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Habits-of-mind and practices of high-functioning public baccalaureate and comprehensive universities

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Habits-of-mind and practices of high-functioning public baccalaureate and comprehensive universities

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2012

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DEDICATION

Great thanks to my committee and professors who cared enough to help me learn.

Thanks to Tom Schellhardt, Joel Haack and the University of Northern Iowa who supported me in this work.

Thanks to the gang at Panera who let me work and distracted me when I needed distraction.

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ABSTRACT

This study provides better understanding of the practices and habits of thought of two high-functioning public institutions. Both schools, New England College and Midwest State University have received consistently high rankings from commercial ratings publications like U.S. News and World Report, and consistently high and often improving scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Both schools studied had consistent success despite the economic challenge of their baccalaureate focus and the rapidly changing higher education marketplace.

Both Midwest State University and New England College underwent significant change in mission and culture. Despite the disruption inherent in a significant mission change, both schools have, within that change, created practices and habits-of-mind that allowed them to react in a positive and responsive manner to challenges as they present themselves. This study examined the overarching question: How do campus faculty and administrative leaders in high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions understand their role and practices, and how they contribute to the success of their institutions?

Data collection consisted of a series of interviews with administrative and faculty leaders and a review of documents at the two case institutions. There were a total of 11 participants between the universities and each was involved in a series of three interviews. During data analysis, some common themes were revealed between the two institutions. There was, however, a theme unique to each of the case institutions. The themes shared by both Midwest State University and New England College were: teaching, faculty
engagement, leadership, interdisciplinary/general education and being student centric. The theme unique to New England College was honesty; and the theme unique to Midwest State was assessment.

This dissertation also provides recommendations to future campus leaders, administration and faculty at public baccalaureate and public comprehensive universities. Some recommendations may be of use to leaders at other kinds of institutions of higher education. Finally, the dissertation suggests additional paths for future research noting existing gaps in the literature.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Paul walked out of the branding meeting frustrated. As a midlevel academic administrator he could not understand the difficulty his institution was having in developing a University brand. In fact, as the meeting ran on, he had begun to question why they even needed a brand. Part of an eight school state system, Midwestern State College had more than ten thousand students and offered more than one hundred and fifty baccalaureate majors and minors and twenty masters degree programs. As the state’s flagship school, Midwestern State College provided most of the state’s doctoral programs and served as the home for the state’s professional programs in law, medicine and engineering. Paul’s school primarily focused on providing a strong, undergraduate, general education. Paul said:

Why did they need to sell the University? Their reputation had always been good.
Why didn’t the administration focus on raising more money and getting the state to meet its commitments to fund public education? Nothing is broken. Why did the administration want to change things and create more work?

Higher education is undergoing a period of transformation. Whether driven by the privatization of public universities, the rise of private institutions, the growth of community colleges or changes in faculty culture, all universities face more competition for resources and students than ever before (Hazelcorn, 2007; Pascarella, 2001). This change goes beyond campus boundaries and includes student expectations from the institution for degree value and being treated like a customer, and political expectations from state and federal government for higher levels of accessibility and quality (Jones, 2002; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2011).
This study sought to understand the practices and habits-of-mind of two high-functioning public institutions: a public baccalaureate institution which will be referred to as New England College and a public comprehensive university which will be referred to as Midwest State University.

New England College and Midwest State University are unique in that they are both teaching institutions and have embraced public liberal arts missions since the 1980’s. This change, and the resulting practices took both institutions from isolated regional universities to nationally recognized public institutions, not just in commercial rankings, but by standards defined by national surveys as well. These national instruments include the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) that measure institutional quality and priorities (National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES], 2011; Princeton Review, 2011; Midwest State University, 2012 U.S. News and World Report, 2011).

Both institutions underwent significant restructuring, including eliminating departments, revising standards, and recruiting and hiring a large cadre of new faculty. Led by committed and visionary administrators and faculty, both institutions chose to emphasize great teaching and student success. A commitment to affordability and access, as well as the broader education inherent in offerings of a liberal arts school, required the two schools to be particular and intentional in terms of differentiating themselves in terms of staffing and the professors they hired. Existing faculty members were engaged in the new mission, and new hires were drawn by the desire to achieve the new mission of providing high level liberal arts education while maintaining financial accessibility.
New England College and Midwest State experienced changes in leadership as they sought to define and achieve their new missions. New England College was able to hire and retain presidents who had long tenures and Midwest State had a line of presidents with shorter tenures, each of whom brought their own vision to the role. The comparison of a long term president with a president early in their tenure provided insight on the disruptive nature of leadership turnover.

Problem

Within the current higher education marketplace, public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions, sometimes referred to as “regional universities” face unique challenges. Traditional mission elements of these types of institutions--such as service to local communities, teaching-centered undergraduate education and applied master’s degrees face increasing competition from community colleges, for-profit institutions and research universities that provide similar services (Henderson, 2007).

There is a dearth of research on the adaptive ability of higher educational institutions to differentiate themselves, as well as leadership models and structures that support institutional differentiation. The few existing case study styles neglected to focus on exemplary institutions and became outdated due to the changing nature of the higher education marketplace (Tierney, 1989). Mounting external pressure from students, and employers who hire them, challenge traditional university roles and missions. Public universities and particularly, regional universities, must change to remain viable. Leadership--broadly defined as individuals within the university community that engage in the challenges facing their institution--is a critical factor in this differentiation.
As public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions address these changes, seeking to redefine their niches and differentiate themselves, they must develop a greater understanding of other institutions that successfully faced the same challenges.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to explore the practices and habits-of-mind of academic and administrative leaders at two distinct institutions, one a high-functioning public baccalaureate and the other a high-functioning public comprehensive institution facing the challenges of a changing higher education landscape. By investigating and reflecting on the shared experiences of the participants, I constructed a deeper understanding of the challenges of differentiation and realignment, and offer insight into the habits that will overcome these challenges. By examining and comparing behaviors and belief structures at two different institutions, commonalities and differences are identified that may inform and inspire practices for other institutions.

This study also provides insight into the challenges facing public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions as an understudied sector of the higher education spectrum. This dissertation is particularly important due to the lack of research specific to this category of schools at a time when leaders and policy makers need to make informed decisions about the future path of similar institutions. Additionally, a deeper knowledge and understanding of their own practices and habits-of-mind, viewed through a fresh lens, enables the two institutions to better understand themselves.

For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as individuals within the university community engaging in the challenges facing their university and taking responsibility for the work of their institution. The leadership practices and habits-of-mind
of three administrative leaders and three faculty leaders at both New England College and Midwestern State were explored.

**Research Questions**

The overarching question is: How do campus faculty and administrative leaders in high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions understand their role and practices in the success of their institutions?

1. How do faculty and administrative leaders understand their role and responsibilities in the mission and goals of their institutions?
2. How do faculty and administrative leaders at high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions view and respond to the challenges facing their institutions?
3. How do faculty and administrators understand the function of leadership on their campus and their role in it?
4. What leadership practices do campus leaders feel are most effective and important?
5. How do faculty and administrative leaders view their role in developing and maintaining their unique campus culture?

**Theoretical Framework**

Three theories were used to provide a framework for the understanding of leadership and group dynamics and their role in the function of the organization. These theories are; Bass’ Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifitz, 1994), and House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (House & Mitchell, 1974).
Bass’ Transformational Theory (Bass, 1985) is centered on understanding how a leader can impact his or her followers. Bass’ model is housed within the assumptions that awareness of task importance motivates people and that a focus on the team or organization produces quality work. Bass believed that a leader can transform followers by: increasing their awareness of task importance and value, encouraging them to focus first on team or organizational goals rather than their own interests, and activating their higher order needs such as belonging, self esteem and self actualization (Bass, 1985).

Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994) models leadership both from an authoritative position and from the roles of non-traditional leaders within an organization. This theory is particularly concerned with the dynamics of leadership in complex situations in which the problem definition is unclear, technical fixes are unavailable, and learning is required by all parties to define challenges and implement solutions (Heifetz, 1994).

House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory (House & Mitchell, 1974) articulates the way leaders encourage and support their followers in achieving set goals by making the path that they should take clear and achievable. The three primary ways leaders can prepare the path for their followers is to: clarify the path so followers know which way to go, remove roadblocks that are stopping them, and increase the rewards along the route (Evans, 1970). Path-Goal Theory provides an understanding of how the leader works directly to create conditions favorable to the achievement of goals and informs the understanding of follower perception of difficulty and potential gains.
Context of Higher Education

The history of higher education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is a history of expansion and change (Donoghue, 2008). In the last thirty years this change accelerated as the higher education market expanded to include more students of increasingly diverse backgrounds served by an expanding variety of institutions. Educational opportunities now include a variety of options that range from for-profit, online institutions with massive nationwide enrollments to traditional private baccalaureate institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007).

The expansion of choice in higher education has been mediated by costs associated with those options, creating a more competitive higher education marketplace. In this competitive environment, institutions have differentiated themselves by focusing on specific degree preparation, accessibility, entrance selectivity, research mission and cost, in order to remain viable.

Education has increasingly become a commodity with educational consumers expecting measurable and substantial economic returns for their educational investments (Jones, 2002; Pascarella, 2001). Ironically, even as public funding provides a smaller and smaller percentage of the revenue for public education, national and state legislative bodies have exhibited increased involvement in higher education. Legislation addressing costs, practices, transferability and even programs of study have increased in frequency, thus, politicizing practices on an institutional level (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Whitney, 2006). This was evident at both case institutions which had double digit decreases in state funding over the last five years (McCrea, 2012; Midwest State University, 2012).
On an institutional level, an informal caste system has developed with different kinds of institutions given higher status, impacting the level of faculty, students and revenue which universities and colleges are able to attract (Henderson, 2007). Institutions of higher education can be viewed in a hierarchy of status. Moving from the relatively low, for-profit institutions with lower prestige, upward to higher status at the community college level, upward again to the public baccalaureate and comprehensives, upward yet again to the public research institutions and finally reaching the pinnacle of highly selective, private baccalaureate and research institutions (Cohen, 2010). There is little faculty or administrative mobility up to higher prestige universities, and there is a strong correlation between lower levels of educational readiness for students with low socio-economic status (SES), and first-generation students at the lower prestige institutions (Chapman, 1981; Goyette & Mullen, 2006). This lack of mobility and class bias translates to the perpetuation of the class system in America and undermines the democratic ideal of opportunity.

The role and composition of faculty has changed, with tenure track faculty increasingly being focused on research and publication as a primary function (Maddux & Liu, 2005). Teaching in turn has been displaced at some institutions to become a secondary responsibility perceived as an inconvenience by some faculty members and assigned to adjuncts and graduate students (Henderson, 2007). The relationship of faculty members to their institutions has also changed, with many faculty members relating more closely to their discipline or even their sub-discipline than their institution (Veysey, 1965). These changes have in turn undermined collegiality and shared governance, and established teaching as a secondary function of highly portable, research focused faculty and part-time teachers (American Federation of Teachers, 2008).
Finally, the nature of students participating in higher education has changed. A few key statistics capture the scale of recent change in higher education. Between 1994 and 2005, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 14,278,790 to 17,487,000, an increase of 19 percent (NCES, 2007) in comparison to a 12 percent growth in U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In this same time period the number of degrees earned has increased from 2,217,700 in 1994 to 2,936,095 in 2005, an increase of 25 percent. These figures are even more impressive when you take into account the cost of education, which rose from $189,120,570,000 overall in 1994 to $385,971,374,000 in 2005, an increase of 49 percent. Increased demand spawned many new institutions, an increase from 3,688 private and public institutions of higher education in 1994 to 4,276 in 2005, a 14 percent increase driven primarily by new community colleges and for-profit institutions (Cohen, 2010).

The ability to measure and compare the quality of institutions of higher learning is itself a source of considerable conflict. There are many commercial rating systems. Some international ranking such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, have a bias toward research universities. Sixty percent of the Time’s rankings are based on research criteria like Nobel laureates in faculty, citations and doctorates granted. Of the 30 percent devoted to teaching, 50 percent of the overall rating is based on reputation, driven by a poll of experienced scholars (Times Higher Education World University Rankings, 2011).

Others, like U.S. News and World Report, rely on economic measures like graduation rate, financial resources and percentage of tenured faculty in addition to reputation as rated by university presidents and academic leaders. The U.S. News and World Report rankings also base their ranking system within different types of universities (U.S. News and World
While heavy reliance on opinion and the arbitrary weighting of institutional characteristics has lead many individuals to dismiss ranking systems, they have a real impact on college choice and the economic success of institutions of higher education and therefore were part of this study’s definition of high performing institutions (Hazelcorn, 2007; Pascarella, 2001).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is based on student assessment of their educational experience and is administered during the freshman and senior years. While consumer driven, NSSE explores rigor, campus environment, quality of teaching and overall student experience and provides comparisons to other institutions (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011). The student experience is at the center of higher education and therefore, NSSE data was used in this study as part of the definition of high performing institutions.

Finally, the ability to attract and retain a student body of high or rising quality is a concrete measure of effectiveness and one that should not be taken for granted in today’s competitive environment (New England College, 2012; Midwest State University, 2011b).

In the last twenty years, higher education has been challenged to adapt to changes in external expectations, business model, student population, curricula and faculty roles. In the face of competition, institutions have been challenged to differentiate themselves and change to reflect the changing demands of their marketplace and their own desire for high quality.

**Research Strategy**

The epistemology of the study is constructivist in that the researcher acting as interpreter constructs meaning. I recognized that “truth is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 2003) and embraced my role in thematic development and analysis.
The theoretical framework for the study was basic interpretivism described by Merriam (2002) as a framework in which researchers “strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world” (p.4).

The methodology used is case study which Robert Yin (1994) described as appropriate when “a how or why questions is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). I present two distinct cases, one of a high-functioning public Midwestern comprehensive university and the other a high-functioning New England public baccalaureate university.

My methodology was guided by a phenomenological lens through which I understand that people make sense of their everyday experiences and that the role of the researcher is to gain understanding of the meaning they construct around events (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Geertz, 1973). I worked through my own observations to attain the intersubjectivity that recognized common constructions and subjectivities to arrive at interpretations that can be somewhat generalized (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998).

Three 45 to 60 minute, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Interviews followed a semi-structured format and allowed both for exploration of revealed subject areas and the expansion of questions informed by discoveries (Merriam, 1988). Participants included three administrators, the presidents, provosts and student services leaders at each case university. I also interviewed three faculty leaders or former faculty leaders from each institution. Faculty members were selected based on feedback from administrative participants and the current faculty leaders. Particular emphasis was placed on the exploration of leadership and governance practices and the habits-of-mind of participants as they worked to improve their institutions.
Data analysis began during the interviews as I took field notes that intentionally captured emotional responses of the participants and their enthusiasm for the ideas and answers they shared. This process was recommended by Anne Mulhall and allows the interviewer to remain an active participant in the collection and interpretation of knowledge (Mulhall, 2003 p. 309). After each interview, I expanded and completed my field notes, adding detail to the key thoughts and the responses already collected. Transcripts were created of the recorded interviews and the process was repeated for each interview. After transferring all data to written form, I conducted multiple readings of all materials and then began the coding process, developing themes and sub-themes.

Documents were reviewed, including strategic plans, data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and university publications and web sites.

Concerns for goodness and trustworthiness were addressed by triangulation through the use of document analysis, member checks and consultations. Colleagues assisted by reviewing theme development and findings, and by reviewing collected data and conclusions (Merriam, 2002; Morrow, 2005). Participant identity was protected throughout the dissertation process. Descriptors were used when as part of the qualitative research interviews, they added richness and goodness to the research. Pseudonyms were used and transcripts were reviewed by interview participants. Data and recordings are being stored on password protected computers and files.
Significance of the Study

The findings of this study enable a deeper understanding of formal and informal leadership experiences, habits-of-mind, and practices at two public regional institutions in the face of significant change. This understanding can be used on an individual level to inform personal leadership styles and practices. Finally, this study can assist leaders of regional institutions as they address the changes facing their own institutions.

Delimitations

Delimitations for the study were the selection of participants and the selection of research setting. The participants I selected include cabinet members, including presidents, provosts and student services leaders, and faculty leaders or former faculty leaders from each institution. Faculty members were selected by intentionally drawing upon lists recommended by administrative participants, and my research on institutional faculty roles. The limited number of administrators and faculty members interviewed limits the ability to generalize findings to all faculty and administrators.

Two institutions were studied: one a Midwestern public comprehensive and the other a public baccalaureate, both located in a rural setting (New England College, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The choice of rural setting may limit the ability to generalize findings to urban regional universities. The baccalaureate institution had a student population of approximately 2,400 students and the comprehensive had a population of approximately 6,000 (U.S. News and World Report, 2011). The size of the institutions may limit the ability to generalize findings to larger or smaller institutions.
Limitations

Changes in policy, legislative action and other external factors may likewise impact the reliability of the findings as this study captures a distinct period within a volatile environment.

Definition of Terms

Due to their complexity and sometimes by intent, much terminology surrounding leadership and higher educational practices is generalized. In order to enhance shared understanding of the study, it is helpful to clarify definitions for the purpose of this research:

**Formal leadership:** Leaders who hold position of formal authority and use the various forms of authority and power available to persons in these positions: legitimate, coercion, and extrinsic reward (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998).

**Informal leadership:** One derives authority through intrinsic value and exerts influence over other group members (Goktepe & Schneider, 1983), and comes from the team and is chosen by the team (Wheelan & Johnston, 1996).

**Comprehensive university:** Institutions that typically offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and are committed to graduate education through the master’s degree (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 2001).

**Baccalaureate university:** Primarily undergraduate universities with major emphasis on baccalaureate programs. During the period studied, the case study institutions awarded at least half of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 2001).

**Liberal arts:** Denotes a curriculum that imparts *general* knowledge and develops the student’s rational thought and intellectual capabilities, unlike the professional, vocational and
technical curricula emphasizing *specialization*. Contemporary liberal arts comprise the study of literature, languages, philosophy, history, mathematics and science (Blaich, Bost, Chan & Lynch, 2004).

**High performing institutions:** For the purpose of this study, a high performing institution will be defined as a public comprehensive or baccalaureate university that for five years has scored above peer comparison groups on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2011), been highly ranked within its classification nationally by commercial ranking systems and has maintained or expanded the number of students it serves.

**Habits-of-mind:** Habits-of-mind bridges the gap between cognitive reflection and instinctive reaction. Developed through experience, habits-of-mind are a default set of reactions to stimuli based on learned behavior. By definition, a well-developed habit is more likely to be utilized than a practice that must be deliberately and thoughtfully deployed (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

**Summary**

This chapter prepares the reader to critically evaluate the methods, goodness, and strength of the discoveries and findings of the researcher. By defining not just the methodology but the theoretical context and relevant leadership theory, it provides the necessary elements for a critical evaluation of the research, its limitations and delimitations. Definitions are provided so that the reader can bring a clear understanding of key terms to their evaluation of the observations and conclusions presented.

The next chapter--a review of the literature--provides context on the challenges and changes happening both on a macro, national and international level and their specific impacts on the two case studies. This perspective is particularly important as it links the
circumstance facing the case institutions with a broader field, thus strengthening the ability make use of findings beyond these two universities.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The history of higher education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is a history of expansion and change. Driven by technology, accessibility and social change, institutions of higher learning have transformed from elite schools focused on a classical or religious curriculum for a few, to a broad variety of educational institutions designed to provide education for every American in thousands of disciplines (Donoghue, 2008). Throughout this period of change there has been expansion not just of disciplines available for study, but of teaching methodologies, educational values and goals. Learning outcomes range from specific technical expertise in programs focused on training to broader life skills in what is described as liberal education (Veysey, 1965). Institutions of higher education have commonly faced these same challenges and been forced to make choices, some leading to differentiation; others to retrenchment.

It is critical to understand these key decision points in the context of the two case studies of high performing institutions. The methods by which the case institutions met the challenges of a changing educational landscape and balance those changes within their extant mission, values and culture, offer insight into the work and practices of a high-functioning university in the face of adversity.

Review of Changes in the Higher Education Marketplace

Over the past twenty years, there has been a shift in the design of educational programs. Changing technology, globalization, and both cultural and societal shifts made it important for all disciplines and institutions to teach a broader range of core skills necessary for student success in a fast changing world (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In addition to the skills and applied knowledge required to enter a career, core skills are
required by almost all global citizens. These skills include: lifelong learning, reading, writing and computation, oral communication, listening, creative thinking, problem solving and group work that prepares them for multiple careers in multiple fields (Jones, 2002; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2011).

An informal institutional class system has developed, with various higher education providers being given higher status, which impacts the level of faculty, students and revenue institutions are able to attract (Henderson, 2007). Institutions of higher education can be viewed in a hierarchy of status. This higher education hierarchy begins with the relatively low status, for-profit institutions, moves upward to higher status community colleges, upward again to the public baccalaureate and comprehensives, upward yet again to the public research institutions and finally reaching the pinnacle of highly selective, private baccalaureate and research institutions (Cohen, 2010). There is little faculty or administrative mobility into the center, and there is a strong correlation between low socio-economic status students, and first-generation students at the lower prestige institutions (Chapman, 1981; Goyette & Mullen, 2006). This lack of mobility and class bias translates to the perpetuation of the class system in America and undermines the democratic ideal of opportunity. Generally, endowments, public funding, research grants, contracts and tuition rates all provide higher status schools with the resources they need to have the best, more selective enrollment, faculty, facilities and ranked athletic programs (Henderson, 2007).

The trend toward a transactional value-based approach to college selection has a strong influence on how students select institutions. College ranking systems have grown in popularity and have been shown to have a real impact on the perceptions of customers in the higher education marketplace (Hazelcorn, 2007). Students and their families increasingly
seek a value proposition that commoditizes education based on the potential economic benefit it will provide (Pascarella, 2001).

**Review of Changing Climate of Faculty**

The role of faculty has changed significantly in the last two decades. Shifts in faculty duties and roles began when greater emphasis was placed on institutional research (Bakken & Simpson, 2011). This focus on publication and research was born from the culture of the research universities that train most Ph.D. and other terminal degree faculty (Henderson, 2007). The secondary nature of the teaching role, as evidenced in promotion and tenure evaluation, and comparative teaching and research loads, has made research productivity the preeminent factor in promotion (Maddux & Liu, 2005).

This has pushed faculty roles like teaching and service to a secondary status in the academy (Bakken & Simpson, 2011; Henderson, 2007). This cultural prioritization of research has filtered down into the comprehensive and public baccalaureates, carried by their faculty, most of whom received their graduate degrees from research one institutions (Dreifus & Hacker, 2010). This has a tendency to cause confusion and mission-spread on the part of traditional teaching centered universities and colleges; and contributes to the flood of low quality, insignificant or duplicative research that has exploded into an ever increasing number of academic publications. These publications and inquiries, many of which do little to investigate meaningful phenomenon or advance the field of thought, becomes costly waste of faculty time (Bauerlein, Gad-el-Hak, Grody, McKelvey, and Trimble, 2010). Time is therefore diverted away from the teaching and service mission of the traditional public comprehensive and public baccalaureate regional universities (Henderson, 2007).
The current era has seen an enormous shift in faculty employment categories. Driven by economics and a desire for management flexibility, this shift toward a variety of employment arrangements of adjunct faculty replaces a faculty made up of tenured or tenure track faculty. These adjunct faculty members may include: terminal degree holding, part time faculty, professional experts from the field and graduate assistants. The shift to lower status adjuncts has resulted in a weakening of the collegial culture and lack of connection between teacher and learner (American Federation of Teachers, 2008). These employees are almost always compensated less than their tenure track colleagues, often are regarded as academic lower class within the academic community and often have little job security (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges currently employ the largest percentage of adjunct faculty at 68 percent (Dobbie & Robinson, 2008). Among traditional faculty members, there is a strong belief that adjunct faculty provide inferior instruction (Magner, 2009). The marketplace however, seems to suggest that adjunct faculty is not inferior as reflected by the continuing growth of for-profit and distance learning institutions that utilize mostly adjunct faculty (Kinser, 2007).

Regardless of the qualitative element, today’s traditional faculty have lost their teaching focus, changing instead to follow the research publication path which leads to promotion and tenure (Bakken & Simpson, 2011). Since in most instances, adjunct instructors are not organized or recognized either informally as part of the faculty senate or formally as part of collective bargaining, their role as lower caste members of the academy and university workforce seems assured (National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 2006). As higher education increasingly approaches a corporate model, the low cost of adjuncts in relation to credits
taught, makes them economically attractive (Hess, 2004). The primary role of faculty as professional researcher as opposed to teacher-mentor reflects the low priority of the teaching function, as is demonstrated by the outsourcing of instruction to adjuncts.

**Review of Changes in Student Life**

A few key statistics capture the scale of recent change in higher education. Between 1994 and 2005, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased from 14,278,790 to 17,487,000; an increase of 19 percent (NCES, 2007) in comparison to a 12 percent growth in U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The number of degrees earned increased from 2,217,700 in 1994 to 2,936,095 in 2005, an increase of 25 percent. These figures are even more impressive when the rising cost education is taken into account, which rose from $189,120,570,000 overall in 1994 to $385,971,374,000 in 2005, an increase of 49 percent. Increased demand for postsecondary education spawned many new institutions, which increased from 3,688 in 1994 to 4,276 in 2005, a 14 percent increase on the community college level and in the for profit sector (Cohen, 2010). This trend is further exacerbated by the growing political popularity of a seamless pre-kindergarten through baccalaureate path for students. While there is a long tradition of students from two-year community colleges transferring to baccalaureates, more recently this idea has spread to high schools. In some states and high schools students receive college credit for high school classes, sometimes taught by appropriately accredited high school faculty, that are legislatively mandated as transferable to public institutions (Geiser & Atkinson, 2010). As the percentage of students moving into the higher education arena expands and as the levels of instruction vary in quality, students making their way through the seamless system come with an increasingly broad variation in readiness to learn (Gross & Goldhaber, 2009). This
uneven level of preparation has lead to the creation of remediation classes in basic skills including; writing, reading, mathematics and English as a second language on almost every level of higher education. Since most remedial classes are not for credit, the number of classes required for graduation increases as does cost and time to completion (Dreifus & Hacker, 2010).

Two challenges to this open accessibility model are rooted in studies which consistently show that students with low socio-economic status lack the ability to move forward. Students who come to college with poor preparation--as indicated by a C average in high school--are only one-third as likely to earn a degree in six years (Jez, 2008).

The changing nature of the student body as it relates to gender is another significant shift in higher education. After 350 years of white male dominance in American higher education, the trend has reversed with an increasing number of female students. In 2006, 57 percent of undergraduates were female, 60 percent of graduate students were female and 50 percent of students pursuing doctoral level professional degrees were female (NCES, 2007). Just as importantly, this enrollment shift translated to a degree completion rate equal or superior to their male counterparts with 62 percent of associates, 58 percent of bachelor’s, 60 percent of master’s and 49 percent of doctoral level professional degrees being obtained by women.

Black, Hispanic and other traditionally underrepresented students have also made significant gains in participation, though they continue to lag behind white students both in enrollment and the number of traditionally aged students enrolled (NCES, 2007).
Review of Changing Administration

The rise of larger universities has created a movement toward centralized administrative leadership of academic institutions. Administrative growth in the size of staff has outstripped faculty growth as universities become more complex, requiring significant human resources and business operations infrastructure. Mission growth that includes support of extensive quality-of-life improvements that run the gamut from the creation and support of a sophisticated technological infrastructure to the operation of semi-professional athletic operations has further expanded the need for staff and administrative support (Bennett, 2009). The value of these elements can be assessed by comparing salaries of leading coaches and other university employees. The pay differential between a bowl division football coach and the highest paid faculty members was, in 2007, higher by an average a factor of nine. Those same coaches’ salaries averaged three times higher than the salary of the president at the same institution. Market value, driven by off-campus valuation, is cited as the driver for these differentials (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2008). In 2006, 25 percent of full-time faculty members were represented by collective bargaining and this trend is accelerating (National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, 2006). This sense on the part of faculty that they need the protection of collective bargaining and the implied adversarial relationship with university management is a sign of the failure of shared governance and weakening of the collegial culture.

Accountability has also contributed to the growth of administrative staffing and added a new range of duties for top administrators. Public higher education has become increasingly politicized in part due to legitimate concerns about rising costs and outcomes
and higher education’s own failure to assess itself and communicate its mission and impact (Bennett, 2009). The public view of the university as a self-serving corporation is shown in a 2009 survey which found that 55 percent of respondents agreed that “colleges today are like a business, with an eye mostly on the bottom line” (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2010, p.4). Bipartisan legislation such as no child left behind and governmental interest in a higher degree of accountability in higher education has lead to greater need for attention to legislative and governmental relations (Adler, 2007; Schneider, 2012).

Voluntary efforts to support improved accountability through practices such as standardized institutional profiles and increasingly rigorous accreditation processes have been undertaken by many institutions. Legislators view taxpayers as stockholders, presidents as general managers and students as customers or consumers (Whitney, 2006).

**Review of Changing Curriculum**

Tension between an education centered on applied skills and the broader theoretical skill-set of a liberal education dates back to the industrialization of the United States. Andrew Carnegie decried the utility of the traditional university saying, “College education as it exists today seems almost fatal,” adding that graduates of traditional universities are “adapted for life on another planet,” this in contrast to “the future captain of industry…hotly engaged in the school of experience” (Wall, 1989, pp. 834-835). Today’s business leaders are, likewise, critical of many graduates; finding only one third of recent college graduates highly prepared for work (Business-Higher Education Forum, 1995; The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, & The Society for Human Resource Management, 2006). This trend toward applied studies is perhaps best reflected in the growth of the award of business related associate’s, bachelor’s and master’s degrees that far outstrips the growth
of all other degree areas. In 2008, the number of business degrees granted made up 21.4 percent of all degrees granted, doubling the number of degrees awarded in history and social science, the second most popular collection of fields (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). In 2011, 20 percent of degrees award in the United States were business degrees. Between 1999 and 2009, the number of business degrees in the U.S. rose 40 percent (NCES, 2011).

Despite this applied focus, recent graduates have been found to possess the technical skills and content knowledge to complete office tasks but lack the ability to problem solve, work in teams, lead and manage others, adapt to change and present a position verbally with a presentation or in written form (Gardner, 1998; Holton, 1992). Lack of these skills prevents recent graduates from advancing in their careers and transitioning to new roles in a changing economy (Carnevale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990). The voice of both the field and the faculty must be represented in curriculum design and discussions of pedagogy. This balance between the development of core cognitive abilities, the goal of the general curriculum and training in applied skills is in constant flux (Joshi, Beck, & Nsiah, 2009). The growth, in applied or vocational pedagogy has been exponential and is represented both in programs offered and degree attainment (Dreifus & Hacker, 2010).

Online education is also a major force in curriculum design. A national survey in 2007 discovered nearly 100 percent of respondents offered online registration, 85 percent had online access to transcripts, 78 percent of courses utilized e-mail and 50 percent of courses utilized learning management software, up from 12 percent in 2000 (Greene & Winters, 2006). As students are increasingly exposed to continual connectivity to the web and one another, it seems only natural that course instructional techniques should reflect these new
realities. Content-driven courses are becoming secondary sources of information to
Wikipedia or powerful search engines like Google (Bauerlein, 2008). Recent research show
hybridized courses that combined traditional teaching--while taking advantage of online
opportunities for dialogue, group work and supplemental instruction--seems to offer the best
of all worlds (Bakia, Jones, Means, Murphy, & Toyama, 2010).

New England College has been transitioning across market expectations,
moving toward a liberal arts curriculum of fewer courses with greater depth of content. This
is best demonstrated by the shift to a full-time load of three, four credit courses instead of a
more universal four, three credit courses. New England College believed that by doing so
they could focus on a full exploration of content and the engagement of upper level cognitive
skills in each area.

Both New England College and Midwest State maintained a commitment to their
liberal arts curriculum, while modifying instruction to take advantage of the tools of
technology and class content to facilitate a more practicum driven learning environment.
In 1987, Midwest State implemented a mission change that was focused on a liberal arts
based curriculum. This curriculum continued to be delivered in a traditional classroom
setting by tenured faculty. Few of Midwestern State’s or New England College’s classes
were wholly available online, however, some had online components. As the two schools
face market expectations for vocational training and increased flexibility in delivery, they
will be forced to reexamine some of their core cultural beliefs.

**Review of Theoretical Lenses**

University environments are complicated and there are traditional boundaries of
authority between control of the curriculum, control of the budget and physical plant and the
care and wellbeing of students. These boundaries make change difficult because it is by nature dependent on coalition and community building. Because this environment requires many leaders to work together for the success of the whole, an understanding of leadership and theoretical models of leadership should inform both the collection of data and its interpretation. This study is informed by these three theories: Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifitz, 1994), and House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Bass’s Transformational Theory (Bass, 1985) is centered on understanding how a leader can impact his or her followers. Bass’ model is housed within the assumptions that awareness of task importance motivates people and that a focus on the team or organization produces better work. Bass believed that a leader can transform followers by increasing their awareness of task importance and value, causing them to focus first on team or organizational goals, rather than their own interests and activating their higher order needs such as belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization (Bass, 1985).

Furthermore, Bass believed that to be authentic, transformational leaders must be grounded in moral foundations that are based on four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Bass stated that authentic transformational leaders must possess three moral aspects: the moral character of the leader; the ethical values embedded in the leader’s vision, articulation and program; and the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and action that leaders and followers engage in and collectively pursue (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998). Transformational theory will enable the understanding of how leaders in formal positions of authority inspire and engage their followers in pursuing institutional goals.
Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifitz, 1994) models leadership both from an authoritative position and non-traditional leadership positions within an organization. The adaptive leadership model examines the powers and limitations of authority, the role of followers and participants and the natural conflict that can occur in the addressing of disruptive changes to an organization or culture. Focusing on complex situations that involve multiple factors and constituencies, and featuring multiple unknowns and potentially disastrous outcomes, Heifetz provided a model for addressing issues like those faced by the case institutions. In these more complex situations the role of authority is to facilitate the successful addressing of the complex issue. Rather than imposing a technical fix, the leader plays the following role:

- Identifies the challenge, produces questions about problems and definitions of solutions.
- Manages the ripening of the issue, allowing stakeholders to come to grips with the identified issues while maintaining tension that keeps the identified issue at the forefront without allowing it to escalate to the point of paralysis or the undermining of leadership.
- Working with leaders throughout the organization to create a response once ripening has provided the understanding and the urgency to allow it.
- Works with the community to implement the changes in structure or culture that are required by the adaptive challenge (Heifitz, 1994, p.128).

House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory (House & Mitchell, 1974) was created to explain the way leaders encouraged and supported their followers in achieving set goals by making the path that they should take clear and achievable. The three primary ways leaders
can prepare the path for their followers is to: clarify the path so followers know which way to go, remove roadblocks that are stopping them, and increase the rewards along the route (Evans, 1970).

Based on the needs of the followers, leaders can use different tactics in preparing the path. In clarifying the path, they may be directive or give vague hints. In removing roadblocks, they may scour the path or help the follower move the bigger blocks. In increasing rewards, they may give occasional encouragement or more tangible rewards like time off or financial incentives (House & Mitchell, 1974). Path-Goal Theory provides an understanding of how the leader works directly to create conditions favorable to the achievement of goals and informs the understanding of follower perception of difficulty and potential gains.

**Review of Institutional Differentiation**

On the surface there appears to be a rising tide of differentiation in the higher education marketplace. The rise of private for-profit institutions and community colleges and the increased research focus of research universities, and general education focus of the private liberal arts colleges, all provide examples of differentiation on an institutional level (Hazelcorn, 2007; Tierney, 1989). Two easily recognized examples of this are research universities that have a graduate education and research focus, and for-profit colleges which focus on high demand degrees and online instruction.

In the increasingly competitive higher education marketplace however, it is not enough to choose between a being a student at a research, comprehensive, for-profit university or a community college. A business student does not care about a highly ranked accounting degree. Today’s students seek customized experiences that combine the learning
that will maximize their skills and an institutional reputation that will assist them in achieving the job placements they seek (DesJardins, Dundar, Hendel, 1999; Niu & Tienda, 2008).

Some universities have begun the hard work of changing in a substantive way. All institutions can, through self-discovery, find within themselves, organic skills and greatness on which to build (Christensen & Eyring 2011). These strengths, when linked with the needs of the market, allow schools to move beyond trying to move up the ladder by chasing research one status or creating yet another business emphasis. Midwest State and New England College, by focusing on teaching as a core faculty responsibility and embracing a liberal arts curriculum structure, have differentiated themselves from competitors. Unfortunately, this differentiation has failed to protect them from systemic challenges and economic conditions of the changing public higher education landscape.

New England College was one of twenty universities featured by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt in their 2005 book, Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter. In the book, the authors contend that a focus on student outcomes makes the school more effective.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the changes and trends currently impacting higher education and by extension the case universities. It became clear during the research process that the relative success of these institutions was not rooted in their ability to avoid the challenges and pressures facing higher education in general or their competitors in the higher education marketplace. Both institutions struggled with issues of diversity, increased competition, rising costs, the changing nature of the academy, reduced state funding, changing technology
and changing student and parent expectations. Both institutions are located in rural regions in states that had--during the period of the study--a volatile state funding process.

The next chapter will provide greater context, placing the universities within their institutional missions, exploring both their strengths and weaknesses. More importantly chapter 3 will introduce the study’s participants and provide insight into their beliefs, practices and habits-of-mind.
CHAPTER 3
THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology

The literature review presented in chapter two described the systemic challenges facing higher education and discussed the way many institutions have evolved to meet those challenges and new marketplace needs. The review of current literature also exposed a gap in that knowledge base specific to public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions.

While some authors, such as Tierney (1989), looked at differentiation in higher education, they tended to focus their analysis on public research and upper-tier private institutions. By design, public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions are neither research universities, focused on research and graduate education, nor community nor for-profit colleges focused on professional preparation and potential education for transfer.

This lack of research and the urgency of challenges facing the institutions caught in the middle have created a need for deeper understanding on how these public comprehensives and baccalaureates can work in the new educational environment and what is required to help them get there. The path of positive change and differentiation is one that requires excellent leadership from both administrators and faculty. The changes required are significant and the political implications are serious. This chapter provides justification for a qualitative approach to understanding the subtle nuances, beliefs and habits that enabled the case institutions to succeed where others failed. This framework justifies the qualitative lenses employed, reviews the constructivist framework, and discusses the role of the phenomenological perspective in framing the study. This justification also defines the case boundaries and case selection while describing the methods for selection of participants and the collection and analysis of data. Finally, this chapter discusses the steps taken to ensure
the rigor of the study by discussing the steps taken to strengthen the goodness and trustworthiness of the process.

**Why use Qualitative Inquiry?**

The knowledge sought by this study, which seeks not just to capture but also understand the habits-of-mind and practices of high-functioning public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions, requires a deeper understanding of the people and their environment. To become meaningful and reach that deeper understanding required a methodology and theoretical framework; that enabled this depth of exploration. This depth is in itself a trade off, as increased depth invariably leads to loss of breadth. Qualitative research supplies detailed information about smaller numbers of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied, but reduces generalizability (Patton, 2002, p. 14).

Qualitative research uses multiple frameworks, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, rooted in the setting and contexts of the participants. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). My specific goal was to examine the challenges described in the literature review from the perspectives of the campus leaders interviewed allowing their voices to inform the meaning of the study (Merriam, 1991). Additionally, selection of qualitative methodology was defined by the kind of information sought; my desire to understand “the how’s, why’s and influences impacting the case rather than the what, how much data sought by traditional qualitative methodology” (Merriam, 1991, p.9).
Therefore, I focused on the depth of understanding of the actions, motivations and beliefs of the participants, not the surface actions themselves. By engaging campus leaders as individuals and working to understand their personal beliefs and contexts as well as their shared values, I sought to understand the motivations as well as actions of the participants (Merriam, 1991).

The epistemology of the study was constructivist in that the researcher, acting as interpreter, constructs meaning. I, as the researcher recognized that “truth is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 2003, p 4) and embraced my role in thematic development and analysis. I did not construct my own meaning; rather, I constructed shared meaning, working with the study participants.

Because it is the intent of the study to understand the habits-of-mind and practices of leaders throughout the case study community, a framework was selected that allowed me to explore those beliefs and values as they were revealed. My desire to discover and understand the specific nature of the two cases called for a theoretical framework of basic interpretivism described by Merriam as a framework in which researchers “strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world” (Merriam, 2002, p.4).

**Constructivist Paradigm**

The epistemology framing this dissertation research was constructionism. Constructionism recognizes that all knowledge is constructed through interactions between human beings, and exists in a social context (Crotty, 1998, p.42).

Since this research was based on the practices and habits-of-mind of leaders working within the specific social and cultural settings of their individual campuses, my focus was on how the participants constructed the meanings and interpretations of events and actions
within their particular social context. Each participant story was given equal weight, in recognition that multiple and individually-based realities are constructed, impacted by socialization and personal experiences (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The participants’ understandings of their own actions and beliefs as well as their understandings of the action of others and their shared work, allowed the construction of the shared understanding of my research questions.

Broido and Manning (2002), describe the constructionist paradigm as having the following characteristics:

- The researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive and interdependent.
- Reality is multiple, complex and not easily quantifiable.
- The values of the researcher, respondents, research site and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research.
- The research product (e.g., interpretations) is context specific. (p. 42)

As a qualitative researcher, through the specific methodologies of the study and my own reflection, I synthesized the experiences and truths of the participants. Self-reflection on the experience in conjunction with the purposeful interaction with participants generated a sense of understanding and meaning about the experience. In constructivism, meaning is not a hidden resource to be mined, rather the act of research coalesces to construct ideas, build perspectives, and develop concepts (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 2000).

By joining with my research participants in this interpretation, I sought to discover how the words and actions of participants coalesced into a shared understanding of beliefs
and actions that informed the relative success of their institutions, building perspectives, and developing concepts (Crotty, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 2007).

**Research Design**

The methodology I used is case study, which Yin (2009) described as appropriate when “a how or why questions is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). Case studies are bounded and contained within limiting structures. Merriam described the bounded nature of a case study, noting that “the bounded system examines a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9).

Yin (2009) framed the case study with a set of basic guidelines that help to define and guide the researcher (p. 18). These characteristics assist the researcher in differentiating case studies from other styles of research:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that:
   - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
   - The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

2. The case study inquiry:
   - Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result,
   - Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result.
• Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

Merriam (1988) wrote that case studies are descriptive and offer rich and thick descriptions that can provide a deeper understanding of the topic being researched. Heuristic in nature, they shed light on what is being studied and offer new insights. Qualitative case study research is inductive, building theory through the investigation of relationships, concepts and understandings, rather than verification of hypotheses (Merriam, 1988, p. 13).

This research was informed by a phenomenological framework in which the researcher enters into the research process having set aside preconceptions, instead responding to and constructing meaning as it is revealed. Using phenomenology, researchers attempt to describe and interpret the complexities and of a particular human experience. The challenge of this inquiry is to repeatedly reflect upon an event, or other lived moment, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how participants experience, interpret and make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology is an act of social interpretation and meaningful sense making, and is inherently subjective (Prasad, 2005). Following the principles of phenomenology, the researcher must place the understanding of meaning above apparent causal explanations (Weber, 1949). The process for this discovery is described by Glaser (1965) as the constant comparative method in which data is analyzed “concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (not provisionally testing) many properties and hypotheses about a general phenomenon” (p. 438).
Research Settings

New England College

New England College is located in a rural setting and is part of a small town of approximately 7,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). With an enrollment of more than 2,000, a majority of whom are female, New England College is primarily residential and focused on the delivery of four-year bachelor’s degree. In 2009 the five top majors were education, health science and services, psychology, multi/interdisciplinary studies and business/managerial economics (U.S. News and World Report, 2011).

New England College has a fifteen-to-one faculty ratio and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Full-time tuition, room and board and fees are more than $16,000 per year for state residents and roughly $21,000 per year for non-residents. Eighty percent of students receive some form of financial aid. In 2009 financial aid awards averaged more than $8,000 per student (New England College, 2011).

New England College is a founding member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC). The mission of COPLAC is to advance the aims of its member institutions and drive awareness of the value of high-quality, public liberal arts education in a student-centered, residential environment (COPLAC, 2011).

The 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reported a high level of student engagement and challenge at New England College. Eighty-four percent of first-year students reported working "often or very often" on papers that required integrating ideas compared to 78 percent at Carnegie peer institutions. Seventy-two percent of first-year students reported they "asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions often or
very often", compared to 61 percent at Carnegie peer schools. As seniors, 88 percent reported they "asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions often or very often", compared to 79 percent at Carnegie peers (Midwest State University, 2010).

NSSE data (Midwest State University, 2010) also indicated a high level of faculty interaction with 81 percent of first-year students reporting "using e-mail to communicate with an instructor", compared to 77 percent at Carnegie peer schools. Ninety percent of seniors reported an even higher level of interaction with their professors compared to the 86 percent reported at Carnegie peer institutions. Ninety two percent of first-year students reported that their professors were "available, helpful, and sympathetic," compared to 91 percent at Carnegie peer schools. New England College students also reported a collaborative student environment with 93 percent reporting that students were "friendly and supportive", higher than the 90 percent at Carnegie peer institutions. Senior ratings were also higher, with 98 percent of seniors reporting that their professors were "available, helpful, and sympathetic", compared to 93 percent reported at Carnegie peer schools.

The 2009 NSSE survey also reported a high level of participation in co-curricular activities on and off campus with 61 percent participating in co-curricular activities their first year on campus, compared to 57 percent at Carnegie peer institutions. Seniors reported high levels of off campus experiential learning with 80 percent involved in practicum, internships, field experiences or clinical assignments, the same average percentage reported by Carnegie peer schools.

According to 2009 NSSE data, New England College did a relatively poor job at giving first year students opportunities to interact with students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds with 29 percent of these students reporting such opportunities as opposed
to the 46 percent average score of Carnegie peers. This appeared to correct itself as students progressed since seniors report slightly higher than the peer average. Fifty-one percent of first-year students reported they had "serious conversations with students who are very different from [them] in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values" in comparison to the 50 percent of first-year students at Carnegie peer institutions. New England College seniors also reported experiencing this type of social diversity more than seniors at Carnegie peer schools, 57 percent versus 53 percent (Midwest State University, 2010).

The mission of New England College is:

New England College serves a statewide mission as its state’s public liberal arts college. We offer the educational experiences typically found at selective private colleges to bright and ambitious students from our state and beyond. We are committed to the belief that a liberal education in a residential setting is the best preparation for careers and for citizenship. Because all our graduates, including those who have studied in pre-professional programs, are liberally educated, they are creative problem solvers who have learned how to learn and how to work on complex challenges with people from a variety of backgrounds and fields. New England College offers baccalaureate programs of high quality in the arts and sciences, education, and human services. Our approach to education is based on the belief that students must have opportunities to form meaningful relationships with inspiring teachers. They must be challenged to be active citizens in a campus community that helps them find their own voices, teaches them the humility to seek wisdom from
others, and prepares them for ongoing explorations of how knowledge can be put to use for the common good. (New England College, 2011)

**Midwest State University**

Midwest State University is located in a Midwestern city with a population of more than 17,000. With roughly 5,000 undergraduates and 250 graduate students, Midwest State is primarily residential, and focused on the delivery of four-year bachelor’s degrees. In 2009, the five top majors were: business administration and management, biology, English language and literature, psychology and communication studies (U.S. News and World Report, 2011).

Midwest State University has a sixteen to one faculty ratio and roughly half of the students attending receive some form of financial aid. The 2010 National Survey of Student Engagement reported a high level of student engagement and challenge.

NSSE data (Midwest State University, 2010) also indicated a high level of faculty interaction with more students reporting they had “Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)” than at comparable public liberal arts colleges or regional private liberal arts schools (Midwest State University, 2011, p.6). Perhaps the most telling element of Midwest State’s NSSE scoring was the schools with which they compare. Midwest State’s comparisons include the national pool of all participating private liberal arts colleges, the COPLAC schools and the full pool of 563 institutions that administered NSSE in 2010. When compared with the three groups, Midwest State scored higher than the general pool and COPLAC institutions, and was comparable to private liberal arts in the general categories of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, and student and faculty interaction. Impressively, Midwest State
scored superior ratings in all three groups for enriching educational experiences. One comparatively weak spot according to the NSSE survey was in the area of supportive campus environment where Midwest State scored as comparable to the COPLAC and NSSE institutions and lower than its private competitors (Midwest State University, 2011, p. 3).

Midwest State University’s strengths have also been recognized by college rankings organizations and publications. The 2011 U.S. News and World Report’s edition of America’s Best Colleges lauds Midwest State, ranking it first in the Midwest amongst public colleges and universities and highly in “strong commitment to teaching” among Midwest schools (U.S. News and World Report, 2011). The Princeton Review lists Midwest State University as one of the nation’s best universities for undergraduate education and ranks it in the top twenty in the nation in the category “students happy with financial aid” (Princeton Review, 2011).

Midwest State University’s clarity of intent and philosophy is present throughout its strategic plan. The plan and the mission quoted below does not simply list what the university is doing and will do, but links those statements and goals to why they do what they do. As Midwest State University’s mission statement states:

The mission of Midwest State University is to offer an exemplary undergraduate education to well-prepared students, grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, in the context of a public institution of higher education. To that end, the University offers affordable undergraduate studies in the traditional arts and sciences as well as selected pre-professional, professional, and master's level programs that grow naturally out of the philosophy, values, content, and desired outcomes of a liberal arts education. Midwest State University offers baccalaureate programs of high quality in
the arts and sciences, education, and human services. (Midwest State University, 2011)

Research Methodology

This research was based on two primary sources of information, one-on-one interviews with selected members of the campus communities and a review of pertinent documents.

Interviews

I conducted three 45 to 90 minute interviews with each participant, using Seidman’s interview technique. Seidman advocates a three interview protocol, which ”allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action” (Seidman, 1998, p. 4). The first interview in Seidman’s protocol is designed to establish the context of the participants’ experiences and focuses on their life history. The second interview encourages participants to reconstruct the details of their present experiences in the context of the study. The final section of the interview is designed for participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience.

Participants were selected through Patton’s "purposeful sampling" technique in which participants are selected because they are likely to have the most knowledge about the research questions (Patton, 2002). Participants included three administrators, the presidents, provosts, student services leaders and faculty leaders or former faculty leaders at the New England College and Midwest State University. Faculty members were selected through nomination by administrative participants and from the leadership of faculty leadership groups on campus. Administrative participants were each asked to nominate multiple faculty members based on their experience and engagement with the campus and its culture. I then
selected faculty participants some from and some not from the lists of nominated faculty, based on their experience as faculty leaders and their familiarity with their institution.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format and allowed both for exploration of revealed subject areas and the expansion of questions informed by discoveries (Merriam, 2002). Particular emphasis was placed on the exploration of leadership and governance practices and the beliefs and experiences of participants as they work to better their institutions.

Data analysis started during the interviews as I took field notes that captured the emotional responses of the participants to different questions and their enthusiasm for some of the ideas and answers they shared (Mulhall, 2003). After each interview, I expanded and completed notes taken during the interview, adding detail to the key thoughts and the responses already collected. I then typed transcripts of the recorded interviews, repeating this process throughout all the interviews (Simmons & Gregory, 2003). After transferring all data to written form, I performed multiple readings of all materials and then began the coding process, developing groupings and themes.

In my analysis I used the "constant comparative method" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339) to analyze the data. Analysis will be accomplished by identifying the smallest piece of data (a "unit") whose meaning was relevant to the research and could stand on its own (Glaser, 1965, p.438; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 344). After this data is disaggregated, it is reintegrated into categories and themes that allow the researcher to interpret meaning. Additional insight and understanding of the participant experience was provided by both document analysis and existing literature in the area of inquiry.
Interview questions were focused on the over-arching question: How do campus faculty and administrative leaders in high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions understand their role and practices in the success of their institutions? Questions were designed to provide insight into the following research questions:

1. How do faculty and administrative leaders and understand their role in the mission and goals of their institutions?
2. How do faculty and administrative leaders at high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions view and respond to the challenges facing their institutions?
3. How do faculty and administrators understand the function of leadership on their campus and their role in it?
4. What leadership practices do campus leaders feel are most effective and important?
5. How do faculty and administrative leaders view their role in developing and maintaining their unique campus culture?

Artifacts

I analyzed existing documents that included strategic plans, data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), university publications and web sites. Strategic plans, planning documents, historical documents and institutional media were used to better understand institutional culture, beliefs, inform interview questions and triangulate data gained through interviews. National and international data, including: NSSE, IPEDS, and commercial ranking entities were used to compare the performance of the case institutions with peers and non-peer institutions.
Institutional and participant identity was protected throughout the dissertation process. Descriptors were used only when—as part of the qualitative research interviews—they added richness and goodness to the research. Pseudonyms were used and transcripts were reviewed by interview participants. Data and recordings are stored on password protected and encrypted computers and files.

**Goodness and Trustworthiness**

Concerns for goodness and trustworthiness were addressed through triangulation that included document analysis, member checks and consultation with colleagues who assisted by reviewing theme development and findings by reviewing collected data and conclusions (Merriam, 2002; Morrow, 2005).

**Ensuring Trustworthy and Authentic Research**

Elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). Authenticity requires:

1. a criteria of fairness,
2. ontological authenticity - new data enlarging personal constructions,
3. educative authenticity - outcomes that lead to improved understanding of the constructions of others,
4. catalytic authenticity (encouraging action),
5. tactical authenticity (empowering action). (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 213)

In other words, authenticity and trustworthiness do not exist in a vacuum, but rather as part of a larger body of knowledge. It must be reflective of existing understanding as well as broaden and improve that understanding. Finally, it must provide the tools and encouragement that is required for positive change and improvement.
Fairness. Triangulation refers to the use of "multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305) to collect and interpret data. This dissertation sought to gain understanding through the integrations of multiple participant perspectives and sources of data relating to the two case institutions.

Seeking triangulation I consulted with two of my cohort peers during the design, execution and interpretation of my research. By providing them raw data, I confirmed the validity of my interpretation and constructed meaning. The input of my two colleagues was helpful in the formulation of my thematic development and conclusions. This ongoing review of work and drafts by peers provided not just peer review and examination but also an audit trail that captured the methods procedures and decisions made in the study (Merriam, 2002).

I also used member checking, sharing my transcripts and notes with interview participants, allowing them to check accuracy and intent. Additional interviews with the same subjects and consistent access to the data minimized the desire of participants to self edit.

Ontological authenticity. While multiple business texts have studied high performing for profit and not for profit businesses, most have chosen to avoid the complexities of the academy. Scholars of higher education have tended to focus their work on the outcomes and values of higher education as a whole rather than the practices of specific kinds of institutions. Even other case studies, such as those provided by Tierney in Curricular Landscapes, Democratic Vistas: Transformative Leadership in Higher Education paint pictures of case study subjects from a specific point of view (Tierney, 1989). Other authors wrestle with the meaning of education itself, generally taking a change or anti-change
perspective or attempting to integrate external influences with internal academic values (Arum & Roksa, 2010; Bok, 2006; Donoghue, 2008).

I enlarged this conversation by moving past the existing dialogue and studying the experience of leaders of high-functioning institutions as defined by the market and external evaluators. Moving past the discussion of the validity of such measures is necessary if we are to better prepare higher education for the accelerating pace of a changing world. Public baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions, which have suffered from a paucity of research have an important role to play in creating the structures that serve this need for change. By studying exemplary examples of these institutions we will better understand what the future will require.

**Educative authenticity.** By exploring the practices of New England College and Midwest State University, I, from a grass roots level, tied practice with outcome, marrying the existing literature with practical observation. By moving the scholarship of higher education into a discussion of how institutional leaders act on the values of their institutions, I linked our ever changing understanding of successful higher education with the beliefs and practices that enable the pursuit of that success.

**Catalytic authenticity.** As is true for all qualitative research, unless that research enables positive action it fails to be meaningful (Merriam, 2002). By providing insight to others working to improve their institutions, the study encourages other institutions to build on the strengths unique to their institution and all public baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions.

**Tactical authenticity.** By providing a deeper understanding of the habits and beliefs of two high-functioning institutions, this study provides insight to other institutions making
them better able to understand their own strengths and build upon them. A thorough understanding of the feasibility of differentiation as modeled by the two case universities will encourage leaders to find their own institutional path, strengthening and diversifying their institutions and higher education in general.

**Positionality**

I am a middle aged, white male in a midlevel leadership position at a Midwestern, public comprehensive university. I have followed a non-traditional career path, beginning as a performer and designer and becoming an academic leader. As such I tend to give less weight to traditional structures and hierarchies, focusing instead on mission, values and outcomes. That being said, I have, as the child of a Dean at a small liberal arts college, lived my whole life in an academic environment and came to love the traditional values of higher education. More importantly, first as an arts administrator and now as a University administrator and scholar I work at the intersection of the marketplace and the life of the mind. I consider the preservation of core academic values married to economic viability to be a personal mission.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations for the study were primarily driven by my selection of participants and my selection of research setting. The participants I selected include the three cabinet members including presidents, provosts and student services leaders and three faculty leaders or former faculty leaders from both institutions. Faculty members were selected based on feedback from administrative participants and my research on institutional faculty roles. The limited number of administrators and faculty members interviewed may limit the ability to generalize findings to all faculty and administrators.
I chose to study two institutions, one a Midwestern public comprehensive and the other a public baccalaureate, both located in a rural setting (New England College, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The choice of rural setting may limit the ability to generalize findings to urban regional universities. The baccalaureate institution has a student population of approximately 2,400 students and the comprehensive has a population of approximately 6,000 (U.S. News and World Report, 2011). The limited size of the two institutions studied may limit the ability to generalize findings to larger or smaller institutions.

**Limitations**

Changes in policy, legislative action and other external factors beyond my control may likewise impact the reliability of my findings.

**Summary**

This chapter provided the underlying theory and framework for making meaning in the two case studies. By examining the decisions of the researcher the reader is better able to evaluate the conclusions made.

The next chapter will provide greater context, placing the universities within their institutional missions, exploring both their strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, chapter 4 will introduce the participants and provide insight into their beliefs, practices and habits-of-mind. The words of the participants themselves will guide both researcher and the reader in answering the research questions.
CHAPTER 4
DESCRIPTION OF CASES

This chapter describes two cases through the use of rich, thick descriptions, the words of study participants, and artifact analysis. The two cases, New England College and Midwest State are described with the intent of discovering habits-of-mind and practices of two high-functioning institutions of higher education. Data gathered from multiple in depth interviews with faculty and administrative leaders at the two institutions provide descriptive accounts and observations. Documents that included university web sites, institutional histories, institutional planning documents, data from the National Survey of Student Engagement and articles relating to the case institutions further inform these descriptions. Participants and institutions in the study were assigned pseudonyms and some information was generalized to protect confidentiality to the greatest extent.

New England College

New England College is a medium sized baccalaureate college that is part of a larger state system. A former teacher’s college, New England College has strong educational programs and traditions that complement its development as a public liberal arts college. Nestled in the rural mountains, New England College is located in a town of less than 10,000. Offering forty majors in addition to pre-professional studies in the areas of law, medicine and business, New England College embraces a traditional four-year residential model. At the time of the study, the college’s president of eighteen years had announced her retirement. New England College maintains a standard course size of four credits and a standard fulltime course load of twelve credits, or three courses per semester. This is designed to lead to deeper learning and understanding.
High-functioning

For fifteen consecutive years, New England College has been rated as one of America’s Best Colleges, ranking first in their classification regionally and nationally. In addition New England College ranked well above its state peers and even other public liberal arts schools in student engagement, rigor and personal attention according to annual NSSE data and was one of only twenty exemplary institutions featured in *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (Kuh. et al., 2005). The Princeton Review named New England College a “top green college” in its review of 328 institutions. The Princeton Review works with United States Green Building Council, a national nonprofit organization best-known for developing the LEED green building certification program (U.S. Green Building Council, 2012). This rating is based on:

- Whether students have a campus quality of life that is both healthy and sustainable.
- How environmentally responsible a school’s policies are.
- How well a school is preparing students for employment in the clean energy economy of the 21st century as well as for citizenship in a world now defined by environmental concerns and opportunities. (The Princeton Review, 2012)

In 2011, New England College was one of just 33 colleges in the United States to earn a perfect 5-star rating from Campus Pride. The organization recognizes American colleges and universities for taking steps to make their campuses safer and more inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) students (Campus Pride, 2012).

President Johnson of New England College is careful to note that while external validation was welcome, there was no intentional effort to achieve it. She also noted that sometimes external validation had a role in motivating the campus. In her own words,
“We’re leading, who knew? You know it started to have an effect, people started to get more confident and more ready to do more things and it was fabulous for us, and that was good, and we just kind of kept rolling”. The long tenure and strong leadership of President Johnson, as well as a strong faculty saw New England College create innovative new curriculum models, develop interdisciplinary collaborations and improve learning outcomes for students. Scholarship also improved and in 2012 New England College was recognized as a Fulbright Scholar "top producer" by the Institute of International Education and the Fulbright Program's sponsor, the U.S. Dept. of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Fulbright Scholar List, 2012).

Challenges

New England College has, like much of higher education, been under stress in recent years. These stressors--primarily reductions in state funding and movement away from general education toward a more vocational pedagogy--have created an environment of rapid change and introspection. In 2012, the state university system of which New England College is a part, received 6.2 million fewer dollars (not adjusted for inflation) than it did in 2008. A tuition freeze for the 2012-2013 academic year caused an additional financial constraint (McCrea, 2012). At the time of the interviews, faculty felt they had been well protected from the cuts. Professor Jones observed, “In recent cuts faculty have by and large been protected and support service have been cut pretty hard.” Professor Smith noted that in the face of budget cuts, faculty were protected and lauded the President’s efforts to raise money “Johnson had to hit the road to raise money, I think she thought it would take two years, it took five and it was just pulling teeth.”
The administrative perspective was also dire with the Vice President for Student Affairs saying “The impacts of those cuts were significant. Where is your largest concentration of resources? In personnel. In the first instance we made cuts on the administrative side.” Provost George stated that the crisis was far from past and foresaw a worsening situation, expressing concern that if the university has another small entering class like it had in 2011 “We could be facing a million and million and a half deficit. Those deficits all get worse as the budget moves forward”. The management of budget reductions when they begin to go beyond maintenance and administrative and support positions is ripening even as the next budget year approaches.

Another stressor was New England College retaining its traditional four-year residential model and its dedication to a strong public liberal arts education. Pressure from the system to provide more online instruction and the market shift from general education to credentialing and pre-professional programs have demanded the redesign of existing programs, and shifting of resources while retaining their core curriculum. Additional pressure resulted from the four credit standard course size, which complicated transfers from the colleges’ sister institutions and community colleges. Professor Jones described the downside of the four credit curriculum: “It certainly makes transfers more difficult and we are more dependent on transfer students now.”
**Participants at New England College**

Participants in the New England College case studies were administrative, faculty leaders and senior faculty. All participants brought diverse perspective based on their backgrounds and experiences.

**President Johnson.** President Johnson was, at the time of the study, experiencing her eighteenth and final year of her presidency. By any measure, her tenure was fruitful, being linked directly to the positive fortunes of the college and distinctiveness that has allowed them to prosper in challenging times.

Casually profane, President Johnson was frank, charming and direct. Her office, located in an older campus administration building was unpretentious, filled with papers, correspondence and materials and dominated by a Victorian radius window that provided ample natural light and created a niche for a small conference table (also the home of many documents) where the interviews took place.

President Johnson began her career as a philosopher, following a traditional path of academic promotion and eventually serving as department head and head of the faculty union where she attracted the attention of the President by, in her own words “embarrassing him in faculty meetings and asking hard questions.” She believed this lead the President to invite her to become his special assistant and engage her in the world of administration. This experience and the mentoring she received from her president prepared her for an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellowship in administration at a prestigious private university. The fellowship awakened a desire to serve as an academic leader that took her first to Western University as Dean of Arts and Sciences and then to a New England State college where she served first as Chief Academic Officer and then as Interim President. After
another year as Chief Academic Officer she applied for and was offered the presidency at New England College.

President Johnson arrived at a New England College that was preparing to manage a ten percent budget cut, had just had a vote of no confidence in the state system’s chancellor and was in the midst of a labor action that had faculty only performing contracted work and not otherwise participating in the life of the campus.

From this setting she began the work of the presidency, which President Johnson defined as:

You figure out where the parade is going and then you clean up the obstacles in front of the parade and then you get the hell out of the way. But, actually, the other part of it is that you have to instigate the parade to go. And then they have to think it is their parade.

President Johnson had plans--long term and short term--and she intentionally managed and lead New England College toward those goals, as informed by changing conditions and her associates, sometimes quickly and sometimes over a multiyear period. As the college achieved or abandoned goals she formed new ones.

Trust, the ability to listen and a thorough understanding of group dynamics allowed her to build energy behind key ideas and ripen them to fruition when the time was right. An excellent example of this ripening was President Johnson’s hiring of a Vice President of Enrollment Management:

Another idea I had for years and years is that we should create a new Vice President for enrollment management. Well, I’ve been jabbering with this to
the Presidents Council--my cabinet--for about five years on this one and they always resisted. Finally, this year they didn’t resist anymore.

President Johnson was very self aware, as was demonstrated by her understanding of the symbolic and hierarchical role of the president. She used this understanding to both formally and informally move ideas and programs forward in which she believed. To this end she used a wide range of tactics, including:

Sometimes you can engineer things so that the trustees or the chancellor push you in a direction you want to go. You can come back to the campus and say, ‘I’m sorry gang, we have no choice in this, we have to do fill in the blank and then we have to nose together and do it.’ Sometimes that works as a tactic. Sometimes you just have to wait and give little seed energies to someone who wants to run with it and see how it is, and be willing to go slower than you thought. But you know, sometimes, little things done over a long time can be transformative. You have to have the patience to make that be ok.

Over the course of our several conversations, President Johnson spoke frankly of many aspects of her presidency and the college. It was when she spoke of students however, that her eyes lit up. Commitment to students by every college employee is one of very few cultural elements that define whether a faculty member can prosper at the college, in Johnson’s words,

All they have to do is look around them and see the kind of life people have and the kind of things that they do and the attention they pay to students and they can either say “Phew I’m home” or “get me out of here.”
President Johnson’s interpersonal skills, charisma and frank nature were defining characteristics and important tools for her as President. All New England College participants liked her, even when they were critical of her decisions. Many participants cited the opportunity to work with the President as the reason they came to the college or took on the leadership roles they served in.

**Provost George.** The Provost served in an interim capacity and has spent his entire career at New England College. He brings to his position, deep institutional knowledge and experience as a faculty member, union and faculty senate leaders, department and division head and interim dean. His academic background as a scholar of English literature and his ability to write, lead President Johnson to describe him as “perfect” and to remind the interviewer, “Yeah, well you know English majors, English majors rule the world--when we’re lucky”.

Provost George had an office down the hall from the President and like the President’s office, it showed evidence of his being in the midst of several projects. His attire was casual; his manner direct and to the point. Provost George was a thoughtful speaker who at times paused in thought before speaking or qualifying his answers.

Practical and patient, George’s experience and history with the institution made him very aware of institutional weaknesses, strengths and stressors. While admitting his love for the campus and the town it is located in, he was direct regarding the two-sided nature of the community:

One of the ways I’ve come to formulate it is students in particular think of this place as a small town. We have a kind of small town atmosphere. The advantage of that is that people know each other, people trust each other.
People feel safe. The disadvantage of it is that sometimes people aren’t ambitious enough. The students think like a small town--good enough is good enough. Sometimes I think there is an element of that in our culture too. That we don’t always strive to do the best; strive to be the best--because we all wear sweaters.

As a member of the faculty, Provost George also was in tune with the culture of the campus and had used that familiarity to navigate relations between the faculty and the administration. Under a previous provost the faculty senate had voted to exclude the provost from senate meetings without a specific invitation due to their perception that he tended to dominate discussion. Provost George approached the schism this way:

Working from the example of the prior provost--only being welcome at faculty meetings when invited--I think particular barriers are only broken down by patience. I am not the last provost, and while I think people recognize that, I’m not pushing, but, when they invite me, I go and I shut up. I hope if I do that enough . . . I think, to be honest, there were some people who had small misgivings about me being on the search committee for the Presidency. Even though I said, "Look, it is me, I’m still me, you are getting an extra faculty member," for some people it is still the provost with three people who work for him on the committee. So, there, I’ve just tried to be on my best behavior at search committee meetings. I’ve, by performance, demonstrated that you don’t have to be afraid of having the provost as a colleague in certain situations.
This strategy of patience and collegial behavior is effective as the current president of the senate noted, “He’s done a good job and really changed the tone around here a lot. That has helped and people see him as a steady hand and would love it if they could convince him to stay.

Provost George also placed great value on the campuses tradition of honesty and transparency. One of his major tasks as Provost was to prepare the campus for its accreditation and serve as the self study’s author. Even while recognizing the need for progress and a single voice for the report, Provost George engaged in an extensive feedback process, which he described:

I rewrote the narrative for the accreditation report. I got tons of feedback from the planning committee, in particular from the President’s Council and then we also published a version of the draft in September and got lots of comments in an open meeting. Posted another version and got more comments. Then, when I rewrote sections that were connected to a certain area, I would send it to the people that were in that area, and I’d get feedback.

This pattern of dialogue and feedback, rooted in a pragmatic view of the campus and culture is recognized by faculty participants who see him as solid and trustworthy.

During the second interview with the Provost, we were interrupted by his administrative assistant and a student who had a question, and I observed how the Provost immediately focused on the student and his questions. This commitment was further reinforced as the Provost told with obvious pride:

When I moved into this office I saw my assistant who does everything that keeps the office running. But, if a student walks in, lost or something, she
drops whatever she is doing and walks the student to the office they are looking for. At first I was struck by this. Then I thought, why should I be surprised? That is the way people around here operate.

Student centered, transparent, patient and drawn to a difficult position by the chance to work with President Johnson in her final year, Provost George exhibit a deep commitment to New England College.

**Vice President Bembry.** Vice President for Student Services Bembry had an office sandwiched between the Provost and the President. With an active mind and anxious manner, Bembry came to New England College from a private liberal arts school fifty miles away. She had begun her career at her last school with an interim appointment and been steadily promoted over the course of 25 years to the position of Dean of Students.

Vice President Bembry was restless and gave off an air of being busy. During our interviews we were interrupted several times by her colleagues and students coming in with messages and quick questions. She handled these efficiently while doing an excellent job of engaging in the questions at hand.

Due to New England College’s budget cuts, great effort had been put into preserving the academic core with a resulting negative impact on infrastructure and support services. To enable student support to remain viable and even to expand services Vice President Bembry had to innovate, constructing new models and maximizing resources. She told of one such change:

In our last round of cuts we had the imminent retirement of our Director of Student Life, who had been with us for 23 years. I proposed (it wasn’t imposed) that we promote two people from within the department and present
them as a tandem leadership team. Giving them a slight stipend and not replacing the position and that’s how we’ve been operating since.

The student health center had also been reorganized with the departure of a key staff member. Bembry’s leadership was characterized by innovation, re-shuffling duties and responsibilities to make the most of existing expertise while realizing financial savings.

In addition to creating new organizational structures, the Vice President also created new programming and support services that blurred the boundary between academic affairs and student services. Often working with the provost, Bembry integrated the faculty in orientation, assisting students in integrating their academic and residential experiences. Having learned the power of collaboration and integration at her last institution, Vice President Bembry continued to work to develop new partnerships. One of these was the creation of living/learning communities:

We’ve been actually instrumental in talking about how to get living/learning communities into our residence halls and have been leading that discussion, drawing some faculty into that discussion who had been talking about learning communities, but in a different sense without that residential component. So I’ve seen initiative and cutting edge stuff. Our staff is really trying to chisel away at the faculty to let them see that we can be partners in these initiatives. Though integration with academics to promote student success is one way that student services supports student success and learning, Bembry was also aware of how her work could directly impact learning. Student services employees teach courses in health, coaching, and physical education and provide leadership training and education to student
organizations. Bembry said:

We serve as advisors. Student service employees teach character and aid in retentions through the disposition of conduct cases. Residence directors bring faculty into the residence halls for programs, as well as nutritionists, sexual assault counselors, mental health providers, alcohol and other drug abuse educators, etc.

Like the President, the Provost and the faculty, Bembry and the student services staff focused on student academic success, personal growth and persistence constantly measuring, planning and creating new work to support those goals.

**Professor Pantheon.** It snowed each time I met with the professor and our two cars and twin trails of footprints were the only markings leading to the brick classroom building. Despite the winter break and unfriendly weather, the professor came to work to review student work, respond to faculty correspondence and prepare for the coming semester. A member of the history department and current president of the faculty senate, Professor Pantheon worked at several different institutions before coming to the College. With a teaching history that spanned community college and research one institutions Pantheon was a teacher who could handle heavy course loads and “run big rooms” with hundreds of students. This ability to engage large numbers of undergraduate students thereby “freeing up people for research” had according to him, earned Pantheon steady employment.

Eventually, he realized that he desired a position that offered tenure and got him away from the enormous classes that “felt more like theatre and less like teaching” and was “a step removed from the students.” A chance connection with a New England College faculty member, who raved about the college, lead to an application and an offer to teach in the
history department. Born with a self described gift of gab, Professor Pantheon quickly became involved in the faculty senate and is a frequent volunteer or chair for search committees, projects and standing committees.

This understanding of leadership is part of what attracted Pantheon to New England College. While he admitted that he has not always agreed with the President, he recognized the transformational nature of her presence:

She does it because she’s who she is. She’s driven and committed in the stuff she takes on and she will fight for. She doesn’t always win but she will make the good fight. She will push hard, she is incredibly reasonable and people trust her. Some of the things she did I would not be here if she hadn’t. I wouldn’t have considered the place.

Pantheon is also fiercely proud of the accomplishments and quality of his students and is particularly proud of the grad students he has sent on: “We’ve got Harvard, and U[University of] Chicago and Oxford. Considering we’re training mostly first generation in-state kids, we’ve had a hell of a run.” Professor Pantheon credits the campus environment and the quality of the incoming students for this academic success:

One of the students I had here is one of the best students I’ve had in my life, including grad students. And I’ve had thousands of students. I have any number who are in the top 10 percent of students I’ve ever had. Part of that is it’s so much more hands on here that you can actually shape and develop the diamonds more than you can elsewhere.

Professor Pantheon has a shrewd understanding of campus politics and the external challenges facing the campus as well. He also has a commitment to the improvement of the
institution and cited two habits of thought that have created that improvement despite the challenges the University faced: accessibility and interdisciplinary culture.

There is a tradition at New England College of access to leadership. This access allows problems and solutions to rise from within the organization and for different interest groups to communicate and build trust. Using the President as an example he said, “folks are capable of sending the President an email saying, ‘I need to talk to you’ and she will respond, I am free this time in a way that at other places is often not true”. Pantheon also notes that this pattern is true for the administration as a whole:

Here, if you want to meet with the Provost, he’ll free up some time on his schedule. The same was true with the last provost. The same was true of the VP for Student Services, the same is true of the upper level of leadership throughout, where they see this really works well because we work well together.

Professor Pantheon noted that even strong willed administrators like the past provost were very approachable. Referring to an occasion when he and the Provost had disagreed he described a specific moment of conflict:

He perpetually said, “This is a place where you can tell someone to go to hell and go have a beer.” The first time I told him to go to hell and really frustrated his plans, I said I’ll buy you a beer and he said ok, and we went and had a beer. He was a scotch drinker so that even turned out better. But it was for me at least, it was a moment of seeing the pitch is the reality.

This access and commitment to relationship beyond the issue at hand allowed continued dialogue, shared group work and healthy conflict.
Professor Pantheon also recognized as do most of the individuals that is a unique place. He observes the prominent posting of the President and Provosts contact information on the University website, echoing and demonstrating the culture of access to parents and students that is enjoyed by the faculty.

Finally, Pantheon--like all the people interviewed--referred to a Friday late afternoon and evening tradition called “seminar”. Seminar is an informal gathering at a local bar restaurant where a core of 15 to 20, and at one time or another almost every faculty member comes, drinks or eats and interact with colleagues. Seminar groups, often multi-disciplinary, bring faculty together to talk about the college, their teaching and their lives. Pantheon credits this interaction in part with the college’s ability to work across discipline and division lines and address professional growth.

Professor Campbell. Professor Campbell could not meet with me in her office because it was small and located in a re-purposed house that had seen better days. While there are few new or renovated buildings on the New England College campus, her building-home of one of the college’s more popular program--showed the effects of deferred maintenance. The lounge down the hall was comfortable with couch and overstuffed chairs and was perfect for our far-ranging conversation. That conversation started with her briefly interviewing me. Upon learning that I was an Assistant Vice President, she quizzed me on the appropriate role of administrators. While the ensuing dialogue revealed some suspicion of administrators as a whole, once our conversation began, it became apparent that she was comfortable and open with her thoughts.

Professor Campbell’s background was in clinical psychology and as a well practiced interviewer, she was very comfortable being interviewed and happy to interview in return,
which made for a wide ranging and at time non-linear conversation. Educated in the Midwest and having received her doctorate from an east coast research one institution, she was very attuned to the culture and was intentional in choosing to come to New England College, and spent her career there. Initially hired to help start a psychology program, Campbell worked with multiple Presidents and observed the growth and changes the college has experienced.

Professor Campbell served on innumerable committees, lead institutional studies and had held just about every leadership position in the faculty, union and senate at the college. She had experienced firsthand the transition from faculty governance to shared governance and was concerned about the increase in administrative strength. Referring to a past president and the current administration she said:

He did other things like, that were meant to give the faculty their heads and if someone came up with a good idea he’d throw money at it and it wasn’t anything official. He’d hear about it, someone would work on something – things were possible. It is very different now. Everything is initiative from up top. Stipends are paid to do what the administration wants and then the next summer they do something else. None of it sticks.

Campbell referred to specific initiatives like online course delivery and told stories of how a faculty developed group called “women in the curriculum” provided a place for men and women to discuss behaviors and discipline issues with the intent of integrating the curriculum across gender line:

It was the English professor working on the he/she language and the reason behind it; we had three history professors trying to understand how do we
change history how do we put women back in; what is lacking. Talking interdisciplinary, the scientist who wants to know how do they put women in there. We had a campus that was 60 percent women--some disciplines 70 percent--and they were aware they are teaching girls and they are struggling with what to do.

This program was taken over by an incoming administrator, renamed and became a more politically oriented group. Campbell said:

She missed the point of the thing entirely and when it became a presidential committee they changed the name and honest to God it was Committee on Women (COW) and that was the end of it. We got a few women coming on campus, women’s libber types and they pounced on that and any time a man opened his mouth …Well I stopped going pretty early but I stopped in like a year or so later and it was all women. The men learned it was not for them.

Professor Campbell used this example of how a well intentioned administrator can damage a productive opportunity for shared learning:

Her 40 year tenure at the University allowed Professor Campbell to trace the evolution of the faculty and governance. The communal nature of the colleges early days where as many as 30 social scientists were in one big room, where interaction was unavoidable and healthy conflict of ideas a reality of life. According to Campbell, “The kind of people that came in that era were tough, independent, dedicated to teaching and didn’t give a shit about stuff. Wonderful minds”.

The shared social setting of a faculty dining room only added to this sense of interdisciplinary community. Of the 90 faculty on campus at the time, 60 would meet and eat
together over the course of a week. Upon reflection, Campbell remembered New England College’s early Presidents with appreciation for their hands-off approach toward leading the college.

Since those earlier years, Professor Campbell noted the steady erosion of community as faculty spent less time in the office, the number of faculty committees shrank from 20 to five and new buildings allowed disciplines to become more geographically isolated. Shared time for informal interdisciplinary or shared work became less a part of faculty life.

To some extent Campbell believed that this sense of community has been affected by the President:

Part of it is the fact, and I love Johnson, but part of it is the fact that she is very directive and honest, a lot of integrity and nothing to get riled about and when they do get riled she has a real good ability to just ignore you. So nothing happens.

Despite this sober assessment of the strength of shared governance, in the course of our conversation, Professor Campbell cited several instances where faculty action had caused the administration to reverse course on a change the faculty was against. She spoke of how a faculty email campaign saved and lead to the restoration of the math building, a converted home. She told how faculty resistance to the combination of divisions, taking 10 divisions and reducing them to five was eventually stopped by senate and faculty dissent.

Regardless of her concerns regarding some of the decisions of the President and their impact on faculty, it is clear that she had affection for Johnson, and respect for ability to raise money for two new buildings and a renovation of the library; two achievements she described as unprecedented on campus.
When asked about what made New England College special, Professor Campbell spoke of both teaching and students. The interview was peppered with stories of students who had gone on to graduate school and prestigious careers and even the character of those students:

I brought this speaker from Eastern State, big interdisciplinary guy, big hot shot name and stuff. We were sitting over breakfast, I had the students entertaining him, they did such a great job. We were walking to some venue and he said “Where did you get those? Those students, bright vivacious, gracious?” I responded that’s what New England College students are like. He said “I would never be able to get a group of students to do that.”

This focus on the whole student; bright and socially adept, was, in the mind of Professor Campbell, the result of the combination of New England College’s open, often interdisciplinary culture and the students themselves sets New England College apart from other schools.

Professor Campbell worried about the college’s focus on faculty teaching for promotion and tenure. She said:

We are students first and that has stayed. Still, if you want to be respected among the faculty, you gotta teach. So much so that sometimes if you do other things outside of teaching people go Bleh!(makes a face). It’s just there is not an awful lot of recognition of that other stuff.

Campbell credited faculty and the faculty culture for sustaining the teaching focus but notes that new members to the community often bring with them a research focus that they need to learn is not paramount. She said:
Every time we get a new administrator they come on with that publish or perish crap, the reality of the campus pushes back and they cave. We don’t have the release time, we don’t have the resources, we have to focus.

**Summary**

The participants of New England College came to the college from diverse backgrounds. These backgrounds ranged from small private liberal arts schools to large public and private research one institutions. Most were drawn to the place by the people and culture of New England College. Faculty and administrators perceived a place where they would fit, where their view of public higher education would be practiced. Over the last decade, the campus has faced multiple challenges that are endemic to today’s higher education system-chief amongst them, economic challenges. Those challenges have tested the culture, creating friction and occasional discord. Despite this, participants and the college have remained true to their principles and practices and maintained the habits-of-mind that support them. These themes will be discussed in detail in chapter five of this dissertation:

- Honesty
- Student Centric
- Faculty Engagement
- Leadership
- Interdisciplinary/General Education
- Teaching

**Midwest State University**

Midwest State University is part of a larger state system. Founded as a teachers college, Midwest State University had strong educational programs and a general
education curriculum that complements its status as a public liberal arts institution. Located in a rural setting, Midwest State is the largest employer in its’ small city. With roughly 5,000 undergraduates and approximately 250 graduate students, Midwest State University is primarily residential and focused on the delivery of four-year bachelor’s degrees. In 2009, the five top majors were: business administration and management, biology, English language and literature, psychology and communication studies (U.S. News and World Report, 2011).

Midwest State University has a history of innovation and mission change. One of the key milestones of this change took place in the mid 1980s when the state legislature passed legislation that designated the University as the state’s only statewide public liberal arts and sciences university. This legislative act set the groundwork for an infusion of state funding and the planning that transitioned Midwest State University from a regional institution serving one corner of the state to a university that served the entire state and the Midwest as a whole. This act lead to the reorganization of the University and the hiring of a significantly large cohort of faculty recruited to serve the new mission. This new cohort, selected for liberal arts experience and quality of teaching--through an elaborate interview process that included a presidential interview and teaching demonstration--became the foundation for Midwest State’s faculty culture.

Another core element of the University’s culture was formed in the same period of time as Midwest State University committed to and became a leader in a value added or assessment culture that engaged in creating outcome assessment of student learning. Regular and comprehensive assessment of student results, classroom teaching, campus conditions and even administrative performance as developed and overseen by the faculty became a
hallmark of this renewed institution. Today, Midwest State faculty still oversee one of the country’s most comprehensive student portfolio review systems, designed to capture all elements of student learning.

**High-functioning**

Midwest State University has for several years been recognized as the number one public university in the Midwest region by U.S. News & World Report's 2012 edition of *America's Best Colleges*. This ranking is based on a series of factors that include hard data such as student to faculty ratio, persistence to graduation, and percentage of course work taught by faculty, as well as more subjective criteria based on the opinions of other educational leaders. Midwest State has also been recognized as a top producer of United States Fulbright students for 2010-2011. The University tied for second nationally among master's institutions, with a total of four Fulbright students (Fulbright Scholar List, 2012).

Midwest State University’s commitment to teaching is noted by U.S. News and World Report which ranked the University in the top five in the Midwest Region for “Strong Commitment to Teaching,” which is based on surveys that identify schools where the faculty have an unusually strong commitment to undergraduate teaching. Finally, in a region that is blessed with strong private and public institutions, U.S. News and World Report ranked Midwest State in the top 10 out of all public and private institutions in the Midwest above research universities and highly selective institutions (U.S. News and World Report, 2012).

Midwest State’s various awards and rankings are prominently listed on the University’s website and recruitment materials but rarely came up in interviews with either faculty or administration.
Challenges

Midwest State has had to contend with an extremely volatile state legislature that has diverse opinions on public funding and routinely engages in brinksmanship. As a result, the legislature and the executive branch will often threaten deep cuts, requiring Midwest State to develop contingency plans for the management of these threatened actions. Budget cycles have routinely begun with the governor proposing double-digit cuts that are as deep as 25 percent. This has lead Midwest State administrators to create plans that require the engagement of the campus community in devising solutions to the threatened cut.

Discussion of cuts to programs, fee and tuition increases and reduced services create a campus environment of turmoil. At the end of the budget cycle the scale of the cuts has been much reduced and through strong budget management--primarily employment attrition--the cuts have been managed. Nevertheless, cumulatively in fiscal years 2011 and 2012, Midwest State has seen a 10.9 percent reduction in state support (Midwest State University, 2012). Unfortunately, the volatile nature of the legislative funding process and administrative efforts to be responsible have lead some faculty members to think that the administration was crying wolf, creating a false case for the need to change. This has in turn undermined the administration’s efforts in engaging the campus in meeting the real challenges Midwest does and will face.

As a result of the mission change in the late 80s and a period of outcome based funding in the 90s, most current faculty at Midwest State are part of two very distinct groups. The founding group, which makes up roughly one third of the faculty, was recruited with a very specific profile in mind and was attracted by the notion of a public liberal arts university. This group is deeply committed to teaching, evaluation and a broad curriculum.
The second group, also making up roughly one third of the current faculty, was recruited in the mid 90’s and was made up of more traditional faculty members, attracted both by the Midwest State University values and by its reputation for quality. The 90’s group was more research oriented and not as service oriented as the founding group. The founding group has begun to reach retirement age and leave the University, weakening the campus historical cultural foundation and challenging current practices and values.

Midwest State University had a strong tradition of faculty governance and because of this had always had a lean administrative structure. In an effort to protect faculty positions, this structure had grown even leaner. In the face of the need to develop additional revenue, and meet the needs of a campus under stress, these administrators were in danger of overload. The administrative load issue was communicated by Dean of Student Services McCoy who said:

The student union now has campus activities and the career center and that person is one of my former assistant deans so we have one fewer person in this office. We did do some moving of one secretary and refilling the position but, for the most part I’ve taken the hits at the Director level. When I look at student affairs I think that the way we look at our work comes from a student development, even a counseling paradigm, so it is very accepting, it is patience, it is spending a lot of time, not really push and challenging. I don’t think we can afford with fewer resources to do that.
Participants at Midwest State

Participants in the Midwest State case study were administrative, faculty leaders and senior faculty. All participants brought diverse perspectives based on their backgrounds and experiences.

President Smith. President Smith began his duties as President in May of 2010. Prior to becoming President he served as Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Midwest State, a position he accepted in 2008. Earlier in his career, President Smith practiced law, and worked both as a faculty member and a dean at another Midwest university.

President Smith was a welcoming presence, genuinely glad to meet with me despite an obviously busy schedule and multiple demands on his time. We spoke in his conference room, an airy modern space with large windows.

President Smith, in his two-year tenure has overseen two significant cuts that thus far have been managed primarily through attrition. Faculty and students are starting to experience larger class sizes and some introductory courses are switching to an online format. Even while overseeing internal downsizing, Smith embraced his role as a lobbyist to the state’s Commissioner of Education, legislators and the Governor.

Working with the legislature has proven particularly trying, not just because of its volatility but also because of the heavily politicized nature of the legislature and it’s attitudes toward higher education. The President has even heard from a legislator that a public liberal arts college and perhaps higher education as a whole has become, for some legislators “a luxury we really can’t afford.”
The internal challenge and resistance to incremental changes on campus and the vision and values being expressed by state government “has created a sense of urgency,” according to President Smith, and convinced him that given current trends, Midwest State will need to examine its very nature. The time Smith said, has come that requires the university “to change our mode of operation in many respects in order to be successful in the future”. The retention of mission and values, he believed, would require the university to examine all other aspects of its operation.

President Smith put together a guiding coalition made up of staff, administration and faculty to begin this process. Established with a theoretical perspective, this coalition meets regularly and devotes considerable time to evaluating hard truths, recognizing the challenges of the change process through shared reading and discussing the necessity for change. While the work of the coalition was in its early phases, the President planned to make regular reports to the community on its progress and bring forward recommendations before the start of the next academic year. The President acknowledged that they were far from being ready to make recommendations, but, he understood that the conversations and even the conflicts that took place in these meetings were informing the future and moving the thoughts of the coalition forward. Despite the challenges facing President Smith and the demanding nature of his role, he has maintained student learning and growth as a top priority. This priority was reflected in his reaction to a recent hazing incident on campus and the unique approach he took to disciplining the offenders.

When I asked about a hazing incident I had read about in the campus paper, it was clear that he had been very involved in the incident’s resolution and that his decisions were driven by student outcomes. The incident in question took place on an athletic team in which
the President said “a drinking game was played to initiate the new freshmen on the baseball team, and, it was a game that they put two different cases of beer [in front of the freshman players] and made them race through drinking them.” Some of the students felt pressured to participate, word got back to the coach, who reported the incident and an investigation was launched immediately. Once the scope of the incident was fully understood, the President decided that given the potentially destructive cost of hazing, and recent events at the University of Florida (Brown, 2012), a firm stand needed to be taken. It was the nature of the punishments that revealed Midwest State’s commitment to learning and character. A range of punishments were assigned, depending on the level of responsibility to the 30 players on the team. Of the 30, 12 team members including the team captains received the most significant punishment, losing scholarships and suffering multi-game suspensions. Even as the players, who all remained at Midwest State University, accepted these sanctions the whole team was required to participate in learning activities designed to help them better understand their actions and hazing in general. As the President described:

We put them through a year long process, an educational process that culminated with a capstone that included presenting their research on hazing and how in the future they would work to do more productive team building exercises as opposed to hazing.

The capstone presentation was given first to the President and campus leaders who had been involved in the investigation and then repeated to other campus constituencies. There was also a student driven anti-hazing campaign following the incident. President Smith expressed real pride in the quality of the research that the team did and congratulated them on taking responsibility for their behavior. This combination of harsh penalties merged with a
caring, learning centered response, demonstrated the President’s commitment to Midwest State University values.

**Interim Provost Jones.** Provost Jones’ term as Interim Provost ended June 30, 2012. Jones came to the position in a non-traditional fashion after a provost search that included on-campus candidates, failed. Jones who was previously serving as Dean of the Library and overseeing campus computing and technology, was asked by the new President Smith to take the temporary role. This appointment of a non-academic Dean with no desire to stay in the position provided the President with an interim appointment familiar with all academic areas, and minimized conflict with Deans who had not been selected for the Provost role in the earlier search. Perhaps most importantly, Provost Jones accepted the position because the President, someone he had enormous respect for, who needed his help, asked him to. The Provost had clear affection for the President, describing him as, “smart—he’s fast he thinks on his feet, um, great personal skills he’s reasonable, seems to have common sense, and is someone people are going to want to work with.” The President saw in Jones a strong administrator he could trust and Jones accepted that trust and the opportunity to help the President with whom he enjoyed “a chemistry that was easy and natural.”

Jones spoke of the provost position as a leadership position, differentiating it from day to day management: “Leadership means that you have some sense of where the University needs to go, what’s important, and how do you get other people to line up behind that.” The provost spoke of the need for dialogue and two way communication with his Deans and faculty. Jones also recognized the challenges inherent in the politics of academic administration:
I’ve found that a lot of people will tell you what you want to hear and there’s a reason that they are not frank with me. I think that even though we say we’re all friends and colleagues, I think that they are aware that I am in a position in which I could influence them and so there may be some reluctance there.

Real challenges in the creation of opportunities for frank dialogue on substantive matters were an obstacle that troubled the provost. Jones believed that a critical part of his leadership was to develop a greater sense of trust and openness among his leadership team. The creation of an environment where such conversations can take place are needed as the University faces its challenges.

Support of his team was also an important element of the Provost’s leadership style. In recent years, funding and other challenges forced the members of the leadership team to be the ones who carried bad news to their academic colleagues, and at times make the hard decisions that circumstances required. Jones said it was important to him that:

Deans are part of the administrative team and take responsibility to say no on their own…I wish they would say to me “I want cover”, because I’d give them cover, but sometimes there I think it hurts them if they don’t really stand up and set their agenda and stand by it. 

Jones saw the ability to make hard choices, have difficult conversations in an environment of trust and mutual support as key goals for his office.

Provost Jones cited the institution’s commitment to assessment as a primary reason for both choosing to come to Midwest State University and one of its keys to success. The ability to measure outcomes and evaluate choices has prepared the University for the
challenges it faced. The provost gave an example of assessment the University had been doing in measuring the development of critical thinking skills:

If we say we’re going to do something, we pay attention enough to make sure we do what we said we were going to. Whether those results actually lead to change or not is different in all cases, whether we heard good news or bad news to me was actually incidental. It was more that the institution cares enough to really take a hard look. I think Midwest passes on that score.

Jones used student mental health as an example of how Midwest State University’s rigorous attention to results had motivated timely action on the part of the campus as a whole. When an annual interview process and health survey exposed a high level of anxiety and depression among the student body, the campus reacted. The faculty looked at their curriculum, reviewing both content and delivery. Student services embarked on a process to better serve students with a more urgent need for service.

This focus on student outcomes was typical both of most of the assessment that took place at Midwest State and the changes that had the Provost’s attention. One such project was the consideration of a transition from a three credit to a four credit system that would allow greater depth of curriculum.

Mostly however, Jones looked forward. Strategically, he considered the challenges that were beyond the horizon and focused on building the kind of team and institution that has the ability to manage the disruptive innovation; challenging the residential university model, changing modes of instruction and the need for differentiation.
Looking forward, Jones saw universities moving away from residential models noting that he had first become concerned while reading an article by Peter Drucker. Jones said that in the article, Drucker referred to the protected, increasingly luxurious campuses stating that he felt they were failing because the set up “is not useful—it’s just delayed adolescence.” The shift from a traditional student body living on a residential campus seemed antithetical, but Jones expressed how he was willing to embrace even this as he pursued the preservation of Midwest State’s core mission:

I think I upset a few people at the coalition meeting when I said I think states are not going to be allowing the building of residential facilities anymore. I’m not sure they want to be in that game and I’m not sure they want to encourage schools to be in it.

Even Midwest’s rigorous classroom instruction fell under examination as Provost Jones recognized rising competition. Despite high rankings and an excellent reputation, he felt that Midwest State University must examine even its core curriculum. The need to better respond to student and parent desires and an increasingly competitive higher education environment encourage this challenge as a matter of necessity. Jones said:

You know, if you look through Midwest State’s catalog, we look just like everyone else. And, I’m not sure that’s gonna serve us well in the future. I think, again, as long as we have the same student body, we should trust that student body and make ourselves look different. Either it’s the way we deliver education, or whatever. Um, I don’t know. It could be internship; it
could be on the practical, getting kids out there. It could be practical, changing our whole method of instruction. We’ve gotta do something that sets ourselves apart.

Jones was aware that his time as provost was finite. He recognized that his chief role as a campus leader was to build the capacity to manage challenges and change. He did this by encouraging a climate of openness and by challenging his team to look unflinchingly at ideas that challenge their comfort zones and force them to look outside the walls of their institutions.

**Dean of Students McCoy.** A former faculty member, Dean of Students McCoy had served Midwest State for more than 20 years. Her office in the student union employed more student than non-student staff and was a hub of activity.

Resources were central to Dean McCoy’s thinking; resources of both time and money. Hit hard by budget cuts, student services had endured a long string of annual budget cuts including both staff lines and program funds. As a member of the President’s Coalition, the Dean was well aware of the stresses facing not just her departments, but the rest of the campus as well. As a former faculty member, she understood the faculty perspective but held deep concerns that the University was not ready to make the kinds of changes that seemed necessary.

Like the provost, McCoy looked beyond the tactical responses required by the latest budget cut and instead looked for trends in higher education as a whole that threaten Midwest State University’s business model. At a school that focused on student assessment and accountability, the Dean believed the University did little to assess its own performance particularly in the eyes of the general public. She believed that a sense of urgency was
lacking and without that sense of urgency, the required change was impossible. McCoy used
the circumstances surrounding the annual budget cuts to illustrate this lack of urgency:

The metaphor I like to use is that we are like the frog in the boiling water.
The state has threatened as much as 20 percent cuts that first year; the sky was falling. So we went out there and we were prepared to have this big
University wide conversation. Then Obama’s bailout money came and the cut wasn’t quite that bad. But here we are three years later and you put the cuts of the last three years together and we got that 20 percent cut. So it is almost like we have not. We’ve been able to deny the reality [of the cumulative impacts].
It is really like the faculty sees the administrators as saying the sky is falling again, crying wolf. So it has been hard to get people to take people seriously--then we are shocked when a program shuts down.

McCoy saw significant challenges in the near term for Midwest State and worried that the University was not ready to face them.

Dean McCoy was a strong proponent of assessment and had developed and implemented assessment strategies to assist goal-setting resource allocation; and also to encourage the University as a whole to address critical issues in student health and welfare.

Assessment had allowed Dean McCoy to identify critical areas around the subject of student stress and anxiety, and engage faculty members in helping students manage their course loads. That same assessment encouraged her to innovate and re-evaluate how her division provided student support. Noting that career centers have shifted from a career counseling to a career coaching paradigm, she and her staff were receiving training and
certification in coaching for a counseling setting. Her assessment showed that student demand for a counseling modality is high, however, many students are looking for sympathy rather than support and assistance. She hoped to make more effective use of limited resources by prioritizing staff time around a new coaching paradigm that focused on students who were ready to work with the coach to problem solve.

Using her own assessment data, she was able to make decisions that may lead to real progress for those who are ready. Dean McCoy described her thinking about this:

Only about 20 percent are really ready to make changes in their lives. If we can come up with a coaching model that combines online assignments with face to face, but very focused meeting for those 20 percent, I think we can do a lot more with less.

Dean McCoy and her staff were integrated with the faculty and administration. Student services was able to coordinate with other campus constituencies and take part in the development of campus-wide strategies. While the Dean had a natural focus on student welfare she remained strategically engaged in the challenges facing the University.

**Professor Twist.** Hired in the late 1980s as part of the large transition cohort, Professor Twist came to Midwest State University intrigued by the notion of public liberal arts and found, like many in her cohort--her life’s work. Twist’s work space was stacked high with papers and articles which she diligently worked through, demonstrating her commitment to student writing and feedback. Two students who worked as her assistants greeted me at the office and directed me down the hall to a couch that served as their waiting room. The two young students, one male, one female, were polite and professional, explaining that the professor would be with me in a moment as she had just returned from
teaching. It was clear from their energy and enthusiasm that the students were excited to be assisting their professor and that she in turn was very fond of them.

The time of Professor Twist’s hiring was a critical one for the University. With a legislative mandate and funding, approximately one third of the faculty was hired in the time frame of a few years. This burst of hiring took place even as existing faculty were reassigned, retired or left to pursue other opportunities.

This hiring process was driven by the President and the Dean of Instruction, and was designed to set the stage for a new culture at Midwest State University, by engaging candidates in an extensive and non-traditional hiring process. This process included extensive review of the candidate’s undergraduate coursework, teaching demonstrations and one-on-one interviews with the President, Dean of Instruction, department faculty and students for every candidate. The President and Dean of Instruction had a very specific profile they were looking for that included a strong liberal arts background, a student centered teaching focus and an attitude of engagement. Interviews were challenging and the two professors interviewed who were part of that cohort reported feeling like they were being tested in their Presidential interviews.

The faculty, boosted by the new cohort was split into two groups, one of 80 members that served as the working group that would take part in the self-study, and another of 30 to 40 faculty members who engaged in the strategic planning for the course of the University. Both groups were formed and facilitated by the President and Dean of Instruction, with the goal of setting the course for the University based on the latest educational models and research.
The planning process was scholarly with each faculty member expected to bring fully realized lit reviews and data analysis to their assigned area. All the research analysis and decision making was focused on, as Twist said:

[T]rying to identify what do we need to do to be a higher quality institution and this focus, increased focus on the liberal arts came in that format, but it was also that the accreditation committees were being asked to identify how do we demonstrate that our quality is high and getting better? What do we mean by quality? All of those questions were being asked in repeated forms.

This questioning, research and level of engagement of the faculty created a sense of momentum and Professor Twist described how faculty became a driving force for the new Midwest State University:

People immersed in these discussions of quality and had over the half of the faculty talking about this stuff [strategic planning and implementation] that you will get some movement. And you will also be able to identify who are people you can keep going to, and they always said you don’t have to wait for everybody to be on board; you have to get 15 percent on board and enthusiastic.

This deep level of faculty leadership and participation set a tone that remained at Midwest State, laying the groundwork for strong faculty governance and group work.

Professor Twist spoke of the President and Dean of Instruction as transformational leaders, providing a vision, hiring a faculty that had the tools to realize it and guiding the process of self discovery that resulted in Midwest State’s realization as a public liberal arts institution. She talked about the President’s habit of what Peters and Waterman called
managing by “walking around” (2002, p. 279), recounting the President “coming down the hallway looking at who is still in their offices at 5:30, going by, having conversations.” These visits were more than a supervisor checking up or measuring commitment. Twist described how some of these passing conversations were engaging, intellectually stimulating and at times challenging:

I will never forget the second month I was on campus, having the President come by and wanting to talk about de Tocqueville. Well I hadn’t read de Tocqueville in at least five years and he had read it the weekend before. On another occasion that first year, he came down and wanted to argue about the wisdom of having city managers versus mayors; what was my thinking on that? So this was the sort of intellectual engagement we had from the leaders of the campus.

Through casual conversations, through verbal appreciation and simply by being present, the President, Dean of Instruction and division heads demonstrated both their expectations and their appreciation for their faculty. Professor Twist discussed how participation in campus initiatives and quality teaching were clearly identified as the criteria for faculty success. She said they “elevated the purpose, and made you think you were important.”

That initial group of new faculty in the late 1980s, lead by their President and Dean of Instruction were also founders of the University’s culture assessment and student advancement. Together the two formed a team: the President focused on the big questions and ideas and the Dean of Instruction focused on a relentless pursuit of rigor. Professor Twist described the way the two worked together:
The President was more about asking the big questions, being consistent, and persistent. The Dean was the action and bottom line idea guy. He kept asking questions and he didn’t take general platitudes as answers. He wanted to know what evidence is there that we met these various standards.

One of the challenges of the unique culture--almost universally embraced by administrators and faculty--was that it created a challenging environment for administrators that did not embrace or understand it. Twist identified several Presidents who came with an agenda that focused more on research or a stronger administrative bureaucracy and found working within the culture, and particularly with the faculty, difficult.

With the late 80’s transitional faculty reaching retirement age and stepping back, the University faced new challenges. Legislatively mandated shared curriculum, an increasing number of community college transfers who come to the University as juniors and financial pressure from shrinking state budgets all challenged the level of instruction and the ability of the University to provide a strong liberal arts foundation for it majors. Professor Twist believed that Midwest State University was holding true to the core values it had maintained for more than 30 years. Those values however, were proving increasingly hard to maintain and Twist worried that every Midwest State student may not reach their potential. She said:

These kids have the potential and haven’t been stretched. If you have the right course, and you’re able to get consistent feedback and opportunity to excel based on the feedback…ah, maybe it really is an exciting thing, because you see this just unbelievable jump in the quality of their work in 15 weeks.
Professor Iris. Professor Iris taught statistics. He worked in an office that had walls covered by bookshelves, diplomas and awards. Pride of place on the wall went to a plaque recognizing him as the Midwest State University’s Educator of the Year, this and a number of other plaques from other years nominating him for that same honor. Like Professor Twist, Iris was a member of the 80’s cohort and has played multiple leadership roles both in the creation of Midwest State’s culture and in facing the challenges of a changing higher education landscape. Going through the job interview process convinced Iris that Midwest State was a place with a vision and that for him it was a perfect fit. About that he said:

All those things, the liberal arts mission, the excitement of what was going on, but also the fact that the institution’s heart was with the teaching, and I knew that’s where my heart was. Finally, coming to a place I was doing assessment, I mean, I’m a statistician. This place is a big sandbox to me.

Professor Iris loved teaching and it was evident by his eight in the morning to after five office hours, and the steady stream of students coming to the office with assignments or a quick question. Iris took the time to introduce me to each student, sharing their year, major, hometown and usually a quick anecdote about the student that highlighted their relationship. Professor Iris spoke with delight of how when he was first hired, it was made clear to him that “research and professional activity and those things are important, they allow you to remain alive and active, but also it [was] made very, very clear, the first job is teaching.” Even though Iris taught a full load of classes, and served on multiple standing committees and governance bodies, he still found the time to advise students on their senior capstone projects. In fact, when he
considered the challenges currently facing the University, one of them was the tradition that faculty members be very engaged with students, outside their regular course load. Increasing course sizes challenged the professor’s ability to provide personalized attention and feedback in the classroom and still do the extra work.

The assessment culture that attracted Iris to Midwest State University was pervasive. For Professor Iris, what they assessed often communicated as much about the institution as the data that resulted from it. Using the annual campus wide assessment of the President as an example he noted:

So what’ll you see here? Recruitment of outstanding faculty, staff and students, which obviously is critical, morale, issues of concern, interest in the welfare of all members, and then on it goes, mutual assessment, affordability those kind of things. That gives you a pretty good idea of where our heart is on things and also what kinds of qualities we expect to see.

Annual feedback, both quantitative and qualitative, has become an overarching system that provides feedback and supports the culture’s core values.

As a long time member and four-time President of the faculty senate, Professor Iris witnessed cultural challenges first hand. While the high level of participation in faculty governance ensured deliberate decision making processes, its multiple levels of process and tendency to seek unanimous agreement created a process that was at times slow and unwieldy. The senate’s leadership role in governance also required that it do more than represent a faculty constituency. Twist described how the senate’s strength allowed it to serve a mediating role between the President, faculty and students in contentious times:
It became extremely high stakes because everybody was very deeply involved. I mean the faculty, the Faculty Senate, the faculty of this committee, the President. I mean everybody had it on the line. And so that’s why it was so hard on this as a community, and as a family if you want to call us that. Is that we were kind of at civil war with ourselves over what we’re going to do. And so the Senate’s role was to continue to be at least a formal body whose job was to keep talking about what’s the faculty role in this, what’s the University role in this, how is this going to help us, we’re here to ask the hard questions.

It was this role that allowed Iris to discuss some of the Presidents who arrived at Midwest State University with specific agendas, some of which challenged the campus culture. While commenting that some presidents had turbulent and at time short tenures, he was quick to point out that the culture of the University itself stopped conflict from escalating, noting that even the most controversial President had some ideas that were strong and worthy of implementation.

Professor Iris had confidence in President Smith and Smith’s fit with the campus culture. Iris recalled his own words at the Smith’s installation:

As a homeowner and a guy who likes to work with his hands, I have installed a lot of things. I have installed starters, refrigerators, air conditioners, ceiling fans and lots of things, but I have never installed a President. But to stick with that theme for just a moment, when you are installing something it goes a lot easier when it fits--and President Smith fits. Now, can you measure that? Not
exactly. Can you list that exactly? Not exactly. But, you look at them and you know it’s great.

Like other faculty participants interviewed at Midwest State, Professor Iris had concerns about the University’s ability to maintain its current level of student outcomes. While recognizing the necessity in moving pre-calculus—a liberal arts core requirement—into a computer aided instruction format, he worried those courses requiring a more nuanced, conceptual understanding might not translate as well. Growing class size was also a concern for Professor Iris as he worried that with larger class sizes, faculty would not be able to find time to support larger numbers of students or put effort into governance issues.

Budget cuts were also a concern, as are the way they had thus far been implemented. Most faculty salary lines that had been lost came from retirements, not by redistribution of resources based on need. The relative success of these cuts were, for the most part, measured by the impact they had on a faculty members department. Iris said: “That comes down to whose ox is being gored. As soon as it’s yours of course, it’s the end of the world. As long as it’s someone else’s, well, we can find a way to live with that.” At Midwest State University, some departments or majors have lost as much as 25 percent of their faculty while others have felt no effect. Morale is equally uneven, and Iris believed the future would see more conflict around the distribution of cuts. Despite this, he said, pointing to a passing student, “No matter how bloody the battles get, students will remain the priority.”

It is Midwest State University’s values that Professor Iris believed would see the University through its upcoming financial challenges. Their culture of attention to results, student outcomes and mission is the glue that will bind the different disciplines and departments together in the face of adversity. In Professor Iris’ words:
We have to find a way to keep our eye on the prize, knowing that we still want to produce learning. We still want to be the greatest public arts around. But, there is no question that it’s getting a lot harder to do. We still do what we do because we believe in it.

Professor Davids. Professor Davids was hired in the mid 90s and was part of the second largest faculty cohort on campus. His cohort was hired at a time when the state legislature was rewarding state schools for demonstrating strong outcomes for their graduates. This results-based funding allowed a new generation of academics to join the Midwest State University faculty. A statistician with an interest in developing strategies for quantifying data that is often thought unquantifiable, Davids found a great research opportunity at Midwest State.

Drawn by the unique nature and mission of the University, Davids saw an opportunity to focus on teaching and to utilize his discipline on an operational level. More than that, the quixotic nature of Midwest State’s mission to provide a strong liberal arts education to students with limited means challenged him. As he put it:

We know for one quarter the price, we’re never going to be Dickinson or Oberlin or whatever, but we can be something really cool and something really fantastic, sort of, with this almost contradictory mission of excellence and affordability.

Davids recounted an extensive and comprehensive interview as part of his hiring process, and its focus on teaching:

The two things that I really like from that was first of all, while they were polite about my research, they were really interested in my teaching. And that
was really cool to me because none of the other schools I was looking at they were interested in good teaching.

A hard worker, the Professor enjoyed the demanding teaching and service schedule. This was best demonstrated by his current efforts to achieve better life balance. Since his hire, Davids had taught a full load, kept eight to five office hours, served in a faculty leadership capacity and worked as an active adviser to student organizations. Now that the professor had children, he was endeavoring to cut back his work so that while maintaining his responsibilities he only worked one night a week on campus. Until then, he had willingly given his evenings to his employer.

Professor Davids had a strong interest in teaching and curriculum development. Davids was an academic entrepreneur. An example of this was his redesign of a long-standing statistics class. Prior to it redesign, the class had been built around an on-campus survey of students. Since the redesign it was driven by multiple off-campus assessments done with external partners. Students now had to professionally provide those services, and could more easily see the impact on the organizations because the businesses give them immediate feedback.

Just like the other participants, Davids also spent time worrying. The Professor worried about external forces and trends in education such as changing demographics, a growing community college transfer population, and the faculty’s ability to maintain rigor as class sizes increase. Like President Smith and the Dean of Students, Davids worried that the challenges facing the campus called not for incremental change, but instead, a major shift in its paradigm. Davids worried about the flexibility and speed of faculty governance and its ability to deal with the volatility that is today’s higher education marketplace.
Professor Davids’ interest in assessment and student outcomes kept him engaged in community-wide conversations about student outcomes. These formal and informal conversations included topics that are notoriously difficult to measure such as creativity and critical thinking.

Davids developed his courses to involve more pragmatic skill development. When a review of the literature on group decision making suggested that, according to him, “often the best decision isn’t made because either the person who figured it out couldn’t explain it or was in the wrong job in the organization,” he adjusted his pedagogy. Now his classes, still rooted in assessment and analysis, include persuasive writing, case studies and an elevator speech summary delivered in the only four story elevator on campus.

Davids credited the quality of the University’s hiring process and its sense of mission as keys to Midwest State’s success. He held Professor Twist up as an exemplar of the 80s cohort’s quality and commitment:

Twist lives in the capital city. That’s where her house is, that’s where her husband is and she has an apartment up here. It is 130 miles away. She has done that for 25 years. That’s awesome, and I am glad she did, because she is the one – as much as I argue with her, she is exactly who we needed. We need to add folks like her.

Professor Davids also worried about how rare and hard it is to find Professors like Twist. Younger academics, according to Davids, seek better life-to-work balance and seek opportunities to advance.
Summary

The administrators and faculty of Midwest State came to the University with varied specializations but with the common thread of a liberal arts undergraduate experience. Every participant interviewed felt that for them, Midwest State was a unique fit. Without exception, participants spoke of the importance of teaching and learning as the primary task of the faculty and the University. All of the participants were committed to data collection and analysis as a decision making and feedback tool. There was a deep commitment to shared governance at Midwest State. All participants also agreed that the values and culture of Midwest State were the source and sustenance of its success. Over the last decade, the campus faced multiple challenges, including significant economic challenges. Those challenges tested the culture, creating friction and occasional discord. Despite this, participants and the college remained true to their principles and practices, and maintained the habits-of-mind that supported them. These themes will be discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this dissertation:

- Teaching
- Faculty Engagement
- Assessment
- Leadership
- Culture
- Interdisciplinary/General Education
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS

This chapter provides themes that emerged during the data analysis of these case studies. These themes supply a framework for developing a greater understanding of the habits of thought and practices of faculty and administrative leaders at the two case universities. The two universities shared five common themes; and each institution had one unique theme. The shared themes included:

- Teaching
- Faculty Engagement
- Leadership
- Interdisciplinary/ General Education
- Student Centric

The theme unique to New England College was honesty; and the theme unique to Midwest State University was assessment.

Teaching

Both institutions had a strong tradition of successful teaching as the primary task of the faculty and the university. While this is a common claim at many universities, at both Midwest and New England, selection of faculty based on teaching ability was intentional and reflected in university practices such as: hiring, promotion and tenure, decision making and funding. Faculty and administration at both institutions reported a hiring process that explicitly put teaching at the center of faculty qualifications. As President Johnson told potential faculty members during their interviews, “This is where you are at. This is not like the places you came from. We are a teaching school.” Professor Iris recounted a similar
conversation from the applicant’s perspective when during his interview, his division head “made it very, very clear, the first job is teaching.” This focus on teaching was supported by the promotion and tenure process at both institutions. Professor Campbell was blunt about the importance of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions: “If you want to be respected among the faculty, you gotta teach. So much so that sometimes if you do other things outside of teaching people go Bleh! (made a face).” Professor Iris of Midwest State University thought the institution had done a good job of resisting the publish or perish mentality that is prevalent at some schools--focusing instead on teaching and service:

We feel like if we hired you, we’re making a commitment to you, we’re asking you to make a commitment to the institution, and we want you to understand that we’re making a commitment to you to make you the best teacher and the most productive professional you can be.

Iris believed that if you taught well and served Midwest State University, tenure was all but assured. Funding is another area where the focus on teaching was evident. Both institutions had a tradition of having a very lean administrative staff in comparison to their peer institutions (NCES, 2010). Despite this, during the budget cuts between 2008 and 2012, it was administrators and student service personnel that experienced the brunt of those cuts. Professor Twist of Midwest State University described how “one of the things that a past president did was eliminate bureaucrats in order to create funding for more faculty members.” Several other administrators and faculty members felt that some of those cuts may have been too deep.

There was a lack of a strong development focus at both institutions. New England College had two gift officers, one of who was also the director of alumni (New England
College, 2012). Midwest State had three gift officers and of those three, one was also the
director of development and another was also the vice president for advancement (Midwest
State University, 2012). In the course of all faculty interviews and most administrative
interviews, it was difficult to get participants to discuss anything except teaching. Both
schools had created formal and informal settings for the discussion of the practice of
teaching. Faculty members shared their thoughts, opinions and concerns with the interviewer
regarding technology integration, assessment of student success, rigor and feedback, the
balance between theory and applied learning, and undergraduate research. There was a sense
of urgency in their voices that demonstrated an active engagement in the underlying
pedagogy and learning. Professor Davids of Midwest State for example, talked about critical
thinking and creating deeper understanding for his students:

   Getting them to think more about the structure and what it’s for and why we
care…you click the button NSPS and it will give you the answer, but knowing
when you should click it and what’s wrong once you’ve clicked it, or why you
should worry about the answer it gave you.

   New England College created an informal meeting on Friday evenings at a local bar/
restaurant that they call “seminar”. Open to any interested faculty, it was an opportunity that
engaged many of the faculty over the course of the year in conversations and informal work
over a drink or a meal. This informal social setting provided a collegial experience.
Professor Pantheon described that give and take: “There are people there you talk to that you
have no good reason, in the run of the University, to see them and people who have wildly
interesting things to say.” Beyond this, Professor Campbell described the seminar as
providing faculty members a safe, interdisciplinary environment to discuss their work and challenges.

The faculty at New England College and Midwest State University thought about teaching frequently. They studied learning and they worried about how to make their teaching better, how to go deeper, and how to spark the interest of a flagging student. This habitual worrying and thinking translated into creative action. At times this action may result in the adoption of a new technology, a better grading metric or a new resources. That same productive worry has also resulted in innovations that have lead to better teaching and learning across the institution. New England College replaced their three credit course system with a four credit course system to allow greater depth and rigor. Midwest State University had begun experimenting with a similar system. Courses were redesigned, evaluated and redesigned again. Outcomes were measured and best practices were disseminated across the faculty. By hiring with great teaching as the primary attribute of new faculty and by creating a culture where expectations are high and teaching is supported, both New England College and Midwest State University have created an environment where student learning is the first priority.

**Faculty Engagement**

Midwest State and New England College both had strong shared governance and a strong tradition and expectation for campus citizenship. While great teaching was the first requirement, President Johnson listed good campus citizenship as the second requirement for faculty success, promotion and tenure at New England College. Professor Campbell explained how faculty members have taken it upon themselves to create groups that meet
regularly to talk about issues of concern to the University as whole, such as the topic of women in the curriculum:

We had something called “women in the curriculum” and it was started by a man, maybe a philosopher, we had in those days. It had no chair, it had no structure but it had Tuesday at 2:30. Anybody who wanted to talk about anything relating to women could come. Then sometimes someone said “I’ll take care of next time”, and they’d do a presentation. It was 80 percent men.

It was the English professor working on the he/she language and the reason behind it. We had three history professors trying to understand “how do we change history? How do we put women back in?”

Midwest State University was born out of faculty engagement. In the late 80’s when the school was transitioning to public liberal arts, the research and planning that guided that change, the foundation of their current campus structure was borne out of the faculty itself.

Both Midwest State University and New England College had active faculty and vibrant senates. Both oversaw the dynamic curriculums of their universities and also held significant power over University policy and priorities. The Presidents and the Provosts at Midwest State and New England both conferred regularly with the senate and its officers, as well as individual faculty members. This frequent and familiar interaction allowed for the free exchange of ideas and built trust between the faculty and administration. Faculty suggestions, experiments and recommendations have had significant impact on the course of the two institutions; and the willingness of administrators to share power with the faculty allowed the campus to come together when facing threats. Professor Campbell described a situation when changing demographics in the region threatened New England College
enrollment and the administration gave a data driven presentation detailing the threat, the faculty decided to take direct action:

And the faculty said well alright, and we went out to schools, had counseling meetings and got involved in regional schools. No organization, they’d ask[ed] for volunteers and got more than they needed. Faculty went places, they recruited; they did it quietly.

As course loads and class sizes began to increase, however, faculty engagement came under threat as faculty members found themselves running low on time to participate and still reach their primary goal of great teaching. Both New England College and Midwest State University had a culture of creating faculty salary lines over administrative lines (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Both schools had evolved systems and committees that do work that at many schools is done by administrators or staff members. With little excess capacity for additional work by administration and staff and growing workloads, faculty members are challenged to meet their commitments. Multiple years without annual raises and the commensurate loss of morale left faculty members feeling overloaded and in danger of burning out. Professor Davids--who worried that faculty members would soon be asked to teach a fourth class--wondered how he or the other dedicated faculty would be able to carry the additional load.

Shared governance and an engaged faculty is unwieldy at times and it can be argued that the quickly changing world of higher education demands quick decisions. The reorganization of Midwest State University administration, recounted by Professor Iris who was serving as president of the faculty senate at the time, illustrates the pace of change in the shared governance environment:
First year your forms don’t work; your stationery doesn’t work; nothing works. And second year, you are kind of rattling around it. And then at the third or even fourth year. It took us a couple of years to even reorganize Faculty Senate, because we had work to do first and to this day, I mean we still have a few things out there is like that still don’t really fit, thus we never really got to that little thing.

Even with lack of agility as a potential weakness, both Midwest State University and New England College had the ability to draw on all of their intellectual capital and labor as they faced those challenges. Shared values and a clear understanding of mission at both campuses ensure that work will be focused. As professor Iris stated while pointing at a passing student, “No matter how bloody the battles get, students will remain the priority.”

**Leadership**

Leadership--both current and past--has been critical to the success of both Midwest State University and New England College. Both universities were lucky enough to experience transformative leadership; Midwest State University starting in the late 80s and New England College starting in the mid 90s.

**Transformational leadership.** At Midwest State University, two leaders, the President and Dean of Education, provided the guiding vision and commitment that allowed Midwest to reinvent itself. They did this by adhering to the principle of Bass’s Transformational Theory (Bass, 1985), and motivating faculty and the campus to understand that the task and the eventual mission of Midwest State was important--even unique--and that their work was important in defining the new mission the campus was undertaking. This engagement of the institution’s and particularly the faculty’s, beliefs, encouraged them to
focus on team and organizational goals rather than their own interests. Bass believed that the start of the transformational awareness of task importance and value, caused focus to first be on team or organizational goals, rather than individual interests and activated higher order needs such as belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Midwest State University’s President Smith showed signs of becoming a transformative leader. Accessible to faculty and committed to transparency, he was conscientiously working with the campus community to face not just the challenges of the day, but the larger questions of tomorrow. Smith’s President’s Coalition was examining the core practices and beliefs and the changing landscape of higher education in general. By working with a representative group and reporting back regularly to the faculty and campus as whole, Smith hoped to engage the campus in the discussion of how to maintain values even while examining traditional methodology.

New England College had experienced 18 years of transformation under the leadership of President Johnson. Coming to a campus in the midst of a faculty labor action with low morale and challenging finances, she set to work to help New England College live up to its potential. Building on the existing student centered culture and using positive external feedback in the form of a high ranking in U.S. News and World report (New England College, 2012), Johnson was able to create momentum on campus. Johnson described the change this way:

Along the first year or the second year, whenever the hell it was, U.S. News and World Report came out with us # 1 in public liberal arts colleges and we said “What the hell is this?” (laughter) You know we didn’t plan it, we didn’t know about it and it happened to us. We said “Oooh, this is good”, and so we
started to help our reputation along. It just kept happening so we started to think, “Hey we are pretty good here, this is good, hey look at this.” We’re leading, who knew? You know it started to have an effect, people started to get more confident and more ready to do more things and it was fabulous for us and that was good and we just kind of kept rolling.

Johnson engaged with administrators and faculty, and communicated a vision of New England College that was both aspirational and in keeping with their existing culture. She supported new initiatives, encouraging the existing culture of experimentation. Johnson guided this activism through carefully thought out plans that moved them closer to their shared vision. Johnson did this with a give and take style that introduced new ideas while also accepting and building on new ideas from the campus community. She said:

I had a plan, I always have a plan, I don’t always know what the plan is sometimes, but, you always have a plan, and you know, that far back, and I don’t even remember what the plan was. It was just that there were all these things we had to do in terms of advising and curriculum and student success and making clear to ourselves what student success might actually be. It was 16 years ago I forget what the hell I did, but, we did a lot of stuff. Sometimes doing stuff puts people in an activist role, we listened a lot, we said “that’s a good idea” and we did it, it kind of happened.

Consistently throughout the interview process, administrators and faculty members referred to Johnson as transformative. While participants did not always agree with the President’s choices or leadership, they all spoke of her with great fondness and respect. Participants recognized Johnson’s moral authority and accomplishments and despite
occasional disagreements, they recognized the ethical nature of her leadership. The moral character of President Johnson; the ethical values embedded in her vision, and the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and action that the campus and community engaged in confirmed her status as a transformational leader as defined by the literature (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Participants also recognized that New England College—and they by extension—was working on a higher level and with a sense of innovation in comparison to their peer institutions, confirming Johnson’s effectiveness as a transformational leader.

Bass and Riggio (2006) also noted that transformational leadership was not solely the domain of those with positional authority. This was evident at both schools where faculty members took it upon themselves to do work and even create initiatives that were critical to the growth and success of the institution. New England College’s creation of the Women in the Curriculum discussion and its informal seminar gathering were both instances of faculty members seeing a need, and inspiring members of the community to put the well-being of the enterprise above their own needs.

While Bass, Riggio, and Steidlmeier’s Theory of Transformational Leadership focuses on the characteristics and actions of the transformative leader, it recognizes that the actions of the transformative leader cannot be successful unless the culture itself can embrace that work. The character of the faculty, staff and other administrators that serve under a potentially transformative leader are critical to a transformative leader’s success. The ability to fully and constructively engage, to question, challenge and accept change and the hard work that comes with it enable the success of the leader (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998;
Both Midwest State University and New England College’s success in creating the culture that enabled the work should be underscored.

**Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership.** The President at Midwest State University was engaged in a complex effort to guide his University through a significant change. Smith had adopted the adaptive leadership model to guide this initiative. President Smith framed these early conversations through a shared reading of a simple allegorical book on the nature of change. This book provided the framework for frank discussions on the cultural challenges of change in general and provided a shared language for addressing obstacles relating to the nature of change. It prepared the coalition to address the actual challenges facing the University. Jones, in forming a coalition that was large enough to make decisions and small enough to make progress, started the work of identifying the problems, identifying questions and defining potential answers as recommended by Heifitz (1994, p. 128).

President Smith combined these early steps with multiple presentations on the nature and work of the coalition and the kinds of issues it hoped to address. This consistent communication strategy and transparency allowed the President to ripen the issues being addressed, allowing the campus community to process the shared information and begin to engage in the process. Even while providing information to the larger campus community, President Smith was careful to keep the conversations within the coalition confidential, allowing the coalition to manage the issues being discussed, thus maintaining the balance between providing enough information to allow the campus to engage, without providing an overwhelming amount of information that might cause institutional paralysis (Heifitz, 1994, p.128).
This balancing act, maintaining tension and engagement but avoiding anything that might create a panic reaction, was in keeping with Heifetz’s adaptive model. The President had plans in place to release a document with the committee’s findings and recommendations in fall 2012, and follow that release with another round of presentations to stakeholders. These presentations and the issuing of the document echoes Heifetz’s leadership technique of engaging organizational leaders in developing a response to the challenges that have been revealed (Heifitz, 1994, p.128).

The engagement of the community in the actual refining of solutions and their implementation is the final step in the adaptive leadership process (Heifitz, 1994, p.128). This final step will take place in the years that follow the document release and will be the final test of the process. Smith was confident that the collaborative and activist nature of the campus culture would make this final step successful.

President Johnson was, by nature, very intentional in her leadership. Her tenure at New England College was replete with institutional progress. Johnson took off-campus fundraising to a new level, raising significant donor funds for the first time in institutional history. This fundraising has lead to new buildings and renovations, and new scholarship support. On campus, she embraced and promoted ideas that improved student learning such as the change from a standard student class load of four three-credit courses to one of three four-credit courses. In her 18 years as president, Johnson oversaw restructuring of administration as well as the strategic elimination of some programs, and the creation and strengthening of others. While Johnson was not intentional in following Heifetz’s theoretical framework, her practices mirrored it. She described the careful way she used her positional power:
To use the power of the presidency very carefully you don’t just sort of endorse everything, you listen a lot, you get ready to make strategic pronouncements when it is the time to do that. On the other hand, sometimes all you have to do is listen to people and they didn’t want anything except the chance to talk; and sometimes I have to do that. Another thing that I do is that I kind of give some of the basic ideas that I want people to work on and then they go to work on them.

Johnson’s awareness of timing and the different responses to ideas or challenges mirror the Heifetz notion of ripening an issue. When Johnson made a pronouncement she knew that the situation had been fully studied, that the leadership team had developed a well thought out course of action and that she was ready to engage the campus in its implementation. When Johnson chose just to listen, she recognized that an issue was not ripened and that while a challenge might be on the horizon it was not time for action. Finally, when she charged people with investigating or working on a problem, she recognized that the issue they were addressing was not yet ripe, but was worthy of investigation and perhaps worth developing as it became more defined.

President Johnson said; “Listening is the most important. Listening to everybody.” It is through this listening that she evaluated challenges, gathered ideas and information and most importantly captured what she called the “emotional resonances” of ideas. These emotional resonances were what informed her of the ripeness of a campus issue and the likely response to proposed solutions.

Recent financial challenges at New England College provided an example of Johnson’s use of adaptive leadership. In this instance, the challenge presented itself
suddenly, requiring a quick response. The issue ripened swiftly as the media publicly announced the depth of potential cuts. This public announcement made the entire campus aware of both the scope and need for swift action. The perceived urgency of the situation and the engagement of the campus community in its solution indicated that the situation was ripe and ready for action (Heifitz, 1994, p.128).

To prepare the campus to meet this challenge, President Johnson responded immediately in two ways. She gathered her leadership team and tasked them with defining the true extent of potential cuts, their available financial reserves and the creation of a range of budget cut scenarios and responses. Johnson also scheduled multiple full-campus meetings to share the facts of the cuts, seek consensus on potential responses and test the scenarios developed by the leadership team.

President Johnson worked simultaneously with her leadership team and the campus community as a whole, making them the leaders she worked with to craft a response to the cuts, echoing Heifetz’s methodology (Heifitz, 1994, p.128). By engaging the campus community as a whole in the preparation of a response, President Johnson was able to create in them a sense of ownership in the eventual actions selected, thus making Heifetz’s implementation phase easier and more broadly supported.

The support and engagement of the New England College faculty made a swift response possible. The habit of engagement and faculty comfort with change and problem solving supported the President’s actions.
House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory. President Johnson of New England College unintentionally was a consistent practitioner of House and Mitchells Path-Goal Theory (House & Mitchell, 1974). In fact when asked to describe her role as a leader she said;

You figure out where the parade is going and then you clean up the obstacles in front of the parade and then you get the hell out of the way. But actually, the other part of it is that you have to instigate the parade to go--and then they have to think it is their parade.

While the Path-Goal theory is one that is more operational, it was clear that President Johnson understood the need to assist the members of the organization in accepting the mission as their own and then removing obstacles and rewarding good behavior (Evans, 1970). She was aware the tools of the president ranged from financial support and promotion to simple attention. Johnson said:

The other thing you can do is bestow Presidential interest, you can show up at the seminars, if they are writing a journal article, or having a conference you can go to it, you can offer to buy them coffee you can do little things that let people understand that this is something that the president likes. If they feel like getting on board that’s good and if they don’t they are not going to get punished, but they are not going to get the coffee either. Sometimes honestly it’s just about finding the right people, sometimes you ask for volunteers and sometime the vice- president is doing it, sometime the dean is doing it, and they are in charge of the thing and you are just sort of kicking them gently in
the butt every once in a while and reminding them that this is a good thing and they should keep doing it.

Path-Goal Theory challenges more traditional views of top down or directive behaviors from executives. By recognizing the power of a shared vision and shared responsibility for outcomes, President Johnson enacted an operational style that fit the culture of her University.

Both Midwest State University and New England College had leaders both in traditional leadership roles and distributed throughout their campus, who were intentional in their leadership and rooted strongly to the campus culture. Both institutions chose a path of leadership that required collaboration and that collaborative leadership played a strong role in the success of the institutions they were responsible for.

**Interdisciplinary/General Education**

Both Midwest State University and New England College were long-term members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), an organization that “advances the aims of its member institutions and drives awareness of the value of high-quality, public liberal arts education in a student-centered, residential environment” (COPLAC, 2012). Participants at both schools considered their identity as public liberal arts institutions to be a strong part of their culture.

Both institutions have strong general education or liberal arts requirements designed to engage their students in multiple disciplines and work across disciplines. Both universities also maintained a small interdisciplinary major designed to allow students to create their own learning experience and body of knowledge that involved multiple disciplines.
Both institutions had faculty-created standing committees, learning communities and informal social gatherings that provided opportunity to cross disciplinary lines and pursue related or loosely related interests and scholarship. These interdisciplinary opportunities lead to assessment strategies at Midwest State University, such as the senior portfolio that requires students to demonstrate a broad array of interdisciplinary skills. At New England College, interdisciplinary learning communities like Women in the Curriculum created an environment where faculty members were able to share thought on a general topic from different disciplinary perspectives. Midwest State University and New England College have also encouraged and supported faculty in the creation of interdisciplinary courses--some of which have been integrated into the curriculum. Professor Campbell spoke of one class, the 1920s salon that drew art, history, economics and literature faculty together to teach the complex nature of that era in America’s history.

Another key aspect of Midwest State University and New England College’s focus on providing a public liberal arts education was the notion of providing a private liberal arts quality education at a price that makes college more accessible to the general population. Even while admitting that these twin goals can be contrary to each other, the faculty and administration at both institutions pursued them with vigor. The Provost at New England College explained that he used the College’s mission to challenge faculty and administrators to adopt the four credit course structure, when their NSSE scores showed only an average level of academic challenge when compared to area private liberal arts institutions:

At times it felt like a Chicago ward boss gathering support and we got it done, but what had happened is that our NSSE data, while we were getting exceptional results, good enough to get us into that student success in college
book, where we looked pretty average was level of academic challenge. I used that and Bauman, Binham, and Biddle shamelessly with the faculty saying “how could we possible defend not having the same expectations of our students as Bauman, Binham, and Biddle? How could we possibly defend producing graduates who are less well prepared?” So if that is where we want to set our sights, then how do we reorganize the curriculum and how do we provide the needed support?

The resolute pursuit of private liberal arts quality, still tied to the apparently contradictory goal of affordability, was a primary motivator of the cultures of both universities. That contradiction also caused friction and worry when the two institutions were under financial stress.

Midwest State University demonstrated the importance of a liberal arts education in their hiring process. Professor Twist described how the hiring process examined their undergraduate experience with an eye towards interdisciplinary work, noting how in the hiring process “they were looking at people’s undergraduate transcripts to see if you had breadth of coursework”. Professor Davids noted that his interview at Midwest State University was unique for its focus on his undergrad liberal arts experience: “They kept not asking me about what I did at graduate school, but, what had I done at undergraduate”. Rather than focusing on Professor Davids’ graduate research they looked at the mix of classes he took as an undergraduate. Midwest State University had a unique interview process and that process brought forward the faculty that had the skills and background that fit the institutional culture and allowed the faculty to help the University move forward.
New England College embraced the liberal arts philosophy and interdisciplinary studies in their management of faculty. Many faculty members had been supported to explore other disciplines and take on work and teaching that is well outside their discipline. Professor Campbell, a clinical psychologist who had spent almost her entire career at New England and built their psychology major, developed an interest in China and Chinese language. She was supported in pursuing that interest and developed a strong connection to several Chinese universities in the early 90s, while creating one of the first online Chinese/English dictionaries (Campbell, 2012). Through Campbell’s work with China, New England College created partnerships and exchanges with several Chinese universities before most schools began such work. Another example of interdisciplinary work as an advantage was the appointment of Joan Dock, a long-serving faculty member in New England College’s BFA program in writing—as the new arts center director. Dock’s interest and engagement with the visual and performing arts and enthusiasm enabled her to take on this new task in addition to her academic duties.

Both Midwest State University and New England College embraced the liberal arts and interdisciplinary studies as core to their mission. Both institutions had so deeply integrated this concept that it is intrinsically linked to their identity and culture. The choice to differentiate their institutions in this way, they felt, has been a key element in both the marketplace and the quality of learning they provide. Provost Jones of Midwest State described this belief, saying:

I also think people are afraid—I often compare it to—like Midwest is this really nice delicate piece of crystal and they want to be careful how they
handle it because they don’t want to break it, and I think that’s valid because we have gotten to be a unique success story.

Provost George of New England College talked about the liberal arts focus as a recruiting advantage:

The way that we think of ourselves, one of which is that the mission says this is not just some state college. This is not a branch campus. This is a place that has an identity and we have higher aspirations than that. We want to provide a high quality, liberal arts education at a reasonable price. I think there is an altruistic feel to it. The feel that we are doing good in the world to take first generation college students from Potato County and say we are going to give you a quality, small college education. You deserve that—not just the people that can pay $50,000 a year.

**Student Centric**

During multiple visits to both Midwest State and New England College I was immediately struck by the presence of students. Whether the visit took place during a vacation break, finals week or during the academic calendar year, there was a student presence in every office. Some students were working for faculty and administrators but more often students were at the center of the work taking place.

The faculty at both Midwest State University and New England College were consistently available to their students. Walking the corridors, I saw that some faculty members had posted office hours while others had not. More telling though, was that from as early as eight in the morning when I came to campus, to as late five thirty in the afternoon, when my interviews ended, almost every door was open. Lights were on and students were
busy conducting business with the faculty. This simple presence and open door policy demonstrated the priority the two Universities place on student interaction.

Faculty members at both Midwest State University and New England College were deeply engaged with the students, and the learning that goes beyond classrooms and offices. Professor Iris oversaw or served as reader or adviser on the department’s capstone projects in addition to his course load. He described his responsibility for capstone experiences:

Some people call it a senior thesis. It is non-credit bearing. We’ve been doing it for close to 15 years and it’s never been credit bearing. Um, one of the reasons early on was that we didn’t want it to cost our student more money….So, we are involved with three faculty members per student that comes out of this course. It can be 20-30 capstones a year. That adds up. For me it is the equivalent of graduate teaching or being on a committee and getting no credit for it.

Professor Iris worried that as class sizes increased and faculty members struggled to maintain rigor and depth, extra projects like capstone supervision would become impossible.

Professor Davids--who also served in the math department and supported capstone projects, had also developed an additional project above and beyond his regular teaching load; he developed and oversaw a campus center that served off-campus clients with assessment and planning services. This was particularly notable as he also lead the senior portfolio group and advised a student organization. This work load and its impact on his family life had caused him to reevaluate that extra work, particularly his advising responsibilities:
I’m still meeting with them once a week or talking this with folks, but they need a young professor or a young assistant, be [it] students or whatever, and we don’t have any of those…And I think it’s hard, now my kids are six and four and I don’t want to commit more time. They have meetings at 10:30 at night and that’s great for them and I’m glad they do and I remember when I was in college and I was in school, but [even] if I get my kids to bed and then come back, I don’t think I can do it.

Professor Twist had, without intent, become an icon of Midwest State faculty commitment to students. A member of the 1980s transitional faculty group, she embodied the work ethic, commitment to rigor, and belief in Midwest State University ideals that make Midwest State strong. Twist was held up as an ideal by Professor Davids. Professor Davids described Twist’s commitment:

Twist lives in the capitol city. I mean I don’t know if that came up in your discussion. But that’s where her house [is], that’s where her husband is, and she has an apartment up here, but it is 130 miles away. And, she has done that for 25 years. She has done that. And again, that’s awesome, and I am glad she did, because she is the one --as much as I argue with her, she is exactly who we need to --we need to add folks like her.

Professor Twist commuted every weekend and maintained a full course load. She also commuted regularly to the capital to oversee a very active internship program that placed students with legislators as legislative assistants. This program provided Midwest State University students with real, hands on legislative experiences and has lead several students to careers within the state legislature or executive branch. When her overload work,
her rigorous curriculum and her own commitment to prompt feedback are combined you see that Twist was an exemplar of commitment to serving students and providing them opportunities for growth. Twist is unfailing in her humility regarding her current workload.

New England College also demonstrated a faculty commitment to students that went beyond the classroom experience. Professor Campbell told of mentoring several students both while they attend the College and after graduation. One instance of this was a former student who eventually earned a Ph.D. in engineering:

I’ve got a friend who just got a job in mechanical engineering at Southern University and it’s been great because it has given me all kinds of insights. She had no idea. She couldn’t understand why the summer before she started she was invited to the President’s luncheon to talk about the future of education. She said, “I don’t know anything.” I told her you go, you keep quiet and you be the minority and forget about it. That is promotion and tenure. That invitation is a gift and someone in your department has already started working for you. She had no idea what the whole thing was about. We talk occasionally, we wrote a paper together last year, and so we talk. I think she is a little more naïve than I was.

President Johnson described a story that she felt captured the impact that New England College faculty had on their students:

Last spring there was a reception for the kids in rehab services that had been put in their honor society; and one of the kids who was just a graduating senior was speaking and she said, “I never dreamed when I came to New England College, that I would be put in touch with the wider world.” She had
been off to Africa for an internship and Montana for another internship, and her faculty members had gotten her into graduate school somewhere big and far away. She had no clue. She was coming, probably for a vocational type degree and she had no idea what she was getting into--but the world opened up to her.

Professor Pantheon told similar stories of his students and his pride in helping them realize their potential. Pantheon had significant experience teaching in research one institutions before coming to New England College. Despite this, Pantheon said this of his students at New England College:

One of students I had here is one of the best students I’ve had in my life--including grad students--and I’ve had thousands of students. I have any number who are in the top 10 percent of students I’ve ever had. Part of that is it’s so much more hands on here and that you can actually shape and develop the diamonds more than you can elsewhere.

Each faculty member and administrator interviewed told at least one story about a particular student or student experience; most told more. The level of commitment to student success, support and development was deeply embedded in the practices of both New England College and Midwest State University. When making decisions, planning activities or even managing their time, members of both faculty and administration made caring about students a habit of mind.
**Honesty**

Honesty was a theme that was unique to the New England College case study. The development of this theme surrounded the actions and behaviors of President Johnson. For many administrators and faculty, President Johnson’s direct and even blunt honesty had become a defining characteristic. Honesty was something that Johnson considered when hiring others, and was one of her expectations of her leadership team:

> You do have to be really honest and you do have to say what you are going to do and then do it and not lie to people. And you have to pick other people that are like that and you don’t keep around people that are not going to have those same habits-of-mind and behavior.

When asked about the need for truthfulness and transparency, Johnson described how she had “been thoughtful about this for a long time, ever since I was a faculty member and discovered that there wasn’t trust between faculty and administrators.”

Administrators and faculty at New England College referred to Johnson’s straightforward manner and communication as a key factor in their decision to come to New England College or accept promotion to the leadership team. Campbell said, “Part of it was the fact, and I love Johnson but part of it is the fact that Johnson is very directive and honest, a lot of integrity.” Professor Pantheon mentioned the trust of the President as a key factor in initiatives being accepted.

Trust as a commodity and value was often spoken of on campus. Provost George credited the faculty’s trust as a key factor in his selection and a key measure of his success:
I think they felt that I had done a good job with the humanities and that I was someone who was widely trusted at leadership jobs, so that’s why they asked me. So far I’ve been able to maintain that trust.

Participants at New England College indicated that in addition to trust, the standard for honesty was very high. When administrators or presidents either do not do what they say they will, or change their position, it is given great weight by the aggrieved party. As much as participants respected and liked President Johnson, they remembered decisions they considered evasive or arbitrary. One such instance is described by a participant:

Johnson arbitrarily made a decision to cut an existent parking lot. She had assured the faculty that lot would be there; it was in the plans; they would lose one row of cars. You can’t imagine the words, but they were never said to her. They think it won’t do any good, she ignores them and they don’t want to be unpleasant to her. Twenty years ago they would have been at her throat. You said! You lied! If that had been Jacobsen there would have been a full faculty meeting and everyone would have come.

In this single statement, the speaker captured both the high expectations of faculty for transparency and the positional strength of a long-term president.

An administrator at New England College looked at honesty and transparency from a different, if somewhat cynical, perspective:

The default in any academic community is paranoia, because you don’t know and you get good at making things up, and you don’t have any trouble making up a theory to explain this human behavior that you don’t understand. So
what I have to do on my side is make sure that there are understandable reasons out there so they don’t have to create an alternate reality.

This recognition that strong and consistent communication during a decision making process, after a decision was made and if necessary when a decision was changed, was important to maintaining a climate of trust. The apparent dichotomy of stated beliefs and perceptions reveals honesty to be an aspirational goal--one that remains subject to the interpretation and opinion of the individual.

Assessment

Professor Twist of Midwest State University credited the Dean of Instruction for planting the seed of robust assessment as a key element of Midwest State’s transition into a public liberal arts university. Twist said that it was the Dean “who was sort of the bottom line idea guy and he kept asking questions and he didn’t take general platitudes as answers. He wanted to know what evidence is there that we met these various standards in the self-study.” Midwest State University integrated assessment and attention to results into the curriculum created during the transition to liberal arts and to the restructuring of faculty and staff. Assessment was built into all aspects of the university. Students were evaluated on learning outcomes with a full range of methodologies that ranged from testing for content mastery to the presentation of portfolios. Student performance was compared year to year, and guided the changes in teaching methodology and pedagogy. Comparative evaluation with other institutions through national instruments like the National Survey of Student Engagement allowed the faculty to evaluate their curriculum strategically, suggesting changes across disciplines.
Rigorous assessment began in 1973 when graduating seniors were asked to sit for comparative senior examinations in their majors. Assessment quickly expanded to include value added instruments. Pre-test/post-test assessment of entering first-year students and graduating seniors using a variety of nationally and locally developed instruments was implemented. In 1984, Midwest State University received a prestigious American Association of State Colleges and Universities award in recognition for its pioneering efforts in value added assessment. Faculty at Midwest State University produced a brief book that provided several case studies and theoretical models for assessment called *In Pursuit of Degrees with Integrity* (Midwest State University, 1984). With its reputation in assessment established, Midwest State University broadened its assessment strategies to include qualitative analysis and the development of new instruments to measure progress in higher order thinking skills. Today, Midwest State University uses qualitative and quantitative assessment and nationally standardized and locally developed instruments to measure student progress, institutional progress and even the work of their administration (Midwest State University, 2012b).

The breadth of Midwest State’s assessment system was impressive but more importantly, their use of collected data to drive decisions was an ingrained part of their culture. For some, Midwest State University’s assessment culture played a role in their decision to come to Midwest State. Professor Davids was attracted to a school that used data to make decisions:

Just the fact that they really like data … I was talking to somebody who sounded a bit typical, a kind of humanities person, but still he was talking about how much they use data and how much they like it.
A statistician by discipline, Davids found his fit in a school that was committed to data driven decision making on a cultural level. Midwest State University’s attention to data spawned a culture that used data to motivate change and develops internal research has created an environment that includes a change motivator. Midwest State University’s Dean of Students learned to create an assessment designed to identify key issues in student development:

For us it’s a little bit different because you can’t get any attention at Midwest State unless you do assessment. So we started some assessment processes several years ago just so we could say we’re here we’re important, so we’ve actually had some success at student affairs from assessment. We’ve gotten some people to pay attention to the mental health of our students through the American College Health Survey and also the MCHBS survey.

The Midwest State University community took part in many forms of assessment and collected an enormous amount of information. Despite this, one administrator at the University was concerned that the current assessment strategy was too focused on student outcomes and did not assess the effectiveness of some key parts of the University:

[I]t is ironic, I understand it because I spent several years on the faculty but, we are so into assessment and holding students accountable for their performance but we are terrible at doing that ourselves. In fact, we have set up so many mechanisms to make sure that we are protected from honest feedback regarding our personal performance that it is almost laughable at times… That is part of the downside of faculty having so much power. If they get behind something lots of things can happen but, they can also set up
barriers to insulate themselves from things they need to know if they are going to progress and move forward.

While one voice at Midwest State University was concerned about what was not being evaluated, another felt that what they chose to evaluate and the questions they asked helped define the University and keep its values at the forefront. Professor Iris discussed the questions asked in the general faculty’s evaluation of the President: “I think on the basis of that instrument you can see pretty well where our heart and where our intent is.”

One of the inherent challenges of assessment is rooted in the choice of what factors you choose to assess. Practical constraints like limited resources and participant attention force the researchers to choose what to include and what to exclude from an assessment strategy. While there might not have been universal agreement at Midwest State University as to what to assess, there was a strong recognition of assessment’s importance in the work and definition of the University. Midwest State University’s strong assessment culture has become a strong motivator of change and a powerful tool in the implementation of new strategies and the abandonment of others.

**Summary**

This chapter captured core themes revealed by participants at both New England College and Midwest State University. Careful data analysis of interviews, memos, interview notes and artifacts at the two case study schools revealed themes that provide insight into the practices and habits of thought at the two institutions. In
this instance, the dual case studies revealed several themes that were consistent as well as themes that were unique to the case institutions.

The final chapter, Chapter six, summarizes the case study findings and explores their implications for policy, program design, strategic thinking and academic leadership in the context of the two case institutions and, to lesser extent, the field of higher education. Additionally, the last chapter identifies areas for future research.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

The following chapter synthesizes the themes developed from the words of the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. By relating the research with current literature regarding trends in higher education, the researcher creates meaning and suggests potential actions and strategies that would benefit the case institutions, public baccalaureate and comprehensive universities and other institutions of higher education.

Conclusion

Literature examining the practices and habits-of-mind of high-functioning institutions of higher education is limited. The diversity of institutions in the expanding higher education marketplace and the quick rate of change confronting them make the utility of the existing literature limited. Most current publications come in the form of critiques, some from the academy itself (Arum & Roksa, 2010; Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Donoghue, 2008), and some from social critics (Bok, 2006; Dreifus, Hacker, 2010). While some institutions have turned to books written for the corporate world like Jim Collins’ Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap…and Others Don’t, the differences between academic and corporate culture bring into question the ability to generalize the conclusions of business writers like Collins (2001).

The purpose of this study was to better understand the practices and habits-of-mind of administrators and faculty at high-functioning public baccalaureate and comprehensive universities. A review of the literature indicated that this is the first study of its kind examining public baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions in this way. Though the dual case methodology of the study is rooted in phenomenology and the ongoing discovery of
information within the boundaries of the two case institutions, the study was guided by
questions designed to engage participants in the exploration of their own feelings, thoughts
and experiences regarding themselves and their institutions.

Interview questions were focused on the over-arching question: How do campus
faculty and administrative leaders in high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive
institutions understand their role and practices in the success of their institutions? Questions
were designed to provide insight into the following research questions:

1. How do faculty and administrative leaders understand their role in the mission
   and goals of their institutions?
2. How do faculty and administrative leaders at high-functioning baccalaureate and
   comprehensive institutions view and respond to the challenges facing their
   institutions?
3. How do faculty and administrators understand the function of leadership on their
   campus and their role in it?
4. What leadership practices do campus leaders feel are most effective and
   important?
5. How do faculty and administrative leaders view their role in developing and
   maintaining their unique campus culture?

The answers to these questions are articulated by the themes that emerged during the
course of the study. The findings of this case study suggested that participants maintained
deeply rooted practices and habits-of-mind that had direct impact on the success of their
institutions.
During data analysis, some common themes were revealed between the two institutions. There was, however, a theme unique to each of the case institutions. The themes shared by both Midwest State University and New England College were:

- Teaching Faculty
- Faculty Engagement
- Leadership
- Interdisciplinary/General Education
- Student Centric

The theme unique to New England College was honesty; and the theme unique to Midwest State was assessment.

**Shared Theme 1: Teaching**

We want teaching. We want people who are engaged with their kids. We want people who keep reinventing themselves and their minds so they are not doing the same god damn thing for the next 30 years. We need people to be thinking in interdisciplinary fashions we need people to be guiding undergraduate research. (President Johnson)

Faculty and administrators at both institutions were deeply concerned about student learning. This concern was reflected in active conversations about pedagogy, curriculum content and content delivery. Faculty members actively worried about the integration of technology, the balance of applied theoretical knowledge, rigor and higher order thinking skills. For the faculty interviewed, this thoughtfulness encouraged a restless attitude that lead to frequent course revisions, changes in methodology and even strategic changes like the
shift from a standard course load of four courses each worth three credits to three courses each worth four credits.

Active engagement with the teaching process lead to the creation of a promotion and tenure process at both institutions driven by the strength of the classroom teaching of the faculty. By anchoring their focus on teaching and learning in the important promotion process, both institutions have created a practice that embeds teaching as a foundational element in the university cultures.

When addressing the challenges facing their institutions, many participants expressed concerns through a teaching lens, interpreting events and challenges by how they affected their ability to provide good teaching. For example, Professors Twist and Campbell from Midwest State and New England College respectively, saw growing class size (an outcome of budget stress and reduced faculty lines) as a potential challenge to rigor. Twist and Campbell saw the increasing ratio of students to teacher’s impacting individualized instruction and the ability to complete large scale projects and receive timely feedback. Overloaded faculty members would be unable to provide the individualized attention they feel is critical. Professor Iris of Midwest State expressed concern that new systems being designed to pay attention to faculty workload might lessen his ability to do the value added teaching he did informally, in addition to his standard course load. The act of creating systems to prevent faculty overload might make it difficult for faculty members to provide the level of service to students that was part of the teaching culture.

Focus on teaching was a dominant element on both campuses. Teaching and student outcomes provided both institutions with a potential differentiator from marketplace
competition and also increased the quality of student learning and the value of their educational experience.

Shared Theme 2: Faculty Engagement

And the faculty said well alright, and we went out to schools, had counseling meetings, got involved in regional schools. No organization, they’d ask for volunteers and get more than they needed. Faculty went places they recruited, they did it quietly. (Professor Campbell)

Both New England College and Midwest State shared a tradition of faculty engagement in the work of the college. President Johnson of New England College referred to campus citizenship and participation as secondary only to teaching, in guiding promotion and tenure decisions. Professor Davids shared how he was told during his interview that he would be taking on service assignments on and off campus and encouraged to find opportunities that he would enjoy and would encourage his growth.

Faculty engagement allowed both universities to engage the faculty in participating in the creation of policy, timely management of the curriculum and kept faculty members involved in and aware of the challenges and opportunities facing the University. Because governance at the two case study Universities was not dominated either by the faculty or the administration, both schools were able to marshal the full capacity of the University to deal with challenges and do so with a shared understanding of institutional values and goals. With the clarity of purpose that engagement creates, Midwest State University and New England College were able to work together to adapt and address challenges.
Shared Theme 3: Leadership

One of the fundamental things I believe is that change has to come from where it comes from; the bottom or the middle or wherever, the people can be leaders from wherever they are. I just encourage them and tell them and tell the provost and behave as though that’s the way it is supposed to be. So that’s the way it is. (President Johnson, 2011)

Strong leadership from individuals in traditional positions of authority and by non-traditional leaders throughout the institution allowed both institutions to effectively make decisions and react to institutional threats and opportunities.

The Presidents of both institutions exhibited a sophisticated understanding of the task of effective leadership. Johnson and Smith applied a broad array of leadership practices that linked strongly to multiple leadership theories and their component practices. Both Presidents were very thoughtful and intentional about their leadership practices, maintaining an atmosphere of transparency and accessibility.

President Johnson had a very practical understanding of House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory of Leadership, recognizing her responsibility to assist her college in developing a vision or path and then providing the organization tools to follow that vision while removing obstacles. Presidents Smith and Johnson were strongly aware of their role to create a vision for their institutions that was inclusive of the voices and values of their organization. The presidents of both institutions exhibited humility in their words and actions, each emphasizing in their interviews that it was not about them and that the work of the University rested in the hands of the larger University community.
Johnson as an 18 year President, had senior status at her institution and was familiar and trusted. While her gravitas is somewhat balanced by the long memories of her faculty and many years of hard decisions, it was an asset that she consciously used to move the University forward when it was required. President Smith on the other hand, was early in his Presidential tenure and while his two years as Provost increased his familiarity, he was still defining his Presidency. President Smith also faced the challenge of having his entire Presidency (thus far) take place in a time of economic volatility. Both Presidents were very aware of where they were in their terms and were conscious of their strengths and weaknesses.

Faculty leaders were likewise aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their role in governance. Strong governance was powerful but unwieldy for both faculty leaders. All faculty participants recognized their role in maintaining the work of the University, even while working with administrators to identify and address institutional challenges.

**Shared Theme 4: Interdisciplinary/General Education**

Midwest State will demonstrate its public liberal arts and sciences mission by developing educated citizens needed to protect our democracy and offer creative solutions to state, national and global problems. It will do so through transformative experiences that foster critical thought, daring imagination and empathetic understanding of human experiences at home and around the world. (Midwest State University, 2012b)

One third of bachelor’s degrees awarded in the United States are in the liberal arts with less than one third of those in the humanities. Of the remainder, business as a major accounts for 20 percent (NCES, 2011). The number of baccalaureate degrees granted in the
liberal arts and humanities granted as a percentage of the whole have been in steady decline since 1970 (NCES, 2007). Despite this, both Midwest State and New England College chose to make a strong liberal arts core the center of all their degrees and programs.

While their commitment to the liberal arts is foundational, participants at both schools recognized it has become a challenge to market the liberal arts both to potential students and legislators. Participants spoke about how their discussion of the liberal arts became focused on student outcomes and skills. President Johnson described how she does not use the liberal arts message with external audiences: “I don’t talk about public liberal arts because who gives a hoot about it. I talk about things that we are doing for them, the things that our kids are doing.” President Smith on the other hand found that Midwest State University’s practice of having all scholarship recipients engage in on-campus employment, draws a stronger response than curriculum.

Both schools have also maintained an environment that crosses discipline boundaries partially through the shared curriculum and partially through social constructs like New England College’s “Seminar” and active shared governance. At both schools, course work and majors were developed that intentionally cross academic boundaries. As with the liberal arts, participants reported rarely speaking to external audiences about the need for interdisciplinary studies.

This is not to say that both institutions are not firmly rooted in liberal arts and interdisciplinary work. For both New England College and Midwest State University, the liberal arts and interdisciplinary curriculum was not a tradition, but rather, the answer to their perpetual question of how to help their students learn and prepare them for successful lives and careers.
Shared Theme 5: Student Centric

Here at New England College people knock themselves out for students and students perceive and appreciate that. It is part of what makes us the way we are. I think that student centered culture is impervious to a Presidential change. It is something that faculty notice right away when they come to New England College. Students here make a lot of demands. It is one of the things that makes it demanding to teach here but its,…I’m proud of it. (Provost George, 2012)

It would be a mistake to assume that the teaching theme and the student centric theme are congruent. While teaching is a powerful tool in achieving student learning, it is only one of the pieces of a larger quilt. To the observer, the most powerful support that faculty, staff and administrators give their students is accessibility. Faculty members were aware that by making themselves available, they could provide the individualized attention that supports student success and retention. Students had the opportunity to work with faculty members; addressing specific questions, projects and undergraduate research. In addition to academic support faculty members got to know their students, building transparent relationships that lead to long term mentoring relationships.

Administrators and student affairs professionals also showed a deep commitment to student well-being and success. Members of the cabinet made themselves accessible to students with questions or problems, meeting regularly with student leadership and students that request a one-on-one meeting. Student affairs officers consciously reached out to support students and identify student concerns and challenges. Once a problem is identified action is
taken, ranging from an individual intervention to a reorganization of student affairs itself to meet the changing needs of the student body.

**New England College Theme: Honesty**

She does it because she’s who she is. She’s driven and committed in the stuff she takes on and she will fight for. She doesn’t always win but she will make the good fight. She will push hard, she is incredibly reasonable and people trust her. (Professor Pantheon, 2012)

Honesty and trust came up frequently in conversations with participants at New England College. President Johnson saw trust as a resource, that needed to be preserved and built. She also saw that honesty, or the perception of honesty, related not just to the truth of a simple fact but rather a congruence of behavior with the values of institutional culture.

Faculty members had standards of honesty that ranged from a factually untrue statement to an outcome that was not communicated. One faculty member considered it dishonest when a faculty member applied for tenure with a pilot portfolio process that involved self-critiques and then failed to receive tenure. The faculty member observing this found the process to be like entrapment and inherently dishonest. Another faculty member felt that failure to respond to a question or a concern on the part of the President was dishonest.

While every participant spoke of Johnson fondly, many stating that they trusted and respected her, some of those same participants felt she had lied to them. This apparent dichotomy of honesty and dishonesty seemed not to bother the participants. Honesty and the resultant trust were significant at New England College. Sensitivity to perceived dishonesty or behavior that was not trustworthy damaged the collegial environment despite the
President’s intentional efforts to the contrary. It could hypothesized that one of the challenges of a long tenure as President in combination with the long memories of senior faculty is that perceptions of honesty and trust become even more critical.

**Midwest State Theme: Assessment**

“You can’t get any attention at Midwest unless you do assessment” (Dean McCoy, 2012).

Midwest State makes an excellent case for the power of data driven decision making. With a broad array of measurement goals, methodologies and instruments, the Midwest State faculty created tools to better track student learning, measure the impact of instructional changes and even let their President know what they thought of his or her work. They continue to work on new ways of measuring learning and skill development, even working on entirely new measures for hard to evaluate 20th century skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Despite the breadth of their evaluation strategies and the transparency with they share results, there is an analytical gap around teaching performance. Despite Midwest State’s deep commitment to teaching and learning and their matching commitment to assessment, they have chosen to avoid assessment of instruction. As one Midwest State administrator said:

I understand it because I spent several years on the faculty, but, we are so into assessment and holding students accountable for their performance, but we are terrible at doing that ourselves. In fact, we have set up so many mechanisms to make sure that we are protected from honest feedback regarding our personal performance that it is almost laughable at times.
Despite this one area that is not closely evaluated, Midwest’s ingrained commitment to examining student outcomes and comparison to peer institutions, brought them the hard data they need to move the university forward.

**Answers to Research Questions**

**How do faculty and administrative leaders understand their role in the mission and goals of their institutions?**

“We have this cohesive faculty and staff that, and it wasn’t just the faculty, it was also these incredibly wonderful staffers that we have, everybody was moving in the same direction (Twist, 2012)”.

At both Midwest State and New England College, faculty and administrative leaders saw themselves as members of a community responsible for the pursuit of a shared mission. While there was an awareness of hierarchy and positional authority there is no sense of superiority, rather leaders saw themselves as servants to their institutional missions. Most participants also felt that part of their role was to worry about the long term viability of the institution and to preserve the values and culture of the institution. Finally, faculty and administrative leaders have a clear understanding that the success of their institutions is closely linked to the success of their students.

**How do faculty and administrative leaders at high-functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions view and respond to the challenges facing their institutions?**

You know, if you look through Midwest’s catalog, we look just like everyone else. I’m not sure that going to serve us well in the future. I think, again, as long as we have the same student body, we should trust that student body and make ourselves look different. Either it’s the way we deliver education, or
whatever. Um, I don’t know. It could be internship; it could be on the applied, getting kids out there. It could be practical, changing our whole method of instruction. We’ve got to do something that sets ourselves apart (Provost Jones, 2012).

At the two case institutions faculty and administrative leaders actively engage with both short and long term challenges. Their attention to external trends and long term developments in higher education often guide short term strategy. Campus leaders paid attention to outcomes, and use assessment to identify challenges and strengths. When confronting challenges, faculty and administrative leaders at the two institutions took action. The action they took was often collaborative and was transparent and clearly communicated. At both Universities faculty and administrative leaders worked in concert, sharing responsibility for facing the challenges of the day.

**How do faculty and administrators understand the function of leadership on their campus and their role in it?**

There is a difference in perception based on the participants’ membership either in the faculty or the administrative participant group. Faculty members opine that they are the sole arbiters of the curriculum and also believed that they had a policy role and a voice in major decisions affecting their institution. Those same faculty leaders expected administrators to take a lead role in revenue generation, marketing, admissions and relationships with government, governance groups and donors.

Administrators at the case universities felt they had a leadership role with external constituencies and strategic and financial decision making authority. Both groups were guided by the vision and values of their respective institutions. This shared direction enabled
them to overcome differences in areas of shared responsibility and maintain healthy conflict typified by dialogue and questioning.

**What leadership practices do campus leaders feel are most effective and important?**

Listening. Listening is the most important. Listening to everybody… as an administrator I do nothing. I don’t mow the grass, I don’t clean the bathrooms, I don’t teach the classes, I don’t do any of that stuff. All those other people do that stuff. My job is to make sure they can do their stuff. (Johnson, 2012)

Listening, communication and over-communication were practices that were repeated by several participants. An attitude of service and a respect for colleagues was present on both campuses. Honesty and transparency and holding one another accountable for results was also a routine practice at both institutions.

**How do faculty and administrative leaders view their role in developing and maintaining their unique campus culture?**

Participants from both the administrative group and the faculty group on both campuses were active stewards of the culture. Those same participants also felt that on occasion it was their role to challenge or enhance the culture. There was a conscious effort on the part of leaders at both institutions to preserve their practices while remaining open to adjusting the way they deliver services or operate.

**Recommendations and Strategies for Public Comprehensive and Baccalaureate Universities**

This research consisted of case studies conducted at two high functioning public institutions, one a baccalaureate and one a comprehensive. An analysis of participant interviews, memos and artifacts produced several themes that capture habits-of-mind and
practices at both institutions. Based on the themes that resulted, the following recommendations were extrapolated to inform the institutions studied. Further, these same recommendations can be generalized to inform other public baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions as well as other aspects of the higher education landscape. Public comprehensive and baccalaureate universities seeking to focus their mission, build on strengths and strengthen their position in the marketplace should consider strategies that include; differentiation, diversity, administrative and faculty leadership, a focus on individualized treatment of students, and hiring.

**Recommendations and Strategies for Differentiation**

The higher education marketplace has expanded, providing new models for education and training to meet the needs of an increasingly complex world. More recent additions to the marketplace include robust community college systems, for-profit institutions and online education, which have all begun to serve distinct and overlapping demographic groups. Many land grant and flagship state universities have focused on developing themselves as research schools, adopting a business model that is less reliant on state and tuition funding (Abbey & Capaldi, 2011).

Caught in the middle of this competitive marketplace are public baccalaureate and comprehensives. The traditional public baccalaureate and comprehensive missions of access and regional service have been subsumed by community colleges; their professional or graduate teaching role has been subsumed by the better equipped and research-driven research universities.

Midwest State and New England College were in a period of transition, under market pressure from increasing competition and needing to find a niche in the new model of higher
education in order to redefine them. They have, thus far, differentiated themselves with a
strong focus on teaching and a curriculum driven by the liberal arts.

The choice of how to differentiate is secondary to the need to do so. In both
instances, the two case institutions identified differentiation strategies that built on existing
strengths while making them unique. If comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions are to
thrive, they must consider the adoption of a differentiation strategy. These strategies can
come from program emphasis, a thematic approach, methodology or curriculum. The
experiences of Midwest State and New England College suggest that differentiation is rooted
in the academy and campus culture, not marketing or athletic prominence. Institutions
should examine their culture and their roots and identify their strengths, and intentionally
build on those items.

**Recommendations for the Prioritization of Teaching**

Both New England College and Midwest State University, as self-described teaching
universities, are culturally pressured as new faculty members seek the research focus they
became accustomed to as they pursued their terminal degrees, usually in a research one or
two setting. Both schools have created a deeply embedded culture that quickly acclimates
new faculty or, in the case of some new faculty, lets them know that Midwest State or New
England College may not be a good fit.

Faculty accessibility, feedback and reflection add value to educational outcomes. The
increasing focus on publication as the primary arbiter of tenure and advancement can distract
from the task of teaching and quality of learning. Since comprehensive and baccalaureate
institutions are by definition not research centered, a focus on teaching offers them a
potential advantage, increasing the quality of student outcomes.
Recommendations and Strategies for Diversity

The impact of the growing majority of professional women in higher education and an increasingly diverse population of graduates is beginning to create change in traditional power structures within the academy as slowly, the faculty and administration come to resemble their more diverse students. Comprehensive institutions--like Midwest State, are challenged to maintain access in the face of the wide spectrum of college preparation levels of entering students. Both Midwest State and New England College had student bodies that were predominantly white and female. It is no surprise that "serious conversations with students who are very different from [them] in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values" (NSSE Report, 2009) is a point of consideration at both schools. The two case institutions are located in regions that do not have a diverse population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). If the two institutions are to remain relevant and provide their students with a global level of education, they must overcome the geographic and demographic challenges they face. Additionally, increasing diversity requires the two case Universities to create new programs that support the growth and retention of minority student populations.

The issue of a diverse student body has been at the forefront of higher education for decades (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1995). As predominantly regional universities, comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions have tended to reflect the population of their region, leading to some institutions being dominated by one ethnic majority. The challenge to create a student body that is more reflective of both the nation and the global community must, therefore, be a top priority. Recruitment must be active and will require investment in specialized staff, the development of programs attractive to the
target population and the investment of significant scholarships. At New England College, members of minority groups visiting campus were introduced to elements of campus—both people and activities—that were tailored particularly to their interests. For a regional university to overcome diversity challenges requires significant commitment and resources to succeed. Failure to make those commitments endangers the ability of the institution’s graduates to succeed in a global society.

**Recommendations and Strategies for Administrative Leadership**

Leadership at both case institutions were deeply aware of the culture and habits-of-mind of the institutions at which they were employed. All administrators shared a commitment to transparency in their actions and communication, and a commitment to listening to student and faculty constituencies.

Presidents at both institutions were also aware of the unique status of their positions and the accompanying influence and expectations that were inherent in their role. Both Presidents were also intentional about applying leadership practices in their work. President Smith applied Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994) intentionally, and President Johnson applied House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory (House & Mitchell, 1974) completely, without even referring to it by name. They both applied both theories in their daily work. An awareness of pacing change so as to ripen an issue and engage participants without overwhelming them as described in Heifetz’s Theory of Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994), was demonstrated numerous times as was their ability to work with the campus to develop a shared vision or path and then provide them the tools to achieve that goal while removing obstacles, as described in House and Mitchell’s Path-Goal Theory (House & Mitchell, 1974).
New England College at the time of the study, was preparing for the departure of what for them had been a transformational leader as described in Bass’s Theory of Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985). Through Johnson’s charm, will and listening skill she had been successful in creating a culture in which the campus perceived and pursued a higher calling and was able to move forward and sublimate personal agendas, which is how Bass’ theory gets implemented (Bass, 1985).

Midwest State’s president had many signs of also becoming a transformative leader for his university. A well liked, clear communicator and attuned to the culture and values of the University, Smith was on the verge a leading a transformation he hoped would take the University out of the reactive mode it has been in thus far. It is clear however that in the late 80s and early 90s, Midwest State enjoyed the presence of two transformative leaders--the President and Dean of Academic Affairs--that guided Midwest State through its transition into a public arts school.

The two case studies suggest that institutions should seek out leaders who are either part of or have a deep understanding of their history and culture of their institution. The ideal President would have a deep appreciation of existing frameworks but also have the drive and will to lead the campus in exploring both incremental improvements and threats that require transformational change. One of the case study presidents came from a traditional academic background while the other did not, and neither were alumni of their institution. This suggests that a traditional background or past experience with the institution is not critical. Wherever the leader comes from, they must be familiar with the institutions culture and habits-of-mind and have the intentional leadership skills to lead their campus.
Recommendations and Strategies for Faculty Leadership

Both of the case schools enjoyed strong faculty leadership and participation in shared governance. Both institutions maintained open and collegial communication between the administration and faculty and were committed to doing this even in periods of stress or conflict.

While the development of curriculum was rooted in the faculty, faculty leadership extended far beyond those traditional bounds, mostly in a consultative role. The faculty senate contained subcommittees that monitored and advised on budget issues and worked together with student services on co-curricular programs and committees.

Even in the face of economic challenges and hard decisions, the campus administration and faculty continued to work together, guided by the habits-of-mind and values of the campus. This ability to work together in the identification of problems and the crafting and implementing of solutions enabled the university to bring its full intellectual resources to bear on challenges.

It should also be noted that both case study Universities had a unionized faculty that was active in protecting faculty labor rights and improving faculty working conditions. A strong separation between the roles of the faculty senates and the unions seemed to make it possible to maintain the high functioning nature of the case study schools’ shared governance.

Even though this case study discusses some of the challenging aspects of shared governance, such as group behaviors or lack of agility, this research suggests that any challenges associated with strong shared governance and collaborative behavior are well worth the effort.
As public universities, both case institutions had to contend with a wide range of external influences and governance. Even as their ability to act independently was limited and their resource base challenged, they worked to forge a unique approach to their missions. This unique approach was not rooted in a refusal to face the changing environment but rather in their ability to apply their principles to the current environment in order to develop their own place in the higher education marketplace. Campus culture was maintained and lived by the faculty. Serious efforts to make change at a university require strong faculty leadership skills and engaged faculty members.

**Recommendations and Strategies for Student Focus**

Both case schools took an active interest in the success of their students. Administrators, faculty and staff members recognized that a key element of retention and student learning is personalized support and they committed to it. A high level of access to faculty, administrators and staff provide students with quick feedback and answers to critical questions. Members of the campus freely embraced a mentoring role when it was needed.

While it could be argued that a smaller school, similar in size to a private liberal arts school like New England College, might find this work more manageable, Midwest State University, a school four times the size of New England College, provided that same environment. This suggests that this habit-of-mind is scalable to larger institutions. For the two case institutions, the depth of their commitment to students became a way they differentiated themselves from their competition. As increasing attention is paid to retention, graduation rates and learning outcomes, this strategy will grow in value.
Recommendations and Strategies for Hiring

Both Midwest State and New England College expended considerable resources and were very intentional in their hiring practices. Both institutions took the time to make sure all potential candidates were aware of the values and culture of their campus prior to applying. Both Midwest State and New England College had developed very specific skills and values profiles for their hires, and both developed elaborate interview processes that tested potential hires against those expectations. By hiring intentionally, Midwest State and New England College were able to reduce faculty turnover and recruit faculty equipped to succeed and progress at their institution. New faculty and staff hires were selected primarily for their ability to support the values and mission of the institution.

Intentional hiring as part of a differentiation strategy is effective and could be used to reflect the values and strengths and further the goals of the hiring institution. By carefully selecting each employee due to their ability to move the University forward as a whole rather than serve the narrow needs of a project or department, the institutions as a whole is made stronger. Use of this practice could be the foundation of an institution which would make all the other recommendations easier to follow.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research sought to address the lack of research examining the challenges and opportunities particular to public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions. This qualitative study examined the habits-of-mind and practices of a high-functioning public baccalaureate and a comprehensive university through the eyes of both administrative and faculty leaders at the two institutions. While this study began to explore the nature of these
institutions, it is clear that further research is justified to further explore this unique part of the higher education spectrum. Further topics for research include:

1. Case studies should be carried out on presidencies at other institutions, deepening understanding of skills, habits-of-mind and practices of successful presidential leadership.

2. Case studies should be carried out on faculty leadership and shared governance at other institutions, deepening understanding of skills, habits-of-mind and practices of successful faculty leadership.

3. A study should be undertaken to compare current hiring practices for both faculty and administrators with the mission, values and goals of multiple universities. The study could assist in the development of hiring processes that better serve the institution as a whole.

4. Studies should undertaken of larger universities to better understand the relationship between institutional size and individualized attention to students.

5. Study the students who attended the case or similar institutions and compare the purpose of the intentional leadership to see if it had the intended results on students success.

There is a lack of research specific to public baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions.

There is no sign that the volatile climate of change in the higher education will improve.

Further study is required to preserve and strengthen these important institutions.

Reflections

As a person who had student experiences ranging from undergraduate at a private liberal arts school to this doctoral program at a large research one institution, as well as a
career at both a land grant institution and a comprehensive, I bring with me a distinct set of personal experiences and opinions about the different types of institutions making up the higher education spectrum. This knowledge base has been further expanded in the course of my work in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Iowa State University which provided me a much enhanced understanding of community colleges. This broader understanding of the higher education enterprise and its diversity informed the selection of my topic in that I observed that there is a research gap in the study and understanding of comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions. I also recognized that this gap could help me to better understand the institution at which I am currently employed. When I began my research, I expected that I would find practice that would make me critical of my current work place and past institutions where I was employed.

To my surprise what I discovered, through the voices of my participants, was that they faced many of the same challenges as the institutions where I have studied or worked. The high cost of education manifested by both the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) and declining public support, the challenges of creating a diverse campus environment, grade inflation, class size, changing student expectations--all were present at both Universities.

There is no surety that the case study schools herein described will be able to succeed in face of the daunting challenges to higher education. It is my belief, however, that their chances are better than average. Through this research, I have come to believe that the problems are the same for many institutions and that they will succeed or fail based on the habits-of-mind they have developed and their culture.

Midwest State and New England College have both adopted a habit of forward looking restlessness. Their administration and faculty looked forward, they worried about
bad outcomes, and they analyzed data with an eye toward detecting and solving problems.
This habit and shared commitment to the success of their institutions prepared them to face
the volatile environment which higher education now inhabits.

A comprehensive intentionality pervades the cultures of both New England College
and Midwest State University, be it in the very specific hiring practice at Midwest State, or
New England College’s strategic plan that explains not only what the University will do, but
also why it should be done. This intentionality, present throughout the participant interviews
sampled herein, demonstrates practices that prepare the two institutions to address challenges
in both the long and short term.

There is no single element that makes one institution succeed while others like it fail,
there is the potential to establish habits-of-mind and practices that allow an institution to
bring all its resources to bear on whatever challenges the future may bring.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview protocol for the project follows Seidman’s interview protocol which allows questions and themes to surface through the Interview process. Briefly summarized, the initial interview familiarizes the investigator with the participant while revealing themes and subject areas for exploration. The second interview allows for a deeper investigation of the relevant themes that were discovered. Finally, the third interview (in this case aided by the participant’s review of their own transcript) allows the participant to reflect on their thought seeking deeper insight into their beliefs.

By its nature this style of interview is semi-structured allowing the researcher to follow up on answers that take the researcher beyond the initial scripted questions. Because of the nature of the protocol participants will be asked to reflect on their own comments and some of their own quotes as selected by the researcher. These reflections will be driven by responses to the following questions.

First Interview

What elements have made you a successful higher Ed leader?
1. Could you share your career path to our current role?
2. What is the job of the <position title>?
3. What are the core skills you use as members of the leadership team?
4. You have worked with a team that you inherited and a team which you had input on hiring. Is there a difference in how you worked with them?
5. What do you look for when you are hiring or having input on hiring?
6. How did you learn your leadership skills?
   Probe: What was it like to have a mentor? How did you teach yourself? What past experiences did you draw on?

How does your position differ from other University officers?

What makes the faculty different than staff members and administrators? Probe: Are there any similarities? Is there a difference between how the two groups are treated?

7. To what extent does a successful <title> need to know about, curriculum, fund raising, politics (state and local) and Finance and external communications, internal communication (faculty student)?
   Probe: What don’t you need to know?
8. How would you describe your institution?
9. What is the role of internal voices (students, faculty, staff) and external voices (legislature, community, national organizations, media)? In your decision making?
10. Tell me about your relationship with the President?
11. How do you manage up to the President?
12. Describe the cabinet and the roles of the people in it?
13. What was the reaction of professional peers to your move to <Institution name>, in and out of state?
14. Describe the Ideal <institution name> Graduate.

**Institutional Information**
1. How do you monitor how the university is doing? Probe: specific benchmarks?
2. How have you managed the last three years of economic turmoil both from a state and a student perspective?
3. Do you use any outcome testing NSSE etc.
4. What are the questions I should be asking? Were any of the questions I asked really important?

**Misc.**
1. What question should I be asking?

**Second Interview**

**Hiring:**
1. Talk about the hiring process that brought you to the University and how it differed from other interviews you have had.
2. What qualities and skills were the hiring processes designed to reveal?
3. How did the interview process effect your attitude toward the institution

**Liberal Arts:**
1. How do you define the liberal arts?
2. How does this relate to the Universities or the marketplaces definition?
3. Do you believe the liberal arts is a relevant curriculum today?
4. How does your institution define the liberal arts?

**Teaching:**
1. What role does teaching play in your role as a professor?
2. What role does teaching play in the culture of the organization?
3. How is this importance communicated?
4. How is it weighed in promotion and tenure?

**Governance:**
1. What is your role in the governance of the University?
2. Is your voice heard?
3. Do you have the opportunity to make it heard?
4. What is the role of the administration (or as appropriate) faculty in governance?

**Problem solving:**
1. How do you address changing expectations in the classroom?
2. How do you address changing expectations from incoming students?
3. How do you identify future challenges and position yourself to respond?

**Student Outcomes:**
1. What are the three characteristic you feel every graduate of your institution should have?
2. What is the relationship between teacher and student?
3. What is most challenging about incoming students?

**Relationships with governance groups:**
1. What is the best relationship between faculty leadership and administrative leadership?
2. How have you worked to achieve that relationship?
3. What are the governance priorities for the University?

**Misc.**
1. Do you have any questions for me?

**Third Interview**

**Leadership style:**
4. Describe a few instances when you have played a key role in moving a plan forward.
5. Talk about how things get done on your campus.
6. What makes your colleagues unique?

**Honesty:**
5. How important is honesty on this campus?
6. Can you give an example of when being honest and transparent was painful?
7. Do you trust the administration/faculty to follow through on their responsibilities?
8. Can you give an example of a lie that was told on campus and what that lead to?

**Assessment:**
5. In the course of a week what sorts of assessment to you take part in?
6. In the course of a year?
7. How do you use the assessment you do in day to day and strategic decision making?
8. Has anyone ever to your knowledge misused data?

**Misc.**
1. What else would you like to say?
APPENDIX B
LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

(Date)

Dear (Name of Participant),

When last we met I told you that your institution might serve as a possible case study for my dissertation in Higher Education Leadership at Iowa State University. As you may recall the purpose of my study is to explore the experiences and challenges faced by academic and administrative leaders at a high functioning public baccalaureate and a high functioning public comprehensive institution. By examining and comparing behaviors and belief structures at two different institutions, finding commonalities and differences that will inform and inspire practices at other institutions.

The study will also provide insight into the challenges facing public comprehensive and baccalaureate institutions as an understudied sector of the higher education spectrum. This dissertation is particularly important due to the lack of research specific to this category of schools at a time when leaders and policy makers need to make informed decisions about the future path of similar institutions. Participants are being selected to participate in the study as they are currently or have served as a leader at your institution.

Your institution has agreed to take part in the study. Participants will be asked to participate in three interviews ranging from 45 to 60 minute in length that will explore the following topics: How do campus faculty and administrative leaders in high functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions understand their role and practices and how they contribute to the success of their institutions? The following key research questions will guide that inquiry:

a. How do faculty and administrative leaders understand their roles and responsibilities in the mission and goals of their institutions?

b. How do faculty and administrative leaders at high functioning baccalaureate and comprehensive institutions view and respond to the challenges facing their institutions?

c. How do faculty and administrators understand the function of leadership on their campus and their role in it?

d. What leadership practices do campus leaders feel are most effective and important?

e. How do faculty and administrative leaders view their role in developing and maintaining their unique campus culture?

As these core concepts are explored participants will be asked to reflect on their own development as a campus leader, institutional culture and the beliefs and actions of others. Audio recordings will be made of all interviews for transcription. Participation will last for approximately a three month span over which the 45 to 60 minute interviews will be completed.
The confidentiality of participants will be protected to the fullest extent possible. Pseudonyms for all participants and transcripts will be reviewed by interview participants. Should participants request that information not be used or ask that their words or thoughts be adjusted to maintain confidentiality their wishes will be respected.

Participants will have all departmental or discipline references removed from their comments. Descriptors will be made generic to protect them from identification. Participants will be allowed to review the final product and work with the researcher to make changes that they feel will protect their confidentiality. Data and recordings will be stored on password protected and encrypted computers and files. No one will have direct access to raw data except for the Principle Investigator and participants themselves. Data will be retained in encrypted files in its generic form. Despite precautions confidentiality will be limited as the identity of participants might be implied by their positionality within their case institutions. Should individuals be thus identified they may suffer social and professional difficulties with both personal and professional repercussions.

I look forward to the opportunity to visit with you and learn more about your institution. Please respond to this email if you are willing to participate.

Steve Carignan
APPENDIX C
AUDIT TRAIL

July 26, 2010    Emailed Presidents Johnson and Smith regarding my interest in performing a case study of their universities.

July 26, 2010    Email responses from Smith and Johnson. They responded they would be happy to assist.

July 27, 2010    Phone call to Johnson with proposed intent and use of study.

July 30, 2010    Phone call to Smith and Provost Jones discussing study and intent.

August 2, 2010   Thank you emails, to Johnson and Smith.

March 11, 2011   Email - Proposed a visit to Midwest State.

March 17, 2012   Visited Midwest State meetings with Smith and Jones, campus tour.

July 9, 2012     Email update on dissertation timeline to Jones and Johnson.

November 22, 2011    IRB approval

November 22, 2011   Emailed Johnson and Smith for formal permission to conduct research on their campus laying out research questions and research scope.

November 23, 2011   Received affirmative replies from Smith and Johnson.

November 29, 2011   Emailed invitation letters to administrative participants at both institutions also requested them each to name six faculty leaders for possible interviews.

December 9, 2011   Emailed invitation to faculty participants at both institutions.

January 9, 2012    Emailed consent form to all New England College participants.

January 11, 2012    Conducted round one interviews at New England College with Johnson, George, Bembry, Pantheon and Campbell.

January 11, 2012    Reviewed recording and notes.

January 13, 2012    Conducted round two interviews at New England College with Johnson, George, Bembry, Pantheon and Campbell.

March 14, 2012    Emailed informed consent to all Midwest State participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 26, 27, 2012</td>
<td>First round interviews at Midwest State with Smith, Jones, McCoy, Iris, Twist and Davids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27-27, 2012</td>
<td>Reviewed recordings and notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27-29, 2012</td>
<td>2012 Second round interviews at Midwest with Smith, Jones, McCoy, Iris, Twist and Davids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 4-6, 2012</td>
<td>Third round interviews at Midwest with Smith, Jones, McCoy, Iris, Twist and Davids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 21, 22, 2012</td>
<td>Third round interviews at New England College with Johnson, George, Bembry, Pantheon and Campbell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 30, 2012</td>
<td>Emailed individual transcripts to participants for correction and clarification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 6, 2012</td>
<td>Shared approved transcriptions and proposed themes with Dr. Margaret Empie for triangulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 10, 2012</td>
<td>Based on feedback from Dr. Empie combined two themes. President with a date and time to conduct a phone meeting to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 21, 2012</td>
<td>Shared draft chapters with participants seeking approval and suggestions. Each participant only received chapter and excerpts that were only involved the directly or their quotes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8, 2012</td>
<td>Shared Dissertation draft with Dr. William Backlin and Dr. Margaret Empie to review themes and conclusions.</td>
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