in the length and type of orientation and a variety of participants in the meetings described. There was no mention in any interview of an attempt to seek training specific to the college mission or cultural heritage.

Research Question 2

How knowledgeable are Illinois community college trustees with the transcendent values and principles that guide and shape higher education?

Trustee responsibility. Trustees are accountable to understand a myriad of values and principles for their own institution and for higher education in general. When interviewed, many trustees had knowledge of some of the terms in the questions that were asked, such as academic freedom, shared governance, and educational quality; yet the answers at times seemed that they did not fully understand the meaning of the topics. It did appear again that there was a connection between longevity of time served as a trustee and a higher level of understanding of the interview questions. There was a clear effort by the less tenured trustees to seek information to better understand what they were responsible for; they mentioned that certain topics were entrusted to college employees and to other trustees who were more qualified for those topics.

Joseph Nathaniel expressed that it was important for the board of trustees to acknowledge having a clear understanding, and value all policies. A trustee should know, for example, if the institution has a policy on academic freedom. One trustee said that if a college has a policy on academic freedom, trustees should have an understanding of how it is valued at their institution. Vernon Edward said that academic freedom discussions rarely came up on his campus. If the subject were to come up as an issue or concern, he indicated that the monitoring of any academic freedom discussion was really up to the vice president of academic affairs along with the president and governance system of the college. Other trustees did not seem very knowledgeable about academic freedom. If they were knowledgeable, they did not provide examples of involvement in discussions of

academic freedom nor did they mention or seem knowledgeable about any type of guiding principles related to academic freedom at their institution.

Regarding the board's accountability for shaping higher education, Jack Harrison discussed how the community college industry needed a definition for what he described as a voluntary framework for accountability. He indicated trustees had a need for a framework to guide higher education. Mr. Harrison stated, "A framework would help define what the data is rather than have it be forced on us, because I think we get stuck in these questions like: what is student success and is it only granting degrees?"

Working together. When trustees were asked about making decisions for the college, it was expressed that there was regular and consistent communication between the president and the board chair at each college. Each trustee described a type of communication with the president that occurred regularly and, in a few cases, on a daily basis. Some trustees said their board members were allowed to ask cabinet members or administrators for information about something in order to be prepared to vote at a board meeting. Some trustees described a process that they used to communicate with staff. Examples were provided where trustee would ask permission or notify in advance when they were planning to request information from a college employee. A few examples were given that indicated that it was appropriate for a trustee to send an e-mail request for information to a college employee when the board chair or president was copied in the e-mail. Participants also described several examples of trustees that overstepped boundaries in their quest to gain information. One trustee gave an example of a trustee that was very concerned about a master plan project and continually went to the campus unannounced, taking photos of certain and things getting a hold of the construction manager and staff.

Further knowledge of transcendent values and principles that guide and shape higher education were demonstrated in comments about shared governance. Mr. Nathaniel felt that “commitment” to anything a trustee did was important, with an emphasis on commitment.

If you keep commitment at the forefront as an individual, I think it will guide the decisions that you make; shared governance as a board at our college, and at most institutions, is important. The faculty is unionized, so there are certain things that need to happen; you need to sit down with the faculty association.

Additional discussions about decision making revealed that even when shared governance was present, the trustees’ perspectives demonstrated that the final decisions rested with various stakeholders or stakeholder groups at their institution. In some cases, respondents felt that academic program decisions should germinate within departments and some indicated discussion should happen within an administrative framework. Some understood that the president should retain the final decision about academic programs. Other shared that while opinions of administration were sought, and in a few examples valued, the board was ultimately responsible for the final decision.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. Several trustees gave examples of their attendance at statewide trainings and national conferences with intent to gain a better understanding of higher education. Many of the responses were general in nature; they described their reason for attendance at trainings was to learn about the new trustees’ role and the basic framework of higher education. Daniel Haynes, however, gave an example of a national conference he attended specifically to gain information on a particular topic, which he felt was necessary for his board to make pending decisions for the college.

Research Question 3

How comfortable are Illinois community college trustees with their understanding of the public interest and the public trust? And if so, in what ways is this demonstrated?

Stewardship. The sub-theme motivation included politics and the discussion of people who run for a board seat as a single issue candidate and candidates who run for trusteeship with a personal agenda. Bertie Carr mentioned that political alliances are sometimes formed and gave examples of boards that do not demonstrate an understanding of public trust. In describing those boards she said, “Some boards have people who form certain alliances within a board and they rubber stamp each other’s votes.” Mr. Nathaniel acknowledged that trustees get on boards for different reasons; some do not realize you have to work at being a trustee. “Some run, you know, as a stepping stone to something else or to promote their own sociability or whatever,” Mr. Nathaniel concluded.

The constituents expect the board to be accountable and make decisions on behalf of the college and all of the stakeholders. During her interview, when we discussed making very difficult decisions, Bertie Carr gave several examples that caused her personal embarrassment; she stated:

There are plenty of decisions that you know you have to remain objective about and you have to make the decision and know and understand the consequences. As long as you can live with yourself at the end of the day, then that’s all that matters.

Ms. Carr also demonstrated her stewardship of the public trust when describing another difficult situation when she said:

It's very hard making decisions when you know it makes a significant impact, especially when you've been on the board a while. Our term is six years, and after six years you get to know some people pretty well, and you know that a decision you're making is going to affect somebody that you know...you just have to put that aside, and if you can't, then you shouldn't be on the board. We have a responsibility to the public.

Another trustee described a few situations such as how after a vote, knowing they have made some people in their community mad, they might avoid going to the local coffee shop or avoid going to church for a few weeks so no one can harangue them about the decisions they have made.

Trustee responsibility. Having the involvement of community members in the presidential search process was one way each board demonstrated good intentions for inclusion and involvement of the public interest. Furthermore, in each participant interview a clear process surfaced about how their institution shared information with their internal and external stakeholders, thus keeping their constituents abreast of the happenings at their institution.

In all interviews, trustees mentioned of the need to have at least one trustee on the board that has fiscal knowledge and experience. Some trustees, in other instances, stressed it was important that all trustees have fiscal knowledge because the board, as a whole, has the fiduciary responsibility of the college. There were some comments indicating a reliance on the chief financial officer to supply the board with timely and relevant financial information.

From their perspectives' all trustees that were interviewed were knowledgeable about public trust. There was a discussion with some interviewees about personal sacrifices and situations where their decisions were very difficult, yet they were decisions

that were necessary for the good of the institution. Trustees demonstrated knowledge about having a responsibility to taxpayers and community members in addition to responsibility to the internal constituents. Several interviewees indicated that what they were doing was to enhance, to better the college they served.

“We, the board of trustees, need the public trust,” according to James Dunavin. Dunavin summarized that once elected, each trustee needed to do what he said he was going to do when he was running for election; furthermore he said there was a responsibility for each trustee to make sure there were no games being played. Dunavin stated, “We represent the taxpayers and the voters who elect us.” He continued:

And our role is to be informed and understand the finances of the college, understand the performances, as we trust them (administrators) to report to us the performance of our students academically. We have to be informed and never forget who we represent. We need to ask appropriate questions.

It was also noted in general comments by other trustees that the elected trustee should understand they have a responsibility to represent the students and all the other stakeholders.

Bertie Carr gave an example of public interest in the recent hiring of an administrator at her institution. Ms. Carr said, “I know that when we were looking at a vice president position that had come in front of us [the board], diversity was something we looked at intensely; having the candidates match the diversity of the school was important to us.”

Attempts to demonstrate transparency of board action emerged with the highest and utmost value throughout the interviews. Many participants responded that either

transparency existed in their college's board meetings or that transparency was respected in their institution. Two trustees mentioned that they had recently initiated significant changes to demonstrate transparency to their college community. One specific example that demonstrated the move towards transparency was the elimination of closed sessions at all board meetings in one institution; in another it was the videotaping of board meetings for public viewing.

Research Question 4

How prepared, and in what way, do Illinois community college trustees feel they are able to address the legitimate and relevant interests of the institution's various constituencies?

Stewardship. The trustees interviewed for this study serve on a seven member board. A few interviewees pointed out that those seven trustees with whom they serve have seven different personalities, backgrounds, and reasons for serving. The board of trustees is generally expected to accommodate the interest of the constituencies they were elected to serve, resulting in the potential of seven trustees with a wide range of differing interests. From their perspectives, all of the trustees interviewed were knowledgeable about the public trust.

In demonstrating his involvement with internal college constituents, Jack Harrison mentioned the need for a trustee to spend some time on campus talking to faculty and students, attending events, and being visible. Mr. Harrison stated:

I think when you are visible on campus and show an interest in the college, the people in the college love it; the faculty and staff love seeing a trustee attend their events. You develop a relationship with them over time where they open up to you and share information that you won't get any other way.

In a few interviews trustees noted that various constituents on campus were involved in the presidents' annual evaluation. By requesting their opinions and contributions, the trustees demonstrated that the employees' interests were being considered.

There was discussion about personal sacrifices and situations where their decisions were very difficult yet were necessary for the good of the institution. There was demonstrated knowledge about responsibility to taxpayers and community members in addition to the responsibility to the internal constituents. Several interviewees indicated what they were doing was to enhance and to better the college they serve.

Most institutions allow their student trustee to attend statewide meetings, and on occasion, a national conference; the student trustee keeps the board informed about the relevant interests of the students. Mary Waggoner boasted she had a very involved and diverse student government that did a lot of great things in the community; she said that she regularly acknowledged their efforts publicly at board meetings. There were multiple times during the various interviews when trustees mentioned their interest in student performance, student job outlook, and placement; the trustees showed interest in their students' level of preparation and in how their graduates measure up compared to other institutions in the state and across the nation.

When asked about internal constituents at her college, Bertie Carr beamed as she talked about how she cared about the staff and stated:

I love my job. I love going to work every day, and I wish everyone could have that opportunity; when somebody says that they hate going to work, that breaks my heart. You spend the majority of your life there, so I want to make sure that my college, even if I have to step over the president, my college is going to be a

nice place to work, I might not be able to make it fun, but at least I can help make it decent.

Mary Waggoner gave multiple examples of where students, faculty members, administrators, and police officers were acknowledged at her monthly board meetings. In a few examples, Ms. Waggoner noted the students and faculty were also acknowledged at state meetings.

Working together. College administration and the college faculty, as two distinct constituent groups, seemed valued and were mentioned multiple times by some of the trustees in interviews, yet were seldom mentioned by other trustees. The responses indicated that cabinet members in most colleges are asked to give reports and updates to the board in an effort to keep the board informed. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there were demonstrative examples of the importance of shared governance; the inclusion of the various constituents at the institutions indicated that the constituents' opinions were valued.

Unions were acknowledged by several trustees as specific groups of stakeholders at their college. There were detailed mentions of the opportunity for faculty unions and other staff unions to give updates to the board; some colleges invite unions to submit reports and participate in some way at the monthly board meetings.

There was an overarching theme of the need for trustees to use conflict resolution skills or consensus building skills. It was clear that trustees need to weigh conflicting needs of the involved parties and arrive at a consensus as a board. When asked if and how his board arrives at consensus, Daniel Haynes stated:

I think it's the leadership of the board with experience and the need to keep that collegiality and respect for the other board members, respect for the fact that some

people are going to have different opinions, and that they'll vote no on something or disagree on something; yet when we decide this is the majority, we accept it and go forward without any acrimony or anything.

William Lone described an experience where it was very difficult to get his board to consensus because of one board member, a trustee who he said really liked to rock the boat because "she irritated us to no degree, but we dealt with it and you know, we've got six out of seven votes and we don't waste a lot of time worrying." Mr. Lone's experience included more than 20 years as a trustee; his board was described for most of those years as a board that was in sync and had no problem making decisions that were for the best of the institution.

Vernon Edward said he felt that healthy debate is good and that with his seven member board they all deserve to be heard. Mr. Edward continued that there are others, in addition to fellow board members, who should be heard from when they make decisions as a board which affect the various constituents. Mr. Edward stated:

Our decisions should be data driven, so they shouldn't be just subjective. They should be based upon good data and reliable data that we're asking for from the administration and any outside experts. Healthy debate over contentious issues is not a bad thing at all. But when we've made the decision, it should be encouraged by all board members that the collective will, the majority of the board, decided that this is the way we go so all board members need to support that decision in public, no matter what the contentious debate was. At the end of the day we are one collective whole.

Bertie Carr shared with me a very different viewpoint about reaching unanimous decisions. When describing the board when she was first elected she said, "They had a very divided, hateful, spiteful, nasty, and argumentative board; when I became board chair, I refused to allow that to happen." Bertie went on to talk about those difficult meetings. "Yeah, I don't care if I told a trustee the sky was blue they would argue, and it was depressing, I would go home after those meetings just exhausted and my spirit was

just heavy ough...and this is a volunteer position.” The recent election, she continued, changed the environment and it improved somewhat but there was a newly elected trustee who told me I should never expect to have a unanimous vote. The new trustee continues to be a challenge, but one who she hopes will learn with time.

In another example Ms. Carr described her board experience when newly elected: “They had a very divided, hateful, spiteful, nasty, and argumentative board; when I became board chair, I refused to allow that to happen.” Ms. Carr is not the only trustee who described to me having a divided board. William Lone described a retired faculty trustee who was a single issue candidate.

We had someone elected to the board, in probably the late 90s, and she came with an agenda; she did not like the president and didn’t like some of the things that he’d done. She came in and my God, she was hell bent on, you know, she would vote no on something just because the others were voting yes. However, we persevered and by the time she left the board, she had served one term for six years. After a couple of years, she finally got to respect the other board members and got to the point where she would not vote no just to be ornery, or if she didn’t get her way exactly. She’d vote no, but after a couple, I’d say about half way through her term, she actually came around to the rest of the board members you know and, and it was the will of the group that actually brought her around. So in time she was kind of like voting with us on most of these things, no longer voting to be obstinate. She didn’t seek another term, and again, I think it’s the leadership of the board. Those with experience need to keep that collegiality and respect for the other board members, respect for the fact that some people are going to have different opinions, and the fact that they’ll vote, you know, no on something or disagree on something; yet when we decide, we move forward as a board.

Research Question 5

How do Illinois community college trustees feel that their past experience, career pathways, and professional development have prepared them for their role as an elected trustee?

Stewardship. The sub-theme of pride and connection to the college emerged with discussion about longevity. Longevity was mentioned numerous times during the interviews; number of years of service was brought up in each of the interviews, even though it was not an interview question. Many trustees started the interview with general conversation stating the number of years they have served; their pride was evident as they spoke. There were multiple comments about longevity and how the boards that had been together for a number of years had, over time, learned ways to resolve conflict and to come to consensus.

One additional perspective about longevity was offered by Bertie Carr; her perspective also offered insight into how the length of time it takes for a trustee to learn is related to how involved in the board decision making they are. Ms. Carr made the following statement:

I think it depends on the type of board that you have. In my opinion, it took me four and a half years for me to know everything. I think now the trustees under my chairmanship are going to know everything in a year; at least I hope so, because they're going to participate and be involved in everything that I am participating and being involved in. It is not that the way that the past chair ran it was wrong; I am not saying that at all. I just encourage them to ask more questions so they will learn more quickly.

Ms. Carr said she encourages questions and participation from her board now and admitted that when she first became a board member she did not participate fully. In fact, she said that in the very beginning she did not even read her board packet in advance of the meeting, and she would vote based on other board members' votes. She now realized the importance of preparation and participation and she offered to me, in confidence, some personal justification for her actions.

There were differing opinions about the longevity phenomenon. Cora Hamilton described longevity adversely when explaining that people are interested in serving as a trustee, but they cannot because the same people stay on. Ms. Hamilton stated the following:

I think quite honestly what would help with that is if we had term limits. I think that's part of the problem in this whole area. I think term limits would really help with that. I know school boards in the state of Illinois are not paid positions, so you can't set limitations. Others would run and they care, but they can't get in. I think they get discouraged because the incumbent stays in.

Working together. When asked if his board's background and experience was helpful in their role as board members, one trustee shared that there was a time during his tenure that he had three lawyers serving on his board at the same time. This was an example he said, when experience can also be problematic; they all wanted to lawyer for the college, but it was our college attorney who was responsible for that.

When asked about past experience preparing him and his board for their roles as elected trustees, William Lone noted that over the years he observed it was hard for some of his trustees not to be too involved in certain programs or activities on campus, because they were knowledgeable about some issues and programs at the college. Because of their background and experience, his trustees sometimes wanted to provide feedback to faculty and staff. When discussion arose about whether he viewed that feedback as interference or not, Mr. Lone indicated it was not as much interference as it was a plus for the college and that it was well intended.

Vernon Edward offered another example of when a trustee's background and experience comes into play,

Oftentimes they'll [trustees] want to micro manage an educational program because they think they know something more about it than the administration. It's always...(sigh) you have to have the flags going up and the warning signs going up when we're crossing over that boundary. Our job is to set the policy for the institution and not to micro manage the educational part of it.

Concerns about the timing of delivery of the monthly board packet surfaced multiple times. Cora Hamilton said:

I'm pushing for the board to get these packets in a little timelier manner. That's a lot of information for us to go over and to understand why you're [administration] is making these recommendations to us to approve. If we get it on a Thursday, most of us work, so we basically have Saturday and Sunday to look it over. I want to show the administration respect and don't want to call them on a weekend and ask them questions. I usually wait, but if it's something critical, I will call the president, but I try not to. I'll wait until Monday to call and ask questions, but then Monday, they have less than 24 hours to get me that information.

Mary Waggoner expressed that not only was there concern about the timeframe in which trustees received their board packet, she was adamant that in the old days, with a previous administration at her college, the late delivery was purposeful. Ms. Waggoner said:

We never got the finance reports until the day before the board meeting, and that ticked me off. We would have a place holder, obviously, for all of our finance stuff and then the day before he'd send them all to us. Well, obviously, nobody had time to go through everything...and that was done on purpose.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. This research clearly showed that each trustee felt that their background and training was of value to the role they serve. Each interviewee cited at least once, and often in multiple responses, what experience or area of expertise they brought with them to this elected position. In some cases it was their professional experience and training and in some cases there were the years of serving as a trustee that gave them added preparation for this role. There were a few examples where the elected trustees' experience might have been thought of by another trustee as a

detriment to the role at their institution in that this experience might cause that trustee to overstep boundaries of the role he/she was elected to serve.

Mary Waggoner stated, “I came in very well prepared, you know, having the history here because I’ve been with the college so long ... but some people come in with no background at all and don’t really even know what it is about.” Ms. Waggoner also mentioned later that she had a background in human resources that has proven to be beneficial in the presidential searches that she participated in for the college.

When she discussed some very difficult situations in her institution, Cora Hamilton felt that orientations and professional development would not be adequate preparation for the role of a trustee. “Some things they just can’t prepare you for; so yeah, some things you have to learn by doing, I suppose.” Ms. Hamilton continued. Later in our interview, Ms. Hamilton’s comments clearly indicated she believed that her background was an asset to her role as a trustee. She concluded:

Being a small business owner, I bring a lot to the board. I’ve been told by many people, off the record, that I’m the level-headed one. I’m the one with a conscience. I’m the one with the common sense. I speak my mind. I know the boundaries. I watch what I say, and I show everyone respect.

Joseph Nathaniel named his prior grant writing experience and overall financial understanding as two examples of the assets he brought to his role of a trustee, while Vernon Edward cited his business and teaching experience as an asset to his trusteeship. James Dunavin called himself a “numbers person.” He had the desire to share his deep understanding of numbers and finances with the rest of his board so they were better prepared to understand the college finances. Mr. Dunavin said:

I encourage financial performance reports every month. We need to know how we are doing compared to budget and what the end of the year going to look like.

Now, we get a monthly one page graphical summary. It shows actual results compared to projected and compared to last year so we can see how we are on revenue and expenses. We need to understand the finances of the college. It's not enough for them to hand us a packet and tell us these are the checks we wrote and here's where the money is invested. There's tons of information, but we really need to understand how the college functions in as simple a form as possible.

Two trustees said that while they personally had no financial background, each had others who they depended on to lend them their financial opinions and expertise. Both afore mentioned trustees stated they trusted in other board members who had fiscal expertise. One trustee gave a specific example of why she used the expertise of one of her board members. "He has more than 20 years' experience as a vice president of a bank," she stated. It is also worth mentioning that some trustees have created, or have had created, for their board a "dashboard indicator" with key performance measures to assist board members who may not have financial expertise; by having the dashboard, it was said this makes board members somewhat financially literate and able to understand the college financial status in a simpler way.

When asked if her professional training helped her in her role, Bertie Carr said, "It's a Christian attitude, that's where mine comes from." She felt it was not her professional training rather it was her personal faith.

Presidents' Review

A small group of presidents within the statewide system were interviewed and asked to respond as a review group; after reading the trustees' perspectives, the presidents' responses to research question six were summarized as a group. This process for the presidential peer review question was done differently to ensure confidentiality. The presidents are referred to as president one, president two, president three, and president

four. The analysis consisted of a summary of the themes. The presidents' perspectives and the trustees' perspectives' were similar in some instances while they were quite different in others. The themes were similar yet in some cases the perceptions of the themes were very different.

How, and in what ways, are the presidents in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official?

Stewardship

The presidents had differing opinions of the trustees' perspectives about running for office. President three hoped that the reason a trustee wanted to serve was to support their colleges and to be a part of something that is very special for the community.

Whereas president four commented on the example of Cora Hamilton who chose to run for office to get someone else off the board; this, president four said was "a terrible reason to seek office."

The presidents agreed that their experience with those trustees who, before being elected into office, were employees or previous students carried a sentimental loyalty to the college. Others were "put on the board" because they represented unions, and president one and president two felt those trustees were "watchdogs" for union contacts and that serving as a trustee was a way to look for jobs. President one noted that friends and family members of trustee's at their college got jobs and looked for union jobs with contractual work to be done at the college; thus resulting in patronage. Patronage was also acknowledged by one trustee. The presidents also confirmed the trustees' comments

acknowledging trustees who ran for office as a political stepping stone, an attainment of power and an ego boost.

Trustee Responsibility

President/trustee relationships are very complex and trustees are not always well prepared for College leadership. Presidents felt it was the responsibility of both the president and the trustee to understand the dynamics of this very important relationship. President three indicated that trustees must hire their experts [presidents] who they can trust and then let them lead.

Presidents and other administrators have professional training and spend their careers learning and improving the college. President three said that administration spends 100% of their time compared to the irregular time spent by elected boards of trustees thinking and communicating about community colleges therefore trustees should trust the recommendations they are given by the administration. The presidents confirmed the trustees' opinions about regular communication between them to keep everyone abreast of what is happening at the college.

The president's perspective about the trustee responsibility did not differ much from the chairs' perspectives. The mutual thought on the boards' role was to approve and enforce policy and to pay the bills. Some of the presidents and board chairs indicated that while some trustees do have an understanding of this role, there were many trustees did not understand and others who chose not to adhere and would participate in activities outside this role. There was definite agreement from president four that the trustees as individuals had no authority and their only authority was as a board.

There was general agreement about the need for trustees to have a definition for what was described as a voluntary framework for accountability. President four agreed that trustees could have the need to ask for a framework to guide higher education.

The presidents explained that once elected to the board, there is not a statewide uniform way for the seven trustees to elect the chair. Most colleges do not rotate this chairmanship and it is not unusual for one person to dominate the chairman seat for several years when they want the power. President two suggested that the board members should rotate the chair seat. A few presidents felt rotation in the chairmanship was important because it shared the responsibility and trustees were allowed to learn more.

According to president one, there was an attempt on each board to stay “above the board” in their governance and others operate blatantly below the standards. The same president felt the politics within the board were dangerous on a local level and yet the trustees did not mention this in their interviews. President one’s opinions were based on observations and were not specific solely to his institution; this was a larger problem that he had observed in multiple institutions.

There was some discrepancy between the trustees’ perceptions and the presidents’ perceptions of who the trustee served or was supposed to serve. In some instances, the trustees said they were there to serve the students, some said they were there to serve the college and a few said they represent the taxpayers and voters who elected them; president four agreed with the latter. The presidents agreed with the trustee comment that the elected trustees have a responsibility to the public.

One president said it was critical for a president to understand the system and the way their board operates. Long serving presidents, for example, knew how to plant a seed

to a trustee and let it germinate so the trustee thinks it was his or her idea. President one said, “It is my role to keep my board out of orange jumpsuits [jail].” President one is also “expected to provide services as well as protect the board and keep them out of the news, unless he is giving them credit for something positive.” It is important that the presidents understand what the trustees expect from the relationship and a president must spin a story and say what trustees want to hear.

A president needs to paint a nice picture for the public according to president one. The last thing a president wants is a dysfunctional and ineffective board; if he has one, he does not want the public to know. President one said that trustees may fight and call each other names but they never have a split vote. The chair, at times, will talk to each of them in advance and in the end they do not have a split vote.

There were a few isolated trustee statements about board meetings that the presidents’ were not in agreement with the trustees’ perspectives. The first topic was public comment at board meetings. One trustee hoped to allow the opportunity for open discussion and the opportunity for community members to approach the board at times outside of the designated public comment time and to discuss items not included in the agenda. The presidents felt that the monthly board meeting had a specific time allocated on the agenda for public comment and that there should not be open conversations with attendees made available throughout the entire meeting.

The second trustee perception, pertaining to board meetings, which the presidents disagreed with, was the removal of closed sessions. One trustee said she had, in an attempt to demonstrate transparency, discontinued closed sessions during her board

meetings. President four felt that there was a need to have a closed session when discussing some items such as union negotiations.

Presidents noted that it was interesting that nepotism did not come up often and that knowledge of this particular type of “conflict of interest” should be acknowledged by the trustees. The comments from the presidents in summary were: “What about nepotism? Does a trustee know that if there no policy against nepotism, they should recuse themselves during voting when they have a relationship with the person they are hiring?” asked president two. The presidents felt all colleges should have a clear policy on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Some trustees have family members who are employees at the colleges, and if the employee is part of a union when that contract is voted on the trustee should not vote. One president gave an example that happened at his/her institution: when the wife of a trustee was hired, that trustee made the personal choice to step down. President two referenced a college in the state that has a husband and wife leadership team at the institution.

Working Together

Some trustees felt a strong concern about the timeframe in which trustees received their board packet, indicating the late delivery was purposeful. The presidents did not agree that this late delivery was purposeful and president three felt that if it happened it might be an isolated and personal incident. President three clearly felt the board could insist on timely delivery of packets, and the president is not positioned to refuse to comply with this request

The board chairs' perspectives on themselves did not indicate that they were micromanagers but did, however, specify there was often a trustee on their board who they had to work with to prevent him/her from continually micromanaging something at the college. The presidents felt, there was always an issue of trustees stepping into daily operational practices at the college where they don't belong, and it changed because it was not always the same trustee; it's usually issue/program based. Rogue trustees, according to the presidents are generally disruptive with everything.

President three said "There is a very fine line between contributing knowledge and micromanaging at the program level." Presidents strongly believed in policy governance and president two felt comfortable to ask his/her board to provide advice when they feel trustees could "add value without trying to manage the outcome."

President four felt it was wrong for trustee to think it was acceptable for him/her to step over or around a president to make something happen at the college, even if it was for what the trustee thought was a good thing to do for the employees at the institution.

Presidents agreed with the trustees' perspective on the level of communication with the president. The presidents said they generally send out a bulletin or notice to trustees every week or two depending on what was happening. This bulletin was an update about concerns which also included good things happening on campus. Everyone agreed that there should be "no surprises" between both parties; no surprises for the presidents and no surprises for the trustees.

President two said there was, or should be, a general courtesy that trustees should notify the president if they were coming on campus and are communicating with staff. Staff also should inform the president when communicating with trustees. Though this

was said to be ignored in many cases, there were multiple examples of political and personal relationships between staff member and trustees. The presidents were not in favor of their trustees communicating regularly with college staff.

Preparation to Serve as a Trustee

When asked about trustee preparation, one president gave an example of having two trustees who do not have a college degree and he described one of them as the best trustee he has on his board. This trustee studies the agenda, researches as needed, and came prepared to every meeting; this trustee is also a true diplomat.

Contrary to the trustees perspectives', presidents did not agree that longevity makes a trustee better. President four said "longevity is not necessarily a good thing." The presidents generally felt it was more about the person who is serving; they felt it was more about that person's level of interest and capabilities. President three felt in some cases, that board members who stay for more than two terms seem to lose the energy for the work of a trustee.

Upon election, trustees generally had an internal orientation and many participate in the ICCTA professional development opportunities. One president gave an example that his board had recently participated in media training on how to have a unified voice for the college.

There are some trustees who, on the contrary, do not attend anything at all. President one offered an explanation about the statewide trustee association and the meetings and workshops made available to his trustees. This president continued to explain that when trustees like his are not really interested in serving in the best interests

of the institution, and don't attend conferences, that lack of participation insulates his institution from the rest of the state.

There was much to learn and, according to president four, it usually took a new trustee at about six months to a year to contribute fully in most areas of the college. The presidents agreed with one trustee's summarization that in the beginning of an elected term, a trustee should keep his/her mouth shut, listen for a while, read all the materials, ask a few questions, and then finally, when more acclimated, get involved.

When I asked the president's at the end of their meetings if there was anything else that they wished to be said there were a few comments which I have summarized: President four felt that trustees should realize that while consensus is good, it is not necessary and certainly not required. According to president two, life can be wonderful as a college president when you have a good board; however, there is no worse job than that of a college president when you have a board that is volatile and does not understand its role when initiating policy. With a difficult board, life becomes difficult across the college in many ways. A difficult board affects all of the college stakeholders. "Nobody is free of sin," concluded president one.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

Through this study the researcher explored the lived experiences of trustees who were serving an elected term as a board member for a community college in Illinois. Only those who were subsequently elected to serve as the board chair by their fellow trustees were interviewed. The actions of a board have an effect on many stakeholders both internal and external to the college they serve and their decisions require a range of depth and understanding. The elected position is a volunteer six year term and there is no specific career or professional training background requirements before election, nor is there mandated orientation or training after they assume the role. The primary purpose of this study was to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees felt they were to serve in their role as an elected official and to explore if they felt their past experiences had prepared them. This study also intended to determine if they felt that professional development would assist them in this role as a trustee.

This discussion will begin by addressing the findings in relation to the five research questions that guided the study. Included in this first part is a researcher's reflection, which provides a contextual lens for discussing the research questions. Following is the analysis of how, and in what ways, the presidents who were interviewed were in agreement or disagreement with the Illinois community college trustees' perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official. Next, the

findings of the study in the context of the existing literature are discussed. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, implications for the community college constituents, recommendations for future research, and lastly the researcher's final reflection.

Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

In this section a discussion of the findings is presented by reflecting on the different roles the researcher held as a stakeholder through the past several years. Collectively these roles establish the viewpoint used to discuss the aspects of the findings. The discussion is around the five research questions: Familiarity with institutional mission and cultural heritage, transcendent values and principles that guide higher education, public interest and public trust, legitimate and relevant interests of constituents, and the preparation and experience the trustees brought to their role. The first research question explored was about the trustees' perspectives on their understanding of their institutions' mission and cultural heritage. The findings in response to this question are located in Chapter 4 as the thematic structure and phenomenon was developed.

Research Question 1

How familiar are Illinois community college trustees with their institution's mission and cultural heritage, and in what way do they feel these two things meet the needs of stakeholders in their community?

Stewardship. Based on the findings from this study, it appears that upon election some trustees are not familiar with the mission and the cultural heritage of their college.

There were many when first elected who did not understand their student population or the needs of their community, although, there was demonstrated motivation to learn about the institution they served. An understanding does, however, appear to come with time spent serving the institution..

Some of the trustees spoke about their institution like it was their family and talked about making lifelong friends. It appeared that they really spent time learning about their institution. Trustees were very proud of the relationships they gained while learning about their college's students and staff. Mary Waggoner made lifelong friends, which she reminisced about several times during our time together. Mary also talked with great pride about how she created ways to award students and employees for their accomplishments. She smiled as she described the people who were honored at the recent board meeting. These examples showed trustees who were familiar with their community.

There were instances when interviewees shared the cultural heritage of their institution. While each participant's example of cultural heritage described different types of institutional culture, in all examples the heritage was recounted with great pride.

The first cultural heritage example described a warm collegial atmosphere, a culture where people cared and were interested in your viewpoint, a culture that was inclusive and congenial of stakeholders. The next example was about a painting; the trustee silently walked with me, showed me, and then told me how the cultural and ethnic heritage was represented by the painting in their board room. This description of rich cultural heritage was followed by the same trustee's explanation of his/her institution's philosophic history over time as we viewed a wall of photographs in a hallway of the

institution. In these examples the trustees showed concern and dedication to the community they served. Lastly, one of the trustees explained the college history and how the transition of the college programs were related to the ethnicity of the residents in the cities his/her college served; this example demonstrated that the trustee had a deep understanding of the community and economic development.

Trustee responsibility. The importance of the trustees' responsibility was noted in the interviews by the numerous occasions that it surfaced in the conversations. Throughout the interviews trustees would say "that is not what we are here to do" or "we have to do what we were elected to do." "We are here to serve the students and the community." These quotes were used as a way to express what trustees felt they were supposed to do and "that" is what they will do. This was almost like a pronouncement or a charge. The trustees, in these examples, seemed proud that they knew what they were supposed to do and they understood what their role was. There were other times, however, where this charge was a form of criticism from one trustee to another, condemning them for not understanding what they, as elected trustees, were there to do.

Working together. Trustees seemed to have a good understanding of their need to work as a team to ensure that their work aligned with their college's mission. The way they described how they evaluated the needs of the students and community when looking at programs demonstrated knowledge of the needs of the college stakeholders. In the example of the agriculture program, the board and the president worked to support the stakeholders by revamping their current program. The community wanted it and there was demonstrated student need. In this example the trustee said it was up to the president to make the recommendation, which was supported whole heartedly by the board. The

trustee in the cited situation described the relationship between the president and his board as “the line between being president and the board was pretty blurred because we were working together; we had such a good relationship that there really wasn’t any trouble.” This relationship demonstrated they were working for the betterment of the institution and they understood the college’s mission.

Preparation to serve as a trustee . The analysis of the interview responses indicated that few trustees realized the magnitude of understanding that this elected position required. Nor did it appear that trustees understood the investment of time that it took to learn what was required to make decisions representing the constituents who elected them to office. The participants identified a wide range of time, from six months to six years, as the length of time needed to gain the knowledge that was necessary to fully understand their role as a trustee. The trustees who participated in the study all seemed very knowledgeable at the time. However, some did talk about how much there was to learn when they were first elected and spoke about how some trustees on their board still had much to learn.

Research Question 2

How knowledgeable are Illinois community college trustees with the transcendent values and principles that guide and shape higher education?

Stewardship. The analysis revealed the presence of servant leadership, which appeared deeply rooted in many trustees, and dedication to learn about the college and understand how they could help move the institution forward. The numerous hours the trustees dedicated to reading and attending meetings to understand student engagement,

core competency levels, and completion rates were examples of their dedication to understanding the values and principles that shape higher education.

Throughout the interviews there were countless methods that the trustees described as ways they determined to help the students in their institution. Trustees were thoughtful and seemed sincere when they discussed how they weighed their own emotions and asked themselves what was in the best interest of the student. Most examples were unselfish and student centered, though many responses indicated the well-being of staff interest at the core of their decision.

Trustees' personal values glimmered through in a few interviews and those values often reflected how they would like to make changes for the betterment of the institution. It appeared that the mentoring and/or buddy system for new trustees would link a new trustee to a sitting trustee and provide assistance for the new trustees to have a better understanding of the principles that guide higher education. The sitting trustee could encourage questions and conduct some outreach to make sure the new trustee felt like he/she was catching on. This would motivate new trustees to participate and become engaged.

Trustee responsibility. By having the responsibility rest on the board to set college policy and hire the president as the college leader, trustees were positioned to influence and shape the future of the organization. It did not appear that all trustees realized the magnitude of the responsibility they held.

During the interviews many trustees expressed some basic knowledge of the principles that guide higher education. Some trustees believed that most of the transcendent values and guiding principles were dependent upon the college

administration. Some trustees were more knowledgeable about terms such as academic freedom, shared governance, and educational quality than others. When looking for more in depth answers on some topics such as Sarbanes Oxley, it appeared that some trustees did not fully understand the definition of Sarbanes Oxley. At times it was necessary to reword the questions so the trustee understood what was being asked. This did not mean they were not a good trustee; it meant they did not understand the question or did not know what Sarbanes Oxley was. This indicated Sarbanes Oxley could be a good topic to consider for training or professional development.

The trustees who were interviewed were for the most part interested in the “business” of the community college. What trustees did not already know when they began their term, most seemed interested in learning. They reached out for knowledge in multiple ways including internal and external inquiry and professional training. In most cases, they sought information to arm themselves to make decisions. One trustee talked urgently about the need for what he described as this “voluntary framework for accountability.” From a researcher’s perspective, it was agreed that the community college and the community should define the accountability measurements rather than have them forced on the colleges from the government. The trustees talked passionately about student success, granting degrees, and doing comparative analyses of students’ stated goals when they enrolled compared to student outcomes. This was an assurance trustees were knowledgeable in the responsibilities they are entrusted with.

Working together. When a shared governance model was employed for the college presidential search, college-wide teamwork was demonstrated. All trustees that were interviewed outlined a comprehensive team to assist with this task that many felt

was their most important task as a trustee. Trustees also felt that hiring a president with the input from community members was a valuable way to show that everyone's opinion was respected. It did seem that this was a rather routine answer and that there was no thought as to who the appropriate people should be or what skill set they would look for in someone to serve on the presidential search committee. To me it seemed more like there was a need to include a variety of people because that is what was expected; because it was the right thing to do.

As the interviews progressed, it became clear that the role of chair was critical in guiding teamwork, in influencing his/her board to work together to make decisions about the institution's future. It appears that it is the leadership of the board and those members with experience who keep collegiality and respect for the other board members prominent in the board discussions. In most cases there was apparent respect for the fact that some people were going to have different opinions and an understanding that while they might not vote the same as the rest of the board, in the end of the day that trustee would respect the board decision. This was not always the case. In one example, there was a trustee who shared that another trustee on the board said he/she, as chair, will never have a unanimous vote. This undoubtedly meant that this trustee did not intend to vote based on information provided, instead that trustee's vote would be based on a personal agenda and likely would not be a vote for the best interest of the stakeholders.

Research Question 3

How comfortable are Illinois community college trustees with their understanding of the public interest and the public trust? And if so, in what ways is this demonstrated?

Stewardship. In general the participants possessed a good understanding of public interest and the public trust. Many chose to run because they thought it was the right thing to do and they wanted to serve the interests their community. It appeared that trustees wanted to be associated with a college they were proud of and the stories of holding the public trust to a high standard were plentiful.

The trustees proudly described themselves as the liaison that represented the college. When trustees are out in public they are elected officials who represent their constituents and represent their college. The trustee explained, in what he deemed a very logical manner, that if trustees are approached in public about a college concern, it is the trustee's responsibility to bring that information back for an evaluation by the appropriate college staff. This trustee described himself as the information traffic cop who brings information to the administration. Hearing this perspective in this context made sense.

Trustees were adamant that they represent the taxpayers and the voters who elect them and it was their duty to ensure there are no games being played. Trustees expressed the need to ask good questions and make good decisions. One trustee felt he/she should ask questions, because they were elected to ask questions, and were ultimately responsible to the community and to the students. These strong opinions indicated that the trustees understood that as a board they needed the public trust and understood that as individuals they wanted the community to know that the trustee was doing what he/she said they were going to do before getting elected.

Trustee responsibility. One of the problems with managing board business was board politics. The discussions about political stepping stones, single issue candidates, board alliances, and rubber stamp boards were bothersome and yet not surprising. The

interviews confirmed the existence of these types of feelings and behaviors within the various boards.

To the trustees the public trust appeared to be a big part of their life. The examples of making difficult decisions really seemed to affect some trustees more than others. Trustees who knew they had made some people in their community mad avoided going to the local coffee shop or church so no one could harangue them about the decisions they had made.

Most trustees said transparency and openness was important to them. A few said they wanted their monthly board meetings to be: “open, honest, see through, transparent, ask any question you want, if you have something to say or an opinion you think might add to the conversation, please by all means get up and speak.” Other trustees were definitely not in favor of allowing non board members the opportunity to voice their opinions in the meeting except during the allotted public statement timeframe. Those who said they were not in favor of allowing non board members to voice their opinions disagreed in order to have an orderly and timely meeting; this was not about the lack of transparency.

One chair made arrangements to have the board meetings videotaped and made available to the public afterward; this was an honest attempt at transparency. Another trustee shared the decision to discontinue closed sessions at his/her monthly board meetings. This appeared to be a really bold yet daunting attempt at transparency. It would be difficult and awkward to discuss sensitive personnel and union contract information in an open session. Transparency was important to those board members who said they did not want the community to think they were hiding anything.

There seemed to be a sincere attempt at transparency. An example was when there was discussion about tuition increases. In addition to open board meetings, board workshops, community workshops, and student budget and tuition workshops the trustees demonstrated that they used many ways to be open and transparent about their financial discussions. Chairs further expressed their attempts to share information about their college's financial statement and how property taxes and grants impacted the institution with the college stakeholders.

While one trustee seemed to avoid the conflict of interest question, the majority of the trustees seemed to have a good understanding of their responsibility related to a conflict of interest. Trustees expressed again and again that they recused themselves when potential conflicts were being decided. They appeared to be aware that they should not be a part of the process and should not vote and should be careful not to influence a decision if there was a potential conflict. With that said, there appeared to be times when trustees may have been blind to conflict of interest situations. One trustee gave a hypothetical example describing how a trustee could follow the policy exactly as written, seeing no conflict, thus allowing them the opportunity to vote on a situation when other people might interpret the policy differently and perceive there to be a conflict of interest.

Working together. Some trustees' decisions were made solely with fiscal responsibility in mind and did not consider the impact on students, where others considered impact on students first. This is an example of where a team approach to consensus became necessary. Some chairs described a technique of convincing as more productive than coercion. They talked about listening to each other; one specifically stated that everyone had a voice and they needed to hear all voices.

The trustees showed an interest in allowing their community members to have a voice in the college by providing opportunities for the community to participate in various committees. Representative community members were asked to participate in the presidential search, allowing them a voice in this important task. Trustees also indicated that community members have the opportunity to participate on advisory committees as well; faculty work with business and industry members to encourage participation. Some colleges mentioned a facilities planning committee that allowed community participation.

Good fiscal management with good oversight is generally important, especially when you are funded by the public. Most trustees explained about having a finance committee for the board. Some trustees said the committee structure was partly in response to the changes in financial reporting, including Sarbanes Oxley. Most of the trustees had an understanding of the financial needs of the college and indicated they make every attempt to hire qualified people with the right credentials. One trustee expressed that his/her intention was to be very ethical and to set a high, solid standard so that trustee behavior was beyond question to community members. In all instances fiduciary responsibility was very important to the trustees and they wanted the public to be aware that they take this responsibility seriously.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. While some trustees appear extremely prepared for the responsibility of public interest and public trust that is bestowed on them upon election, others did not appear prepared. An argument can be made that the board should be more proactive in understanding higher education in general. Fiscal responsibility was an important topic discussed in each interview. Workshops or training for budgets were mentioned by the majority of trustees. In addition to finances, trustees

indicated they need to know as much as possible about the performance of the college, building projects, and academic performance. Trustees said they wanted understand if their students were doing well. They were interested in knowing when students transition to the next level, either for a job or another four-year institution, if they were doing well. The findings indicated that the trustees took the initiative to prepare themselves to be aware of student success. Some trustees felt they were elected to ask student success questions of the college staff and were ultimately responsible to the community and to the students, not to the staff and not to the president.

Research Question 4

How prepared, and in what way, do Illinois community college trustees feel they are able to address the legitimate and relevant interests of the institution's various constituencies?

Stewardship. The trustees' perceptions were that they represented the various constituencies, however the interpretation gets clouded when the words legitimate and relevant are brought into the picture. One trustee talked freely about the unfairness of the boards that form alliances within a board and who then rubber stamp each other's votes regardless of how the outcomes affect the constituents. His/her goal was for the betterment of the college and to make decisions based upon his/her experience, knowledge, and understanding and not to rubberstamp someone else's vote. This demonstrated a need for trustees to understand how to represent the constituents appropriately and not just go along with the rest of the trustees for the sake of a short meeting with all unanimous votes, as some trustees alluded to. This can be very difficult

when a trustee really does not know the needs of the constituents. Unless people come to trustees with concerns, it is hard for trustees to address the concerns.

One trustee discussed his experience of being told by the president of the college that staff should not be talking to trustees and trustees should not be talking to staff. When the trustee questioned the president of that college, the answer was if you talk to staff you only get their side of the story. Interestingly, the trustee divulged that if trustees only listen to the president they only get the president's side of the story. If the board is making decisions for the betterment of the college as an institution, the students who study there, the employees who work there, and the district residents who live in the community, trustees should know what is going on in that environment. It was clear that some colleges had procedures for the dialog between impacted parties and other colleges did not.

Trustee responsibility. It was found that in all the colleges, trustees hired the president to do the day to day running of the institution and most trustees indicated they stayed away as long as operations were in compliance, legal, and ethical. Trustees indicated that if they saw or heard from employees about questionable practices or actions, then the board was responsible and needed to step in. This demonstrated that the trustees acknowledge a fiduciary responsibility. The trustees that were interviewed said they allowed the president to run the college; they all admitted they had other trustees who did not leave that to the presidents. When the trustees encroached on the president's responsibility the examples provided by the interviewees sounded like their involvement was often initiated because that trustee was trying to represent college constituencies.

Trustees seemed in agreement that all communications of board decisions that affect the constituents should be shared with the constituents. Each of the trustees felt the timely dissemination of information to the newspapers and the media was a priority on items such as budget approval, tuition increases, tax incentive approvals, and hiring decisions. Trustees felt strongly that the information should be shared internally and externally to all constituents as soon as possible and they all seemed to have a plan to ensure that it happens.

Working together. I found it interesting that the board did not appear to consider that a trustee, who was known and described by others to “rock the boat,” might possibly be representing a group of constituents who think differently than the board majority. It is possible that this was considered but if it was, the trustees did not mention this to me. There were a few examples of retired faculty members who were successfully elected to the board. The retired faculty trustees were described as difficult, ones who rock the boat, and as someone who lacked the ability to see the bigger picture. One trustee shared that until a retired faculty got on his/her board, the board was really in sync with each other. One trustee shared they he/she was totally frustrated in the board’s inability to deal with a difficult trustee and said he/she irritated the trustees tremendously. One of the trustees concluded his story saying that they [the board] deal with it and said “we’ve got six out of seven votes and we don’t waste a lot of time worrying.” These examples did not indicate that trustees were able to address the legitimate concerns of constituencies, instead it appeared they did not try to find a way to understand or to even acknowledge this person as representing a constituency.

Trustees seemed to be cognizant of the need to ask questions or obtain information before they made decisions; they wanted to determine if the outcome would be a good thing for students and whoever else might be affected. Participants seemed to agree that decisions should be data driven and not just subjective. Decisions they thought should be based upon good, reliable data that trustees get from administration and outside experts. It was also apparent that healthy debate over contentious issues was not a bad thing. Healthy debate implied discussion about varying opinions from trustees who represent various constituents.

When trustees made a decision, it should be encouraged by all board members that the collective will, the majority of the board, made a decision; all board members should support that decision in public. While the trustees who were interviewed said this is the way it should happen, they indicated that this was not always what happened. It was stated that a trustee, when not in the majority, did not always support the decision and instead voiced his/her opinion as an individual when in public.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. The experience shared by a trustee who described “growing up” in a board where there was no other voice but the chair, really demonstrated the power of the chairman. This trustee displayed utter frustration explaining how he/she would sit there in the board room and think that what was happening was not right. This trustee questioned how he/she was supposed to know what was going on when the trustees were not told everything and not given all the necessary information. Other trustees’ responses throughout the interviews indicated trustees would know what was right and wrong if they prepared themselves by asking questions and participating in orientation and training. It was found, however, the trustees had to

vote with less than complete information because in specific situations details were not shared.

Research Question 5

How do Illinois community college trustees feel that their past experience, career pathways, and professional development have prepared them for their role as an elected trustee?

Stewardship. The individuals all brought different skills and experience, which they felt helped them in their role of an elected college trustee. Additionally, their sense of stewardship was important and there were several who demonstrated commitment to serving the needs of others. Some chose to serve because they felt it was the right thing to do and a way to serve their community. For some trustees it was time to give back to the institution that they or a loved one attended, for some it was a place of employment for many years. It was obvious that all these relationships brought with them a level of knowledge and dedication to the institution. The trustees who had a previous relationship with the college had a special sense of ownership and an investment that was different from the others.

Trustee expectations are high. Those who responded were proud to have a reputation of being tough and were adamant that, for the most part, they were not rubber stamp boards. As was mentioned by one of the trustees during the interview, the trustees in Illinois have a reputation of being hard on presidents and making a college presidency difficult compared to other states. This was the first time anything like this was mentioned and since that initial reference it was confirmed in other conversations with presidents inside and outside of the state. It was explained that this was partly because

trustees were elected and not appointed and partly because they were more active than trustees in other states. One long serving trustee said the perceived reputation was because they were better trained, and experienced, and were not going to just let the college president tell the board whatever he/she wants to tell them.

Trustee responsibility. The dedication the trustees had to their colleges and communities is commendable. The trustees described the hours that they spent monthly on board work; for some trustees it was a few hours at the meeting and a few hours in preparation for the meeting. Trustees took their roles seriously to spend time preparing for and participating in the necessary meetings. The trustee should make the time to prepare adequately and to be informed enough to make appropriate decisions or take appropriate actions. The extra time commitment was something that some trustees just incorporate into their day to day lifestyle. All trustees should be available to regularly attend board meetings and they should plan and come prepared. It was understood that not every trustee can drive hundreds miles to a professional development meeting, but all should participate in relevant professional development.

It was interesting to learn that some trustees cited teaching experience as one of the various skills that helped them in their role as a trustee. Trustees said they were not recruited to run for trusteeship because of having experience as an adjunct instructor, it just happened that way. While it may be different than recruitment to run, being at the college teaching did likely have some influence on their decision to run. One of the trustees said this experience from teaching on the campus provided a better understanding of the college operations and it is understandable how their first-hand experience gave them some additional understanding that would be beneficial as a trustee. Though it

would be a conflict of interest to teach while serving as an elected trustee, one trustee had several friends who were part-time faculty and the trustee made guest appearances for them. Because there was no compensation, just the opportunity to participate, this confirms they did it because of the love of what they were doing and not so much for the money.

Working together. After long reflection about how the boards worked together and got along, it was clear that respect was key to the relationship. One of the largest tasks was getting all trustees to respect the opinions of others and to make decisions that affected many constituents. It takes skill for a trustee to lead his/her board; the leadership of the board must have some ability or experience to infuse collegiality and respect among the board members. It was said that trustees needed to have respect for the fact that some people are going to have different opinions. These skills and abilities do not necessarily require experience and longevity as a trustee; they were said to be more about human civility and respect. Longevity was said to have helped the trustees to understand their role and even to learn about each other, however human civility and respect were not linked to longevity.

Preparation to serve as a trustee. The trustees interviewed mentioned that their experience, in most of the cases, was an asset that they brought to the board. Often these skills were specific to their career such as financial experience, business, or human resources; at other timesm it was basic leadership and communication skills. The communication and leadership skills were not named per se, but they were present in the examples trustees gave as a way to build consensus among the trustees when conflict was

present. It is my opinion that preparation for the trustee role is ongoing and therefore requires continual contextualized learning.

Presidents' Review

Because the research was comprised of the perceptions of community college elected trustees in the state of Illinois, a small peer review group of presidents was added to provide a varying dimension and expand beyond the opinions of elected trustees. There were no presidents interviewed from a college where the trustee was interviewed.

How, and in what ways, are the presidents in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustees' perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official?

Stewardship

The presidents had opinions that differed from the trustees' about the reasons trustees gave for why they ran for office. This difference might have been because the presidents have experiences with different trustees and at colleges in different parts of the state. Certainly there are trustees who want to serve and support their colleges and be a part of something that is very special for the community. There will undoubtedly continue to be trustees who chose to run for office with a personal agenda that a president may or may not be in favor of. The constituents and voters make the determination on who will serve when they vote in the election.

The interviews supported the assumption that those trustees who before being elected were employees or former students carried a sentimental loyalty to the college. The research also indicated some trustees ran for office as a political stepping stone, an

attainment of power and ego boost. This was confirmed with examples given by the presidents

Information also supported there were instances where trustees were “put on the board” because they represented unions, and presidents felt those trustees were “watchdogs” for union contacts. They also felt that serving as a trustee was a way to look for jobs. During the interviews with the trustees there were no discussions of friends and family members of trustees getting jobs at the college, nor was there discussion of any other type of patronage.

Trustee Responsibility

The researcher agreed with the presidents’ opinions that the president/trustee relationship is very complex and extraordinarily important to the success of any college. The success is based on the skills of the president but just as importantly on the trustees’ trust in that individual. The board must hire a president whom they trust. Trustees should allow the president to employ the other administrators to run the college and make recommendations to the board.

Overall the presidents’ and trustees’ perspective of the trustee responsibility did not differ, and the researcher agreed that the board’s primary role was to approve and enforce policy and to approve the finances of the college. While the trustees interviewed had an understanding of this role, they acknowledged they had trustees on their board who did not behave as if they understand this role. The latter trustees were described as inclined to interfere in the daily operations of the college.

Trustees expressed a concern that laypersons are elected to the board and then expected to have the knowledge and skills to make decisions for a profession in which

they have no appropriate background and training. While the recommended “voluntary framework for accountability” is a good start, there must be an understanding of what is expected of them to do with the framework. The framework the trustees described would help them have a better understanding, but they should still trust the college administration. When discussing the framework, one of the presidents said, “The college administrators have spent years in educational programs and have years of career experience that prepare them to make recommendations to the board.”

One of the presidents discussed boards that operate blatantly below the ethical standards. The same president felt that politics can be dangerous within the board and he was surprised none of the trustees admitted political alliances in their interviews. This was not surprising. There may very well be some political affiliations; however, the questions asked in the interviews did not lead the discussion in that direction.

This research has helped recognize the importance for the president to understand the way his/her board operates and to learn the idiosyncrasies and needs of each board member. It is the president’s role to continually uphold the college and board of trustees in a positive image. This researcher learned that in one situation a presidents was “expected to provide services as well as protect the board and keep them out of the news, unless he was giving them credit for something positive.” For sensitivity reasons, the details of services that president was expected to provide were not divulged. It is important that the president not only understands what the trustees expect from the relationship, but that a president learn to maneuver through difficult times when they might feel compromised.

Trustees felt that to learn everything they need to know it might take as long as a full six year term. The presidents thought it should take a new trustee only six months to a year to contribute fully in most areas of the college. The disparity in responses might be because there was a difference between knowing everything and knowing what type of questions to ask to understand what you are voting on. The trustee should take sufficient time to learn to trust a president's recommendations. Some of the presidents agreed with the trustee who said that in the beginning of an elected term, a trustee should keep his/her mouth shut, listen for a while, read all the materials, ask a few questions, and then finally, when more acclimated, get involved.

With the knowledge gained from this research, it was clear how longevity can be an asset to trusteeship. The trustees' perspective was that longevity was linked to a more successful trustee. Presidents did not agree that longevity makes a trustee better. They felt that success was very dependent on the individual and related to that person's level of interest and capabilities. Presidents felt in some cases that board members who stay for more than two terms seem to lose the energy for the work of a trustee. However, the researcher's observation found this was not true in the interviews conducted for this study. It would make sense that those who lost energy may not be the same population who would volunteer to be interviewed for this research.

There were plans from a few isolated trustees to investigate an opportunity for expanded public comment at board meetings. One trustee hoped to allow the opportunity for open discussion at times outside of the designated public comment time and the opportunity to discuss items not included in the agenda. The presidents felt that the monthly board meeting had a specific time allocated on the agenda for public comment

and that there should not be open conversations. It could be understandable why the trustee wanted to provide a venue for this to happen, but perhaps there would be a more appropriate opportunity to allow public comment in a town hall meeting.

Presidents indicated it is not in the best interest of the college community to discontinue closed sessions during board meetings. While this researcher understood it was an attempt to demonstrate transparency, agreement was with the presidents. President four indicated there are times such as union negotiations when privacy is of upmost importance.

This researcher was surprised to learn of the volume of examples the presidents gave of trustees who have family members who are employees at some of the colleges. It was not really surprising that nepotism did not come up very often in the interviews because there was not a question directly related to nepotism. The presidents indicated that trustees should know if there is a policy against nepotism, and they should recuse themselves during voting when they have a relationship with the person they are hiring. There were a few times in the interviews where this did come up but none gave firsthand examples. This researcher agreed with the presidents that all colleges should have a clear policy on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable regarding nepotism.

Working Together

There was a common indication that when there was a board meeting or other important event in the near future, the amount of communication between the president and chair increased. Everyone agreed that there should be “no surprises” between parties, no surprises for the presidents and no surprises for the trustees.

In all cases the presidents said there is, or should be, a general courtesy that trustees should notify the president if they were coming on campus and communicating with staff. President two said “this should be vice versa; the staff also should inform the president when communicating with trustees.” This was said by president one to be ignored in many cases because staff would fear retribution from the trustee if they report every time they are contacted by a trustee. It might be difficult for a president when there are political and personal relationships between staff member and trustees. Though these relationships may be handled in a professional manner, it might have impact on decisions and potentially the overall morale and climate of the organization.

Some trustees felt a strong concern about the timeframe in which trustees received their board packet, indicating the late delivery was purposeful. There are many factors that can contribute to the late delivery and the presidents did not agree that this late delivery was purposeful. President four explained that “the trustees can insist on timely delivery of packets and the president is not positioned to refuse to comply with this request.” The president said they would likely do all he/she can to ensure the packet is delivered in a timely manner.

Humans often have a difficult time seeing things when they are too close to the situation and this may be the case when the trustees interviewed did not indicate that they were micromanagers. This researcher had no way to know if this is true or not true. The trustees who chose to be interviewed seemed to have a good understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and the perceived boundaries within those responsibilities. These trustees did specify there was often a trustee on their board who they had to work with to prevent him/her from continually micromanaging something at the college. The presidents felt,

based on both experience and research, that there is always an issue of trustees stepping into daily operational practices at the college. The situation changes because it is not always the same trustee. It is usually issue or program based. Rogue trustees are generally disruptive with everything, and ironically they do not seem to realize they are misbehaving, said president three. A trustee has authority only when the board convenes and wandering around a campus using that authority is not acceptable. This is a difficult issue at colleges because of fears of retribution should an employee express concern.

Understandably, president four felt it was wrong for a trustee to think it was acceptable for him/her to step over or around a president to make something happen at the college, even if the trustee thought it was a good thing to do for the employees at the institution. It would be a winning situation if the trustee and president would work together. The research demonstrated that successful cooperative ventures were used for the betterment of the college.

Preparation to Serve as a Trustee

Regardless of their background and career preparation, any person elected to the board of trustees will have authority to vote on college business. Trustees generally participate in an internal orientation and many participate in the ICCTA professional development opportunities. Hopefully, these experiences will help prepare the trustee to make appropriate educated decisions.

Though professional development is offered, some trustees are not interested or do not have a schedule to accommodate such programs, trustee association meetings, and/or workshops that are made available to trustees. President one said “If trustees are

not really interested in serving in the best interests of the institution, and don't attend conferences, their lack of participation insulates that institution from the rest of the state.”

When asked about trustee preparation and professional training, one president gave an example of having two trustees who do not have college experience at all, yet he described one of them as the best trustee he has on his board. Lack of a college education does not necessarily preclude a trustee's effectiveness; it might mean he/she is concerned and dedicated. In addition to those characteristics, a good trustee is one that does his/her homework by studying the agenda, researches as needed, and comes prepared to every meeting.

Presidents' Closing Comments

A few presidents offered closing comments and recommendations. President one said, “Nobody is free of sin.” The presidents felt that trustees should realize that while consensus is good, it is not always necessary and certainly not required. President two said, “Life can be wonderful as a college president when you have a good board; however, there is no worse job than that of a college president who has a board that is volatile and does not understand its role when initiating policy. With a difficult board, life becomes difficult for the college in many ways.”

The Findings in the Context of the Literature

In this section, the themes have been compared to the literature in Chapter Two. The section is organized by the four overarching themes, and in some cases by the sub-themes within.

Stewardship

All trustees interviewed showed an enormous amount of stewardship, dedication and commitment towards governing their institution. Darla J. Twale and Joanne E. Burley (2007) contended, “As public institutions of higher education grow larger and more complex, governing them internally and externally becomes ever more cumbersome” (Twale & Burley, 2007, p. 1). Integrity is also a very important attribute for new community college presidents and trustees. Vaughan (1986), found integrity was the topped ranked personal attribute for presidents to possess. They should uphold their institution’s code of ethics by example. Presidents and trustees must be accountable for what is happening in the college and all trustees interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of the need for integrity.

The stakeholders of a community college should be represented by the trustees. The examples given by trustees indicated that although the board had seven elected trustees who represent their constituents, none of the trustees are exactly the same; they have different personalities and are representing different parts of the community. These differing variables were similar to what was described in the literature about stakeholder theory. Stakeholder theory assists an organizational entity to function better at hosting diverse participants to accomplish the many, and at times incongruent, purposes of that entity (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). What was observed was that trustees have their interest groups, which might be from a past relationship, such as the trustee who described a fellow trustee who was a farmer and admittedly had a love affair with the agriculture program at their college. The interest might be that of a trustee who is a

retired faculty member who has a special “spot” in his heart for the faculty of that the institution.

Social conflict theory explores the associations and identification of stakeholders and the interconnections in the organization. Problems in an organization, when using this theory, can be solved only with the support of all members (stakeholders) in the combined network of the organizations (Freeman & McVea, 2001). The findings indicated that all the stakeholders are seldom involved with solving problems in the community college. If the stakeholders were all involved in solving problems at the colleges, it did not appear in the trustee or president responses.

The findings of Stewardship were consistent with Greenleaf’s (1977) literature about servant leadership. In servant leadership, the leader has naturally chosen to serve first; then he/she makes a conscious effort to lead. Trustee Jack Harrison had not ever attended a college board meeting and did not know much about the college, but thought serving was the right thing for him to do; after serving a short time he have found an affinity for the college and eventually became the chairman of the board of trustees.

Patterson (2003) presented the theory of servant leadership as a logical extension of transformational leadership theory. She defined and developed the component constructs underlying the practice of servant leadership, defining servant leaders as “those leaders who lead an organization by focusing on their followers, such that the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral” (Patterson, 2003, p. 5). She defined followers as “those who are subordinate to a given leader within a given organization” (Patterson, 2003, p. 7) and suggests the terms subordinates and employees can be used interchangeably.

Trustee Responsibility

According to the Association of Community College Trustees, trustees are officials entrusted by the public to oversee the resources and the property of community colleges; the board of trustees is seen as the link between the institution and the community they serve. Trustees make decisions that affect every aspect of an institution.

The federal government has issued guidelines in areas such as financial aid, grants and specialized funding, safety, labor and employment, and student/employee rights. The sheer volume of rules, regulations, and accountability issues points to the seriousness of the trustees' role. Mortorana (1963) has stated that:

As stewards acting for larger interests in the society, the trustees themselves must maintain an awareness and understanding of the changing character, not only to the institutions which they direct, but also of higher education as a totality. (p. 13)

When William Lone talked about how long it took to learn about the college finances, others talked about the difficulty of learning enough to feel comfortable understanding the funding guidelines. "It's just a big job, that's the whole thing, it's there's a lot to learn," said Lone.

In addition, the "great philosophical, ideological and technical shifts" (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges [AGBUC], 1998) in American higher education, along with the demands of economic development and accountability, indicate the importance of having well-informed trustees as members of institutional governing boards. Daniel Haynes was one of the trustees who felt his board was pretty literate.

I think our board's fairly savvy on it, but it does take a couple years to understand how the state pays you. The federal government is not a critical element, other than Pell Grants; the other difficulty is the fund accounting.

While each trustee had a different perspective on their board level of understanding they all talked about having budget workshops on campus.

Avolio (2004) finds “Leaders exhibit ethical behaviors when they are doing what is morally right, just, and good, and when they help to elevate followers’ moral awareness and moral self-actualization. Indeed, ethical leadership encompasses more than the fostering of ethical behaviors” (p. 2). In alignment with the literature, Mr.

Nathaniel said:

You hire the president to do the day to day running of the institution, and trustees should stay away as long as things are in compliance, and as long as things are legal. If you see or hear from other employees things are not being done in a legal, ethical way then I think as a trustee you are responsible, there’s a fiduciary responsibility to speak up. I have learned in my 22 years that’s when you have to be involved, because otherwise, you’re going to lose the institution from the standpoint of morale. At that point it becomes the need to do what is in the best interest of the institution.

Donahue (2003) stated that the interactions between the board and the president are critical to the image of the institution. Levin (1991) reported that the board/president relationship is important and can have an effect on several areas. These areas include the environment external to the college, which includes the community and government officials; the internal constituencies of administration, faculty, and staff; the consistency of the message of the college; the process of governance; and the portrayal of the values of the college.

Working Together

There was very strong agreement found indicating that communication between the president and the chair is important for the success of the institution. The board chair and the president are joined in a partnership and they “must learn to dance together”

(Chait et al., 1996, p. 123). The trustees all had regular communication with the president and while some was more frequent and the modes varied, all trustees indicated it was imperative that they be informed with all that was going on at the college. As a board member, the worst thing is a surprise; surprises are not acceptable and if that did happen, the trustees indicated that somewhere communication has broken down. The presidents also mentioned that there should be no surprises and noted the importance of keeping everyone informed.

Miscommunication between the board and its president ultimately leads to conflict and other negative tensions. The board chair sets the tone for board governance and acts as the “liaison” between the board and the president (Orlikoff, 2000). The findings of my research are consistent with this understanding of the role of “liaison” in that in most cases there is a process for communication between the rest of the board and the president. Trustees generally funnel questions and comments through the chair, which confirms that the chairperson plays an important role in the professional relationship between the two entities. The chair ensures that there is a positive communication flow between all parties.

During communication with the board and the president, the chair gains insight into the “likely reaction of the trustees” and other actions contemplated by the president (Ingram, 1993, p. 338). The comments and phrases about the role of the chair that were heard in the interviews supported the literature. Their perception was that it was meaningful for the board chair to have good insight into the trustees’ reactions, which then can enhance a positive working relationship.

This study supported research that indicated that a chair that is unable to form the board into a cohesive unit will not be able to keep it attentive to the important governance functions of the institution. The key consideration that surfaced in several interviews was that everybody on the board deserves an opportunity to speak his/her mind. While it is not ideal, there have been situations where a board feels that since they have the majority vote, they were not concerned about the trustee who disagreed. This kind of an attitude is not effective long-term, and it does not serve the college to have that sort of approach to the non-majority trustee and ultimately the college community. Without effective leadership from the chair, a board can easily become divided and distracted from the business of governance by seemingly insignificant issues (Donahue, 2003)

The term “shared governance” began to emerge in the literature following the American Association of University Professors’ pivotal “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” adopted in 1966 (AAUP, 1966). “Shared governance is both an ideal and an operational reality that pertains to ways in which policy decisions are made in colleges and universities” (Hines, 2000, p. 142). Several trustees who were interviewed mentioned shared governance. Joseph Nathaniel said, “In order to have shared governance, it should germinate within various departments within an administrative framework.” While the institution should consider suggestions from within, his understanding was that the president will remain as the final decision. Nathaniel further explained “the framework would then allow the board to look at information that’s been presented to the president and act on those recommendations.”

The trustees interviewed demonstrated an understanding of the importance of the decisions that they make. “Critical thinking is thinking that proceeds on the basis of

Careful evaluation of premises and evidence and comes to conclusions as objectively as possible through the consideration of all pertinent factors and the use of valid procedures from logic” (Carter, 1973). The findings were consistent with the importance given to critical thinking in decision making in Carter’s literature. Trustees emphasized repeatedly the need to evaluate data. They asked for evidence when making decisions that affected the stakeholders.

The participants exercised decision making skills in a variety of ways. In most cases the opportunity allowed for everyone to have a voice and though there were not always unanimous decisions, the decision making that was explained was a process of reaching agreement in situations through discussion, debate, and analysis.

It was demonstrated that critical decisions may require the input of other members of the organization in order for the decisions to be effective. Trustees often alluded to requesting information from vice presidents or faculty members so that they could be armed with the appropriate information to make decisions on behalf of the college. This action aligns with Berry’s literature (2006) in that he believes that “Decision-making, team processes, decision outcomes, and communication effectiveness are influenced by various organizational structures, culture, information technology systems, and leadership styles” (p. 345).

Collaboration was a common term mentioned in the literature and was also common in my research. I think there was a real effort by the people I interviewed to work together with their colleagues for the betterment of the institutions. Collaboration was the most frequently used strategy for dealing with both faculty and trustee conflict (Dee et al., 2004). Collaboration was used to describe the work of the trustees; they

worked collaboratively with other board members, shared ideas and thoughts, and shared opinions and concerns. Vernon Edward said, “Trustees need to be outspoken and be assertive but not necessarily aggressive; they should stand for their opinions.”

Julius et al. (2007) encourage opposing groups and finding mutual interests; conflict can arise from differences of facts or differences over processes. William Lone was not the only trustee who talked about mutual respect. Mr. Lone said they had mutual respect, trust, and good communication between their trustees and the trustees at other colleges. There were several references throughout the research to the comfortable nature of their communication style with statements such as, “I mean that trustees know to give me an honest read and not sugar coat it or say oh yeah that’s a great idea ‘cause you’re board chair.”” This reflects the fact that some of these trustees feel they have a good relationship among their board members and that their board members feel free to actually say the things they are thinking and raise legitimate concerns without any fear of retribution. This was not the case in all the research. I would suggest that Mr. Lone’s board might be different than some boards for a variety of reasons, but partly because they have been around together for a long time.

My observation was that the boards that have not been serving together for a significant length of time had a more difficult time resolving conflict compared to those who have served together for several years. Eddy (2005) summarized that when conflict is present, the effectiveness of the chair can be compromised and the board can easily become separated and diverted from the regular college business. In order to handle the regular college business Mary Waggoner, who served for years, depended heavily on

ICCTA to assist her with the newly elected trustees. She talked about having a facilitator at their recent retreat.

We had him there and it was right at the time the new board members were coming on and they asked all kinds of questions which normally you would think are kind of silly questions, but they're new board members; they don't know any better and they have to learn like everybody else does, but in the meantime the college can't quit doing business. I think the biggest thing is for boards, especially new boards, are to accept that when a decision is made or we have a board policy; that is it!

She concluded with a display of frustration.

Good communication between all stakeholders continued to surface throughout my research and validated numerous pieces of literature about conflict. Conflict should be handled fairly well because "it is through communication that conflict occurs and it is through communication that it should be resolved" (Poots, 2004, p. 300). There have been personal issues between members of Cora Hamilton's board and she agreed that you have to speak freely if you have a problem with someone or something. She went so far as to call each trustee and request that they speak honestly and openly so that they could hear from each member. The need for effective communication within the community college board of trustees setting is vital for all stakeholders within the organization, especially because "communication is at the heart of conflict" (Algert & Stanley, 2007, p. 53).

The difficulty Bertie Carr described was a very divided, hateful, spiteful, nasty, and argumentative board. This did not demonstrate the use of Algert and Stanley's effective communication. It did however demonstrate that trustees must be dedicated to the college in order to exist in this type of environment. This also indicated that at times a

trustee might intend to vote against other people and not for the good of the institution or for its stakeholders.

Ms. Carr was not the only trustee who described a divided board. William Lone described a retired faculty trustee who came on the board as a single issue candidate and caused conflict until she finally came around and began to respect the rest of the board and the decisions became easier. This indicated that either she came around as Mr. Lone described, or perhaps she gave up trying to make her point.

While there was conflict mentioned in some way by all participants, there were demonstrated efforts to make the environment better. Comments were woven throughout participant responses indicating everyone worked together for the best of the college, that they always kept the student in mind, and that members spoke freely when there were personal issues between members to get it out in the open. Cora Hamilton said when her board had difficult times they would go out for dinner. This offered a totally different setting and allowed people to open up and learn about each other on a more personal level. Ms. Hamilton confided that when they were in that board room, there was a little bit of conflict.

Preparation to Serve as a Trustee

Professional development is a key component to the accretion of a strong leader (Davis, 1997). Professional development is important to board members who see themselves as leaders of learning organizations. Vernon Edward agreed and felt there is the need for constant training; training needs to be more than a just one time occurrence. Mr. Edward continued, “I’ve always said, you know, this type of area needs to be consistent and contextual.” Joseph Nathaniel said, “I am high on trustee education.”

These two participants were multiple term trustees and what I noticed was that those with more longevity seemed to place more importance on trustee professional development. Researchers Janosik and Dika (2000) surveyed higher education executive officers to identify trends in the selection and training processes for public higher education trustees. Their fundamental assumption was that the board quality of effectiveness is dependent on the constitution of the board, which is dependent on the processes of identification, training, and orientation of trustees.

When empowered to lead an organization, should a trustee fail or weaken, the system should allow for someone to assist or guide them (Greenleaf, 1977). The trustees used resources available to them through the professional organizations such as the ICCTA and AACC to strengthen their knowledge.

All trustees who participated in the study gave examples of orientation and professional development that were made available to them and their trustees. However not all trustees were able to participate in the offerings and one of the participants admitted she did not participate. Bertie Carr said, “I didn’t do the specific new trustee orientation because our board at the time when I was coming in it was like—sink or swim.” She further described what she defined as a “larger and more important” distraction she needed to spend her time on when she was first elected.

The responses I found differed from Weisman and Vaughan (2001), who noted that nearly one in every four colleges does not provide any local professional development programs for trustees. It is possible that the trustees who participated in this study were interested in the topic of trustee preparation and that would help explain why my sample of nine were different than the larger population in the Weisman and Vaughan

study. It is also possible this difference could be that my study was restricted to the elected trustees and not inclusive of appointed trustees.

In the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) *Guide to Electing and Appointing Community College Trustees*, it is noted “Throughout their tenure as board members, conscientious trustees will continue to acquire the skills necessary for effective trusteeship. Effective boards encourage and support the professional development of trustees.” My research showed that many trustees turn to associations such as ACCT for assistance in preparation for their role and for professional development. The qualities of each trustee, according to the literature, have a direct influence on the effectiveness of the board and the institution and by research showed that there was a connection between longevity a trustee served, their understanding of the college operation, and their ability to maintain consensus among the board of trustees. ACCT is charged to continue fulfilling its mission: developing knowledgeable trustees who better understand their role and who can better govern their institutions. (ACCT, 2001)

Most trustees feel a sense of loyalty toward those who have given them the opportunity to serve (Davis, 1997). Cora Hamilton talked about recent finance training for her board and further expressed agreement in wanting to better serve her constituents in the following statement:

We need to know as much as possible about the finances, about the performance of the college, about how the money's spent, building projects, are we performing academically, are our students when they move on to the next level, whether it's a job or another four-year institution, how are they doing? We need to ask those kinds of questions, but we have to do it from a focus that we were elected to ask those questions, and we're ultimately responsible to the community and to the students, not to the staff and not to the president.

In the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT, 2001) *Guide to Electing and Appointing Community College Trustees* it is noted “Throughout their tenure as board members, conscientious trustees will continue to acquire the skills necessary for effective trusteeship. Effective boards encourage and support the professional development of trustees.” The Association believes that trustees are responsible to their communities for the colleges whose assets and operations they hold in trust.

With the recurrent references to Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA), there was a notable reliance, and in some institutions a dependency, on assistance provided by the organization. There were examples of workshops and assistance from the ICCTA with both president and board evaluations. There were clear relationships of trust with the facilitators from ICCTA. Cora Hamilton gave this example: “We had a special meeting last week, and we have retreats annually unless something comes up. We try to use the same facilitator; she comes in and knows our group; she has facilitated meetings for us before.”

Woven throughout the data was the use of professional facilitators for presidential searches, assistance with board conflict, and board professional development training. Mary Waggoner described a dependency on ICCTA to resolve conflict on her board. When she was describing to me an issue with another trustee who was trying to get her to follow the corporate board rules she said, “We’re not a big board, we’re considered a small board, so I got that on our agenda in the retreat and I’ll let [name] handle that.”

In a separate discussion about a retreat with the same valued facilitator, Mary Waggoner said, “It’s very hard for her [a trustee on her board] because she is not used to working as a team, so that’s what is gonna get settled at a retreat. We’ve got [name] coming to facilitate our retreat.” In another comment about the upcoming retreat she said, “I don’t like being blindsided. I was last month and that really ticked me off and that’s going to get settled at the retreat.” While all participants mentioned the ICCTA organization, this board chair was clearly frustrated with her newer trustees, and had a strong dependency on the outside organization to help with board relationships and responsibilities.

The findings aligned well with Chait’s (1993) literature and the participants agreed that proper training helps to create a more informed, confident, and more successful board. In addition to a briefing on the board’s own procedures, which generally happens in an orientation, Chait (1993) found that colleges benefit from effective boards and those effective boards are populated by trustees with competency in six key areas. Chait (1993) noted

A good professional development program, therefore, nurtures these traits in each trustee: (1) appreciation of the college’s context of history and current setting, (2) curiosity and appetite for trustee education, (3) familiarity with effective group process techniques, (4) inclination to engage in step by step, logical analysis, (5) interest in communicating with key college constituencies, and (6) appreciation of strategic planning. Each trait deserves some comment, since each contributes directly to the effectiveness of the board.

While the trustees participated in professional development, few of them gave examples that specifically addressed ways to nurture the traits in the six key areas. The general curiosity and appetite for trustee education, however, was present in most participants.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be beneficial to see a longitudinal case study of elected trustees. This study would include an interview upon election then an interview one year later and then again the next year with an attempt to understand what the trustees have learned through the process. I would recommend this study to include questions with an emphasis on education, training, and professional development. This would allow the study to compare the trustees' level of understanding before and after participation in professional development.

I would recommend a study to address the unique needs of trustee education. Although ICCTA and ACCT do their part, the colleges and communities trustees serve are all different and unique. The way colleges do business and support education in the college communities are all unique. Yet organizations like ACCT appear to put all colleges in the same "box" when it comes to education. Currently I have been told it is a challenge for presidents when trustees think they have to support/recommend programs, projects, or ideas in their local colleges because they heard about it from a trustee somewhere else. Local units of government are very different and have to approach things differently.

Lastly, I would recommend research to compare the success of institutions who have a policy about rotating the board chair seat and those who do not. In this rotation process, when a trustee is not serving at chair they are a committee chair. Trustees become like a cabinet and the trustee meets with the administrator who oversees particular areas, for example, finances, teaching and learning, student development,

marketing, diversity, technology, and human resources. In this model, each trustee has committee meetings and is responsible for that area. The board agenda is set up the same way. According to one of the participants in this study this is a “Baldrige System” structure.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Each college should have a clear policy or process for information gathering. This process would outline the means of communication and outline the definition of acceptable behavior for elected trustees to obtain information from college employees. Additionally it would be a benefit if each college would have a clear nepotism (or anti-nepotism) policy so there are no questions about what is acceptable practice.

The board would benefit if there was a rotation of the board officer positions as opposed to having the same person as chair for multiple years. This would allow all board members who are interested in serving as an officer the opportunity, potentially creating a feeling of greater engagement in their role as a college trustee.

It would benefit everyone involved if there were a requirement, or strong recommendation, for required professional development relevant to community college trustees and relevant to their geographic and demographic location. Topics such as “Ethical Decision Making” and “Conflict of Interest” could be included.

Implications of the Findings for Community College Constituents

College communities would benefit from a multi-cultural leadership program with the purpose of helping develop leaders for non-profit and elected boards and to create more ethnic, racial, gender, and diversity opportunities. This group would be invited to

attend college meetings as a way to acclimate them used to what it would be like to be a trustee and understand what board meetings are like.

The people involved with community colleges need a definition for what was described as a voluntary framework for accountability. Trustees have a need for a framework to guide higher education and that framework would help define what the data is rather than have it be forced on trustees/colleges so they can move beyond questions like: what is student success and is it only granting degrees?"

Research Challenges

I feel that the trustees who volunteered to participate in this study all had an excellent understanding of their role. I think their participation was, in a naive way, an opportunity for them to show that they were good trustees and had a solid understanding of their role as a trustee. It also appeared fairly often in their responses, that they wanted to help get the word out that the "Rogue Trustee" needed to be stopped and perhaps their participation, or that this research, might help to advance that notion. At times, it felt like I was "preaching to the choir" because in most cases, the participants had such a good understanding that this made the research a challenge.

Time and distance were challenges for this educational program and research study. This program began for me nearly nine years ago. The challenge was because work and family priorities caused this to take longer than originally planned and the literature changed and required updates. The distance was also a challenge as my professors and committee members were a thousand miles away, which made face to face communication very limited. The committee members were phenomenal with their

guidance. The words of encouragement from them and from my fellow students helped when the challenges were overwhelming.

Final Thoughts: A Stakeholder's Reflection

I came into this study thinking that lay people were elected into office and were not given the necessary and appropriate tools and training to do the job they were elected to do. After much research and analysis, I feel that some tools are available but perhaps the tools and trainings are not always relevant. It also appears that the importance of trustee education is not emphasized as much as it should be.

When a person decides to run for the office of a community college trustee it appears that many do not realize the magnitude of the commitment they are making for a six year term. It was found that there were some trustees who were unable to participate with the level of commitment that was expected by others who served with them. Stewardship was important and engagement, at the appropriate level, was also very important. I feel that trustees must make strong ethical commitments to their organizations, their constituents, their values, and to the work of leadership. While doing so they must also understand the difference between the role of a trustee and the role of a college administrator.

Educating trustees is very important. There is the need for an internal orientation so trustees have an understanding of how different departments or divisions of a college operate and how they are funded. Organized professional development such as ICCTA and AACC are a true value that not all trustees take advantage of, and in my opinion, they should be required. Many licensed professionals are required to participate in

continuing education, and while trustees are not licensed professionals, they are entrusted to make decisions that affect stakeholders financially, personally, and professionally.

Perhaps it is because they care, but trustees often get involved in the day to day operations of the college. At times this causes problems with staff not knowing who to take direction from, which potentially causes problems for the president. Conceivably this involvement could be because a trustee has a love affair with a program or maybe they feel more knowledgeable about a specific area and simply want to offer their expertise. It is also conceivable, and believable, that the trustee has time on his/her hands and wants to “rattle” a few people with their power and/or get attention for personal, professional, or political gains.

An important quotation from Cora Hamilton stood out for me, “That’s the administration’s responsibility to give us [trustees] all the correct information so we can make accurate decisions and look at things objectively.” This captured to me what the respective roles are and is an opinion I hope is shared by other trustees.

This study has provided a valuable insight into the perceptions of the trustees and presidents who participated. It has certainly broadened my knowledge and understanding of community college leadership. It also has offered me the opportunity to enhance the respect I already had for those in the elected position of a community college trustee and the role of a community college president.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ILLINOIS COMMUNITY

COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTED CHAIR

1. *If hiring a president, have the board and search committee developed a fair and legitimate process that will culminate in the hiring of the right leader at this time in the institution's history? Please elaborate on this process.*
2. *How can the board most effectively achieve racial, ethnic, gender, geographic, vocational, and other forms of diversity?*
3. *How can the board most effectively attract members who have needed skills and talent?*
4. *How can the board systematically consider information about student learning and academic quality?*
5. *How can the board best assess the academic workforce with regard to the balance of full-time tenure, tenure-track, non-tenure-track, part-time, and adjunct faculty?*
6. *How can the board most effectively affirm its commitment to basic principles of academic freedom? How can it best ensure that such principles guide the institution's relationships with faculty and students?*
7. *What should be the board's role when educational program reduction or elimination is indicated for fiscal or other reasons? What evidence should the board acquire before approving a proposal to add or terminate a program?*
8. *How can the board best achieve "financial literacy" while recognizing that not all board members need to be "financially literate"?*
9. *How can the board effectively assess the potential of laws such as Sarbanes-Oxley to guide a commitment to standards of fiscal integrity?*
10. *How can the board avoid both apparent and actual conflicts of interest, while ensuring that highly qualified individuals are willing to serve as trustees?*
11. *How should the board work with the president to develop the criteria by which the president's performance will be annually reviewed?*
12. *How can the board ensure that it retains appropriate distance and avoids the temptation to micromanage specific educational programs?*

- 13. When and how should board actions and deliberations be reported to the broader campus community and other stakeholders?*
- 14. How can the board maintain the independence and objectivity of its judgment on critical issues that face the institution, even as it provides essential support to the administration and appropriately delegates academic and operational authority?*
- 15. How can the board best achieve and maintain vital consensus? How should the board manage potentially disabling disagreements and dissension?*
- 16. How would a comprehensive board orientation program, if one were in place for new board members, assist in their preparation? How is the work of individual trustees and the board as a whole assessed?*
- 17. How can board members maintain a proper balance between being fully informed and diligent in their service on the one hand and keeping the inherent ambiguities of trusteeship in perspective on the other?*

The following question will be directed to the small peer review group of presidents at Illinois community colleges after the results are summarized and presented to them for review.

How, and in what ways, are the presidents in agreement (or disagreement) with the Illinois community college trustee's perceptions related to their preparedness for their role as an elected official?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW REQUEST COVER LETTER

CSU letterhead

May 15, 2011

Dear Participant,

My name is Terri Winfree and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Education department. I am conducting a research study to explore Illinois community college trustees' perspectives on their understanding about the responsibilities and expected accountability for their elected board position.

The purpose of this study is to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as an elected official. The study will explore your understanding of your college's mission and culture, and the principles that shape higher education. An emphasis will be on your responsibilities, as a trustee, related to public trust and the interests of your constituencies. And finally, the study will explore whether you feel your past experiences have prepared you, and if professional development will assist you, in this role as a trustee. There will be a "peer review" conducted with a few Illinois community college presidents to ascertain if they are in agreement or disagreement with

the perspectives of the trustees you participate. The title of my project is “Select Illinois Community College Elected Trustees Perspectives on how Prepared they are to Serve their Term of Office”.

As the Principal Investigator I am a PhD Candidate, Education and Human Resource Studies; and my adviser is Dr. Linda Kuk, Associate Professor of Education at Colorado State University.

I respectfully request that you will agree to participate in two interviews. The initial interview will be in person, at a location of your choosing, where a series of questions will be asked. The questions have been selected from those identified in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges “Statement on Board Accountability.” The second meeting, to confirm my understanding of your responses, will be a face to face meeting, a teleconference (Skype) interview, or a phone interview as we determine appropriate. Your participation will take no more than two hours for the first interview and less than one hour for the second. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants; I will “disguise” all individuals’ identities and also that of their respective institution. The interviews will be tape recorded; the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office at the college and will be erased or destroyed after a three year period.

While there are no direct benefits to you, I sincerely hope to gain more knowledge on participants’ perspectives about their preparedness to serve in their elected position,

and in your case, what if anything would equip you to make a better impact on the communities you serve.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Terri Winfree, at 708.912.0418 or twinfree@prairiestate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

Lastly, please respond to this e-mail to confirm or reject your intent to participate in the study. I sincerely hope that you agree to participate and respond with a confirmation. If we do not receive a response within a week to ten days we will remind you of this request.

Sincerely,

Terri Winfree

Vice President,

Community and Economic Development

Prairie State College

PhD Candidate,

Colorado State University

APPENDIX C: ICCTA REQUEST COVER LETTER

CSU letterhead

May 16, 2011

Dear Mr. Monaghan,

I am conducting a research study to explore Illinois community college trustees' perspectives on their understanding about the responsibilities and expected accountability for their elected board position. The title of my project is "Select Illinois Community College Elected Trustees Perspectives on How Prepared they are to Serve their Term of Office".

The purpose of this study was to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as elected officials. The study explored trustees' understanding of their college's mission, its culture, and the principles that shape higher education. Trustees' responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of their constituencies were emphasized. And finally, the study explored whether trustees felt their past experiences prepared them, and if professional development would have assisted them, in trustee role. There will be a "peer review" conducted with a few Illinois community college presidents to ascertain if they are in agreement or disagreement with the perspectives of the trustees who participate.

Thank you for verbally agreeing to assist me, and allow Kim Villanueva to assist, with the trustee (board chair) selection for my dissertation research. Due to the nature of

the recruitment help from the ICCTA, this engages the organization in the research. This letter intends to serve as a letter of cooperation from the ICCTA organization stating that you are willing to assist with the project, that you feel the participants are being protected as participants and not put at risk. I have included a statement below that includes what assistance ICCTA will be providing for the research.

Please confirm by marking your initials next to **YES** in the appropriate spaces.

I respectfully request that you will agree to participate in the following:

Yes ___ No___ Look through list of elected board chairs in your organization and identify those who meet the requested criteria (see attached document)

Yes ___ No___ Send the researcher's recruitment text (see attached document)

Yes ___ No___ Follow-up with an email for those who didn't respond

Yes ___ No___ Identify Community College Presidents who to not have a trustee participating and send them the recruitment text (see attached) `

Yes ___ No___ Follow-up with an email for those Presidents who did not respond

While there are no direct benefits to you, I sincerely hope that ICCTA will gain more knowledge on participants' perspectives about their preparedness to serve in their elected position, and what if anything would equip trustees to make a better impact on the communities they serve.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Terri Winfree, at 708.912.0418 or twinfree@prairiestate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

Lastly, please respond to this e-mail to confirm by marking **YES** in the appropriate spaces your intent to assist in the selection.

Sincerely,

Terri Winfree

Vice President,

Community and Economic Development

Prairie State College

PhD Candidate,

Colorado State University

APPENDIX D: PRESIDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT LETTER

CSU letterhead

February 11, 2012

Dear Participant,

My name is Terri Winfree and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Education department. I sincerely request that you will agree to participate as part of the peer review for my doctoral study. This peer review consists of reading the chapter of my research findings and responding to let me know if you are in agreement or disagreement with the findings. Your time involvement, in addition to reading the chapter, would include either a written response or a verbal response. I estimate to total time commitment would take less than two hours. If a verbal response is selected, I would hope to be allowed to record by audio tape. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants.

Below please read the background information about the study and the way that it was presented to the nine participants who agreed and have since participated in the study. Please note at this time all trustee interviews have been completed.

My name is Terri Winfree and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the Education department. I am conducting a research study to explore Illinois community college trustees' perspectives on their understanding about the responsibilities and expected accountability for their elected board position. The purpose of this study is to explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as an elected official. The study will explore trustees' understanding of their

college's mission and culture, and the principles that shape higher education. An emphasis will be on their responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of their constituencies. And finally, the study will explore whether they feel their past experiences have prepared them, and if professional development will assist them, in this role as a trustee. There will be a "peer review" conducted with a few Illinois community college presidents to ascertain if they are in agreement or disagreement with the perspectives of the trustees. The title of my project is "Select Illinois Community College Elected Trustees Perspectives on how Prepared they are to Serve their Term of Office".

As the Principal Investigator I am a PhD Candidate, Education and Human Resource Studies; and my adviser is Dr. Linda Kuk, Associate Professor of Education at Colorado State University.

I respectfully request that you will agree to participate in two interviews. The initial interview will be in person, at a location of your choosing, where a series of questions will be asked. The questions have been selected from those identified in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges "Statement on Board Accountability." The second meeting, to confirm my understanding of your responses, will be a face to face meeting, a teleconference (Skype) interview, or a phone interview as we determine appropriate. Participation will take no more than two hours for the first interview and less than one hour for the second. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants; I will "disguise" all individuals' identities and also that of their respective institution. The

interviews will be tape recorded; the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet at my residence and will be erased or destroyed after a three year period.

While there are no direct benefits to you, I sincerely hope to gain more knowledge on participants' perspectives about their preparedness to serve in their elected position and what if anything would equip them to make a better impact on the communities they serve.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

If you have any questions, please contact me Terri Winfree at 708.912.0418 or twinfree@prairiestate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 970-491-1655.

Sincerely,

Terri Winfree

Vice President,

Community and Economic Development

Prairie State College

PhD Candidate,

Education and Human Resource Studies

Colorado State University

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Select Illinois Community College Elected Trustees
Perspectives on How Prepared They are to Serve Their Term of Office

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Terri Winfree, PhD Candidate, Community
College Leadership, Colorado State University. 708.912.0418 –
twinfree@prairiestate.edu

ADVISOR AND COMMITTEE CHAIR: Dr. Linda Kuk, Associate Professor
of Education, PhD, (970) 491-7243 – Linda.kuk@colostate.edu

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? To
see a broad range (between eight and 20) of trustees individual experiences and how
prepared you feel that you are to engage in the role you fulfill at their college. This
diversity will offer varying personal perspectives on each participant's capacity for
consensus building, decision-making and dealing with conflict when present.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Terri Winfree, Vice President Community and
Economic Development, Prairie State College and PhD Candidate in the Community
College Leadership Program, Education and Human Resource Studies, at Colorado State
University.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to
explore how prepared Illinois community college trustees are for their role as an elected
official. The study will explore your understanding of your college's mission and culture,
and the principles that shape higher education. An emphasis will be on your

responsibilities related to public trust and the interests of your constituencies. And finally, the study will explore whether you feel your past experiences have prepared you, and if professional development will assist you, in your role as a trustee. There will be a “peer review” conducted with a few Illinois community college presidents to ascertain if they are in agreement or disagreement with the perspectives of the trustees.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The total study is expected to take approximately eight months and will include two interviews with each participant at a location of participants’ choosing. The first interview is expected to take no more than two hours and the second will likely be less than one hour.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

- You will be asked to participate in two separate interviews.
- The initial interview will be in person when a series of questions will be asked.
- Each participant will be asked the same questions.
- The questions will be selected from those identified in the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges “Statement on Board Accountability.”
- The subsequent meeting, to confirm the researchers understanding of your responses, will be a face to face meeting, a teleconference (Skype) interview, or a phone interview as agreed upon parties involved.
- In all instances the interviews will be audio tape recorded.
- Please check here if you agree to be audio taped. ____ Yes ____No

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? I see no reason that anyone would not wish to participate in the study except that it will take approximately three hours of your time.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is an opportunity for you to be a part of a study to explore whether, according to the community college trustees, your past experiences have helped prepare you for your elected role. This research would further explore if the you and the other participants believe orientations or professional development, specifically when related to conflicts of interest and dissention among your (their) board, would equip you and the other participants to make a better impact on the communities you serve.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? No you do not have to take part in this study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? Approximately three hours of your time is your only commitment/cost.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key.

After the three years duration of being securely locked, the recordings will be erased.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact me, Terri Winfree at 708.912.0418 or twinfree@prairiestate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on May 27, 2011.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

I will be contacting you along with each of the participants whose information has been forwarded to me by ICCTA. Please check off each activity and initial each step you are agreeing to.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. ____ **Yes** ____ **No**

Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant Date

Signature of Research Staff