

11-24-2020

Community College Foundation Board Members: The Overlooked Partners

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS: THE OVERLOOKED PARTNERS

CHRISTOPHER S. DOWNING

106 Pages

Due to shifting funding policies for community colleges, the role of the community college foundation has changed greatly from passive fund managers for the institution into active fundraisers. With over 15,000 individuals nationally serving in the volunteer role of community college foundation board member, and managing nearly one billion dollars in annual contributions, this is a key stakeholder group for community colleges. With this increased role in the financial health of community colleges, understanding why these volunteers serve and how they see their role is vital.

After conducting interviews with community college foundation board members across the state of Illinois, three archetypes emerged to describe community college foundation board members: The Super Fan, The Innocent Bystander, and The Doubting Thomas. Using the lens of resource dependency theory, community college foundation board members recognize the greater demand from their linked community colleges. Greater questions emerge on what role the foundations should fill as neoliberal funding decisions have stretched community colleges into social service needs of their students.

KEYWORDS: community college foundation, community college foundation board member, community college

COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS: THE OVERLOOKED
PARTNERS

CHRISTOPHER S. DOWNING

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS: THE OVERLOOKED
PARTNERS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude starts with my wife Susie who has supported me through this entire journey, you are my hero. Thank you to my children, Connor and Hayden, my inspirations. To my sister, Haley, you were the voice of reason when I needed it and that things being harder than I thought is a beautiful thing. To my family and friends who consistently shared words of encouragement, I appreciate it. All of you helped me learn to fly.

Thank you to Dr. James Palmer who started me on the path with insightful feedback and Dr. Dianne Renn for guiding me to the end. Dr. Beth Hatt, I appreciated your insights and encouragement as I conducted my research. To the rest of the committee and other professionals who supported me, your time and attention was extremely valuable.

Throughout the experience, I was reminded it was times like these we learn to live again and that it is times like these time and time again.

C.S.D.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Though community college foundations contribute to the revenue of community colleges, they share little in common with other parts of the community college world. As private nonprofit agencies, community college foundations are legally separate from the community colleges they serve. Foundations can raise monies in ways that the colleges—as public entities—cannot. The foundations can receive private gifts from individuals or businesses and grant the donors valuable charitable tax deductions (Babitz, 2003). They can manage and own property, like farms or dormitories, for financial gain, something that state charters often forbid community colleges from doing (Jackson & Glass, 2000). Foundations may also invest resources in the stock market for long-term growth or short-term substantial gain. Colleges cannot access these financial vehicles because of the risk posed to public monies. The financial freedom and flexibility that community college foundations possess make them an attractive solution to the growing financial inconsistencies community colleges face, especially in light of the long-term downward trends in state fiscal support.

However, community college foundations do not exist without the time and energy of those who volunteer to serve on the boards overseeing these foundations. They number over 15,000 nationwide, more than the total number of community college presidents and trustees combined (Nichols, 2013). In 2017 alone, these individually governed institutions raised nearly a billion dollars in revenue for community college budgets (CASE, 2017). Community college foundation board members do more than raise money. Within their volunteer role, they oversee the work of the foundation, ensuring donors that a fiscally nonpartisan third party, removed from the college itself, determines how the collected funds will be used. These foundation board members set the policy and direction of the foundation, working with college staff to carry out

day-to-day activities. In some cases, they hire and manage the staff who do the work of the foundation, paying their salaries as part of the foundation budget. Foundation board members have clearly become important players in the community college enterprise. Their importance has grown to a point that community college presidents stated working with these board members has expanded more than any other aspect of their jobs (Weinrich & Reid, 2003).

The research on community colleges and on volunteers who devote themselves to philanthropic organizations is extensive, but has largely bypassed community college foundation volunteers. There are many studies of community college presidents and trustees (e.g., Bailey, 2001; Boggs & Irwin, 2007; Eddy, 2003; Harbour & Nagy, 2005; Kubala, 1999, Vaughan & Weisman, 2002). Additionally, the research on volunteers at non-profit organizations has focused on the work of groups like social service agencies, international humanitarian efforts, and health related charities (Anheier, 2014; Bowman, 2009; Garner & Garner, 2011; Handy, Mook & Quarter, 2008; Houle, 1989; Renz, 2016). Few studies have examined community college foundations, and those that do focus on best practices in fundraising (e.g.; Adams, 1994; Bock & Sullins, 1987; Jones, 2008; Keener & Carrier & Meaders, 2002; Pezzullo & Brittingham, 1990). What the research fails to examine are the community college foundation board members themselves, what motivates them to become board members, and how they perceive their work.

With that gap in mind, the purpose of this study is to shed light on how foundation board members from three Illinois community colleges view their roles. Drawing on interviews with these board members, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of Community College Foundation Board Membership?
 - a) What are the various paths that lead board members to serve?
 - b) How do board members describe their motivation in serving?

- c) What are the various ways board members perceive their roles and responsibilities especially in relation to the missions of the community college and foundation?

This introductory chapter will make the case for why this study matters, summarize how the research was conducted, and postulate the value of this specific study.

Fundraising at Community Colleges

The importance of fundraising at community colleges has grown significantly in the past 20 years. Community college foundations contributed over \$750 million in 2014 to their institutions (Paradise, 2016), a figure that will likely grow in the coming years as these colleges focus more on private fundraising. Monies generated through fundraising grew by 7% from 2011 to 2012, and were projected to grow by 6.8% in the following year (Kriesel & Patterson, 2013). Community college fundraising was the fourth fastest growing subsector of nonprofit giving in 2016 (McGrady, 2017).

Community college foundations are defined as *institutionally-related foundations*, meaning they are created for the sole purpose of raising funds for a particular organization (CASE, 2014). The institutionally related foundation differs from traditional nonprofits in a number of ways. They first came about in higher education as a means to separate privately donated funds from comingling and being subjected to the rules of public funds (Bass, 2010). Community college foundations make investment decisions that colleges, by statute, cannot. Additionally, they can hold funds over extended time periods for particular uses such as long-term scholarships, building funds, or program support (Orcutt, 2014). However, community college foundations do not have the capacity to make decisions on behalf of the college they serve. Traditional nonprofits, like the Salvation Army or Habitat for Humanity, have boards that make decisions concerning both fundraising and program focus. A standalone nonprofit can

determine if they want to run soup kitchens, homeless shelters, or after school programs for children. Community college foundations cannot determine what courses a college offers or what buildings will be constructed. These responsibilities and powers rest with the elected community college trustees.

Research on community college presidents notes that fundraising and foundation work is a fast-growing priority for these college leaders, but presidents do not feel prepared to lead the fundraising effort (Cook, 1997). Weinrich and Reid (2003) found in their survey of community college presidents nationwide that fundraising is an emerging need demanding their attention. As the literature review of this study will show, funding for community colleges has changed and fluctuated significantly over the past 20 years. These volatile changes challenge community colleges to meet their current mission. But, even as community college presidents recognize the pressure for additional resources, they are also recognizing their personal limitations (Malm, 2008) and are beginning to delegate that pressure to more prepared and connected individuals in the form of community college foundation boards.

Community college foundation board members step into this void. The funds they raise and the connections they create with donors can greatly impact both institutional function and the student populations. Understanding how these volunteers perceive their work as foundation board members can lead to a greater understanding of how they affect community colleges.

Positionality and Conceptual Framework

I have worked in community college fundraising for over 15 years, serving as an executive director for the past eight years. In my role, I work directly with community college foundation board members, serving as their liaison to the institution. I am of their world but not a

part of their world. I work side by side with this group, hearing their stories and recruiting them to volunteer for the community college foundation.

A current board member I work with is an executive for a Fortune 500 company. When we solicit donations from individuals and companies, he shares why he gives and serves. He recognizes that community college students are like him; the first in their family to attend college. He appreciates access to higher education allowed him, from a working class background, to achieve corporate success. He talks about how he was not connected to elite institutions. He felt he needed a chance to learn and grow as a person, unlocking his potential. Instead of crediting his own personal talents, he chooses to attribute his success to the power and opportunity of education.

Hearing stories like that from foundation board members creates a bias. I put halos on the work and motivations of community college foundation board members. A key function of my profession is to highlight what is good about the work of community colleges as a way of motivating and enticing donors to contribute to the foundation. That praise and motivation extends to community college foundation board members. It was necessary for me throughout the study to hear their stories and see the world through their eyes. At the same time, I needed to look beyond my bias and seek counter stories that may not be positive.

The need for supportive foundation board members grows in importance for community colleges who desperately need new revenue streams to complete their mission. Previous revenue streams have become unreliable, especially in terms of state funding. This study's conceptual framework— that community college foundation board members provide new revenue streams to offset declining support – has been defined by the work of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) who coined the term “resource dependency theory”. I wanted to shine a light on how community

college foundation board members see their role in providing revenue to community colleges. In doing so, I hope both researchers and fundraisers can see that the work of community college foundation boards has both an immediate impact financially and a longer reaching influence.

Method

This study was carried out in three general phases: site selection, participant selection, and analysis. During the site-selection phase, three Illinois community colleges and their foundations were identified as the locations for the study, representing differing economic and geographic contexts. Due to challenges presented by changing leadership and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, some of the original locations were unable to participate. Three additional site locations were identified to maintain diversity of the site locations based on economic and geographic contexts. Participant selection for interviews began as facilitated presentations, but again due to COVID-19 restrictions, shifted to email solicitations. Both formats explained the purpose of the study, answered questions of the foundation board members, and invited them to participate. Finally, the interviews themselves were informed by Glesne's (2015) view that interviews are not oral surveys but instead a conversation between two individuals undertaken to reach a mutual understanding. Interviews both in person and through zoom meetings attempted to understand why participants volunteered to serve as foundation board members, what they viewed are the foundation's obligation to the college it is associated with, and how they perceived their own efforts to help the foundation carry out its work.

Establishing trustworthiness is an important part of a qualitative study. Accordingly, I used the techniques of member checking, peer review and clarification of bias, as described by Glesne (2015), to help maintain clarity and relevance. Member checking required me to present my findings and perceptions with those I interviewed to see if my analysis aligned with the

words and thoughts they shared with me. Peer review with fellow researchers allowed additional perspectives and insights that existed in my intellectual blind spots. Clarification of bias entailed me outlining and examining the potential bias I may have towards community college foundation board members so I am aware of my latent views.

Significance of Study

This study is the first to examine how community college foundation board members understand themselves and their work. This is an important endeavor. In pure numbers, community college foundation members represent a larger contingency than community college trustees, creating the opportunity to engage more of the local community on behalf of the colleges they are affiliated with. Though they do not have governing authority over the colleges, community college foundation board members can act as boundary spanners, building connections between the colleges and the communities they serve. In the process, they provide the colleges with needed resources and help forge mutually beneficial partnerships in the local community. The work they do has the potential to elevate the community college to greater prominence in the local area and help the institutions—to at least some degree—compensate for periodic declines in state and local government funding. Given these declines, foundation board members may potentially become one of the fastest growing stakeholder groups in the community college world as they help to shift the resource dependency community colleges previously had on public funding.

In conclusion, foundation board members have received little attention by researchers studying community colleges. While they are overlooked in terms of academic research, the foundation board members are growing in importance to these institutions, providing almost a billion dollars in financial support to the colleges they connect with (Valbrun, 2019). The

interviews conducted in this study, viewed through the lens of resource dependency theory, can provide insights into how community college foundation board members view themselves and the work they are conducting.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I began my fundraising career almost 20 years ago when I was interviewed by five board members of a local United Way. Each person at the table had a day job in the community. They were executives at the phone company, two banks, an insurance company and a factory. For over two hours, they asked how I would help their local United Way grow, what my vision was for their organization, and how I would interact with them as a fundraiser. The sense of ownership and personal investment was evident. The United Way had a long and storied history in the community. It was nearly a century old, had raised hundreds of millions of dollars, and the list of volunteers who served the organization included some of the most prominent business people in the community. The charity work of the United Way was connected to area-wide businesses and societal culture.

When I interviewed a few years later for a position with a community college foundation, I wondered what change in attitude I would find. The foundation I was interviewing with was younger than the students attending the college, because it had existed for less than 15 years. The community college foundation awarded less than \$50,000 in scholarships and hoped to establish a \$500 scholarship from two donors as a goal. Their endowment was less than \$100,000, roughly 1% of what the neighboring four-year institution, Illinois State University, had in its foundation. The community college foundation was in a very different place as a charity than the United Way I was leading. The community college foundation was small and young, so I was expecting a drastically scaled-down version of commitment and engagement.

When I sat down to interview with the community college foundation board members there were eight at the table. Several, unprompted, shared how important the scholarship program was to student success. They relayed stories of students they had met and the

opportunity to change lives that the college provided. While I was the one interviewing for a paid position, these foundation board members talked as much as I did. Their personal investment in the work they were doing was evident in the first moments I met them. Their charity may have been relatively new and comparably small, but their personal and emotional investment was as strong as any I had seen.

The American Association of Community Colleges shows over 1,000 public community colleges in the United States (Phillippe, 2018). Over 80% of these colleges have a foundation, with an average board size of 22 members (Nichols, 2013). That is approximately 17,600 community members and business leaders donating their time and resources to the advancement, support, and growth of community colleges. Studies of community college foundations examine the activities, successful practices, and structure of these boards (Bucci & Waters 2014; Goodman, 2015; Smith, Miller & Gearhart, 2017). However, researchers have yet to examine the motivations of individual community college foundation board members.

This chapter explores the financial pressures that motivated community colleges to create foundations, how volunteer boards serve community college foundations, and prior research on groups similar to community college foundations and community college foundations themselves. The literature emphasizes that community college foundation boards emerged as a response to inconsistent state funding. Community colleges foundations are being tasked with filling the large budgetary gaps shrinking public support is creating for community colleges. Research has examined the impact of community college foundations generally, but little is known about the motivations of the individuals who serve on foundation boards and sustain these connections.

Origins of Community College Foundations

Foundations were created at Illinois community colleges in response to uncertain state funding, which has become even less predictable with the passage of time. Since the 1970s, the levels of state funding for community colleges have fluctuated with the business cycle, declining during economic recessions that negatively affect state revenues, but not returning to prerecession levels after the economy improves (Romano & Palmer, 2015). Community college foundations are, in part, a response to this uncertainty. The following section review these trends, examine the impact of reduced state funding on community colleges, and show how the creation of foundations was at least partially a response to fiscal trends. Resource dependency theory as a conceptual framework for understanding the historical development of community college foundations is also discussed, showcasing why community college foundations are rising in importance for community colleges and bringing additional attention to community college foundation board members.

State Revenue Trends at Community Colleges

Community colleges in Illinois were created by state statute—the 1964 Public Junior College Act (Scott, 2008). The statute outlined the boundaries of community college districts and specified three funding streams for the new community colleges: taxation of district residents through property taxes, student tuition, and state monies based on a residual funding formula that emphasized the state’s role as a guarantor of college capacity to meet educational demand. As Palmer and Romano (2018) explain, the formula

required each community college to project the number of credit hours it would produce in a given year and calculate the cost of producing those credit hours according to a state-approved formula Each community college would then calculate the local revenues

(mostly property taxes and tuition payments) available to meet that cost. The system-wide budget request for state monies in any given year was based on the difference between the local monies available to the colleges and the total cost of producing the anticipated credit-hour load ... Actual state appropriations were always contingent on the availability of state monies, but the formula reflected an open-ended commitment—even if only aspirational—to meet whatever demand local community colleges might face. (p. 248)

This aspirational commitment could not withstand the economic and political forces that have since undermined the two fundamental conditions that must be in place if states are to increase funding for higher education: the fiscal capacity to appropriate increased funding and the political will to do so (Mullin, 2010). These decreases illustrate the well-documented balance-wheel effect, whereby higher education, because it is a discretionary item in state budgets and can fall back on tuition increases, suffers disproportionately high cuts in funding as tax revenues decline in the wake of economic recessions and states trim their spending in response (Delaney & Doyle, 2011; Hovey, 1999). But declines in state support can also be traced to political difficulties, as evidenced by the funding decreases during the budget impasse in Illinois covering fiscal years 2016 and 2017, which the state comptroller attributed to the decreased enrollment of over 70,000 students statewide and in their opinion will have long reaching implications (Mendoza, 2018). The state, once a fiscal guarantor of community colleges, has become an unreliable funding source. In response, community colleges, like other higher education institutions, have sought to diversify their revenue streams in ways that compensate for attenuated state support. The establishment of foundations is a direct consequence of this effort.

The Search for Stability

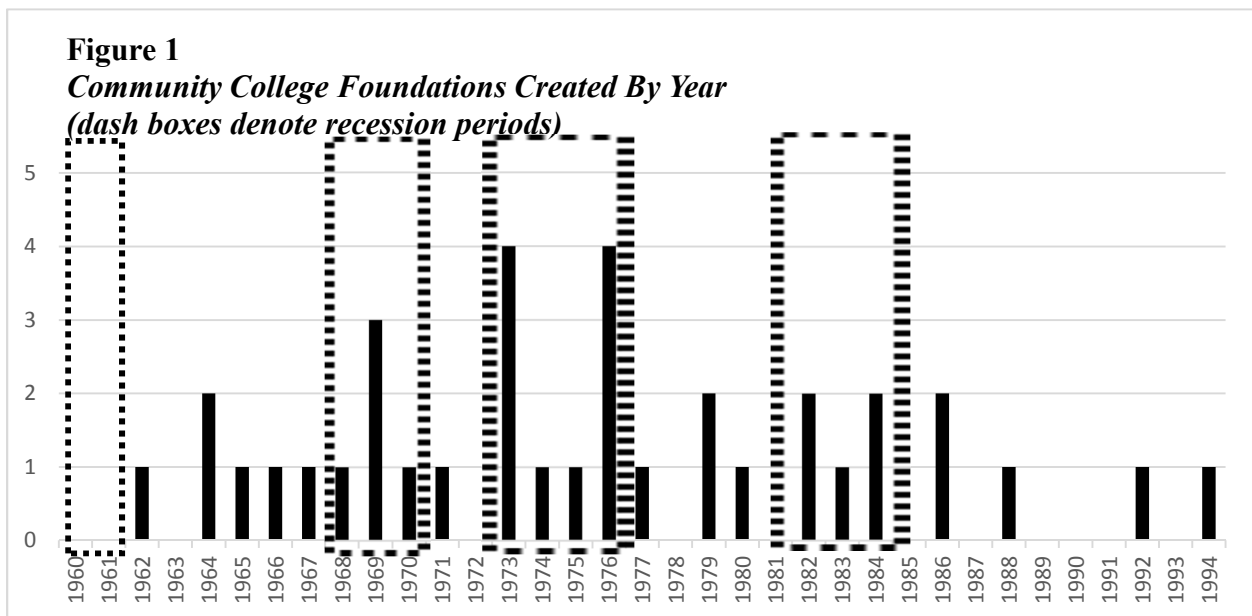
As state funding uncertainty increased, community colleges needed alternative revenue sources to stabilize their incomes. Some expanded into entrepreneurial activities for additional funds. For example, institutions often began specialized training programs for local industries and grew their community education offerings (Cohen & Brawer 2008). A handful of colleges also developed self-supporting career-technical programs, such as the enology and viticulture programs at Walla Walla Community College, in which “wine produced by the students is sold, and the proceeds are used to support the program and its students” (Romano & Palmer, 2015, p. 161). Both efforts capitalize on the strong ties of the community colleges to their surrounding districts.

These strong ties are also evident in the establishment of community college foundations, which represent another attempt to compensate for diminished state funding. These foundations are governed by boards, drawing members from the local community. Fundraising in higher education has a rich history, but community college foundations are a recent phenomenon within it. In the state of Illinois, the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and the University of Illinois at Chicago incorporated their respective foundations in 1935. Illinois State University followed suit, creating its foundation in 1948. Northern Illinois University has the youngest foundation among four-year public institutions; it was formed in 1949.

The first community college foundation in Illinois would not be incorporated until nearly three decades after the foundation at the University of Illinois began its operations. The first community college foundation in Illinois was established in 1962 and was joined by eight others before the end of the decade, with three forming in 1969 alone. The 1970s saw 15 community college foundations being created, 10 in a four-year window between 1973 and 1976. The 1980s

saw the final wave of creation with nine materializing during the decade, over half in the two-year period between 1982 and 1984. The formation of these foundations was not a random occurrence, but instead correlated with economic trends in the country.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (2018) has identified four periods of recession, or business cycle contractions, between 1960 and 1995 that lasted more than 10 quarters. These recessions occurred in 1960-1961, 1968-70, 1970-73, and 1981-83. During each recessionary time-period, or in the year immediately thereafter, roughly half of the 36 community college foundations in Illinois were created (see Figure 1, below). In a 30-year period, three particular years saw the creation of three or more foundations: 1969, when three foundations were created; 1973; when four foundations were created; and 1976, when four foundations were created. As noted above, economic downturns adversely affected state tax revenues and, as a consequence, the state funding to community colleges. These foundations were one response to this hardship, allowing institutions to mitigate their dependency on an unreliable revenue source.



The establishment of community college foundations did not immediately solve the financial challenges inconsistent state funding created. For most of their existence, community college foundations were structured and staffed differently than their four-year public counterparts. Many community colleges did not start hiring staff fundraisers until the 1990's (Proper & Caboni, 2014). Before then, foundations were managed by volunteer boards and the day-to-day operations of the foundation were designated to the financial aid office as one of many job responsibilities (Nichols, 2013). Community colleges tend to hire fewer fundraising professionals than other colleges. A 2015 study of fundraising professionals found that on average community colleges employed 2.5 development-related staff. That was well behind the average for four-year public institutions, which employed on average of 41.5 people (Kroll & Bakerman, 2015). Because of this and other factors, fundraising accounted for less than 1% of total community college revenues per full-time-equivalent student nationwide in 2013 (Desrochers & Hurlburt, 2016). While there are cases of community college foundations profoundly affecting the economic health of their institutions, the vast majority do not. In Illinois, only two foundations provide more than 5% of their college's annual operating budget (see Table 1, below).

Table 1

Illinois Community College Foundation Contributions to Colleges

	2017 contribution from a foundation to college reported in IRS Form 990 for respective foundation	Annual college budget reported in the 2017 ICCB report	Percent of college budget that contribution represents
Blackhawk	\$123,406	\$28,511,627	0.43%
Blackhawk East	\$148,665	\$28,511,627	0.52%
Carl Sandburg	\$400,168	\$13,206,018	3.03%
College of DuPage	\$1,121,072	\$183,613,040	0.61%

Table Continues

	2017 contribution from a foundation to college reported in IRS Form 990 for respective foundation	Annual college budget reported in the 2017 ICCB report	Percent of college budget that contribution represents
College of Lake County	\$909,223	\$100,126,224	0.91%
Danville	\$590,421	\$15,214,779	3.88%
Elgin	\$413,459	\$73,949,831	0.56%
Harper	\$554,077	\$110,058,662	0.50%
Heartland	\$558,622	\$32,449,113	1.72%
Highland	\$1,841,062	\$13,708,344	13.43%
ICC	\$3,189,945	\$66,077,803	4.83%
IVCC	\$433,602	\$20,726,278	2.09%
John A Logan	\$570,302	\$32,236,611	1.77%
John Wood	\$285,520	\$14,262,447	2.00%
Joliet	\$4,165,560	\$84,722,871	4.92%
Kankakee	\$400,937	\$23,261,972	1.72%
Kaskaskia	\$998,164	\$33,652,360	2.97%
Lake Land	\$395,512	\$43,136,889	0.92%
Lewis and Clark	\$694,301	\$28,442,039	2.44%
Lincoln Land	\$1,808,134	\$41,404,318	4.37%
McHenry	\$410,859	\$44,198,675	0.93%
Moraine	\$619,098	\$88,720,393	0.70%
Morton	\$57,073	\$24,275,409	0.24%
Oakton	\$1,352,204	\$72,582,277	1.86%
Parkland	\$1,676,414	\$54,446,447	3.08%
Prairie State	\$352,586	\$30,877,143	1.14%
Rend Lake	\$818,449	\$20,761,443	3.94%
Richland	\$1,284,387	\$16,815,859	7.64%
Sauk Valley	\$424,288	\$12,105,245	3.50%
Shawnee	\$122,436	\$13,009,028	0.94%
South Suburban	\$168,422	\$31,572,836	0.53%
Southeastern Illinois	\$283,991	\$11,578,534	2.45%
Southwestern Illinois	\$353,509	\$62,758,715	0.56%
Spoon River	\$188,875	\$9,353,819	2.02%
Triton	\$366,820	\$56,444,178	0.65%
Waubonsee	\$260,348	\$67,806,395	0.38%
Total	\$28,341,911	\$1,604,579,249	1.77%

Despite the still nascent fiscal impact of foundations on community college revenue streams, their establishment in the wake of attenuated state funding reflects what scholars have

referred to as resource dependency theory. As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) explain, resource dependency theory holds that institutions work to diversify their income streams to minimize their dependence on any one source of fiscal support. The authors note that by having multiple revenue streams, variances or fluctuations in any one stream do not have a dramatic impact on total revenues. In addition, the capacity of any one funding entity to influence the internal operations of an organization diminishes as that organization can rely on other revenue sources. Simply put, an organization's freedom to exercise its own discretion increases to the extent that it is dependent on more rather than fewer revenue streams.

In terms of community colleges, state support constitutes a large income stream on which the institutions are dependent. Changes in state budgets, political leadership, or even taxation rates have a large effect on community college budgets. The introduction of community college foundations opens the opportunity for a new revenue stream that can potentially offset fluctuations in state funding.

This full potential has not materialized. At this time, as Table 1 shows, the community college foundations in Illinois have not dramatically affected the resource dependency for their respective colleges. However, some community college foundations across the country have shown dramatic growth and success, providing examples of what the future could hold. Bellafante (2014) provides examples, including the foundation at LaGuardia Community College, which quickly raised \$5 million in endowment funds for a foundation that did not exist before 2002. This community college foundation began to connect with local New York socialites and philanthropists by explaining how donating to the college would allow them to have a greater and more beneficial impact on the city than directing their dollars to other causes or entities.

Prior Research

Two groups who share common traits with community college foundation board members are community college trustees and nonprofit board members. The research on these two groups is extensive, however narrowing the focus to studies on why they serve and how they see their role can be helpful in understanding community college foundation board members. Additionally, this literature review will look at the research on community college foundation boards generally, highlighting the lack of research that exists on community college foundation board members as individuals.

Community College Trustees

To understand why a community college trustee serves, it is important to understand how they come to service. Trustees are not recruited by the colleges they are associated with, instead they are elected by the general public or appointed by public officials. Interviews with trustees highlight that their motivation to seek a trustee position comes from a commitment to the general community where they live (Bontrager, 2008; Smith, Plinard, & Boggs, 2001;). Community college foundation board members are selected for their affinity with or understanding of the community college they serve, unlike community college trustees. In fact, there are no prerequisites for their role beyond the support of their fellow community members voting for them. So where does the motivation to serve come from?

The overwhelming answer is a sense of obligation or civic duty. Trustees are part of the community in which the college resides. Civic obligation, in terms of democracy, refers to the need for public representation in publicly funded institutions. An elected office holder is an individual who is willing to step forward and speak on behalf of fellow citizens. Thus, when trustees speak of obligation, they are referring to their duty as overseers of the college. To meet

this obligation means the trustees must reach in and engage the college as a community member. While this does not mean that their relationship with the college needs to be adversarial, the notion of civic duty means trustees identify as community members first, instead of recognizing themselves as members of the college. They are outsiders looking in to the college, making sure that the college is aligned with community needs.

The concept of trustees as outsiders is illustrated in the work of Vaughan and Weisman (1997), who noted how trustees derived satisfaction from their efforts to assure that the colleges met community needs. This illustrates how trustees see themselves as an external force working to benefit the community. The trustees are not a part of the college institution, in their view, but are instead a guiding force. This separation from the college and alignment with the community is highlighted by Harbour, Davies, and Gonzales-Walker (2010) who noted that trustees consistently referenced their responsibility to report back to state officials and their local communities on the work of the community college. This showcases how trustees understand their roles as outside observers with obligations to the greater community.

This sense of separation is especially strong when trustees identify themselves as members of underrepresented communities, either in terms of ethnicity or gender. These trustees discuss how their perspectives can inform the college and its policies to meet the needs of that community. For example, Maria Acosta-Salazar (2014) studied Chicana and Latina trustees. She found that the trustees “made sense of their historical accomplishments as a community in struggle for voice and representation in hopes of creating more responsive institutions” (p 74). Newman (2010) observed female trustees helping colleges understand the challenges female students face as working mothers or first-generation college students, with the hope of guiding

the institution to a gender friendlier experience. These are examples of trustees changing colleges to align with the community.

Examinations of how community college trustees see their role yield two schools of thought. One is that trustees act as sides of a riverbank, keeping the flow of the college in check and providing boundaries for the work of the college. For example, trustees examined in the work of Boggs (2003) spoke of wanting to limit taxpayer expenditure on the institution, keeping the college in concert with the variety of other institutions in the community, and preventing mission creep that muddles the core purpose of the college. The second school of thought is that community college trustees establish the trajectory of the colleges. In this role, the trustees set the agenda for the college, conveying the needs of the general community and tasking the college to meet these needs. Carver (2011) found that trustees set goals for enrollment, pushed for a focus on displaced worker training, or prioritized community education courses that serve lifelong learners. Trustees studied by Law-Broeren (2003) spoke of helping their college set an agenda that aligned with local industry needs, advocating for overlooked or underserved populations in the greater community, and scanning the community to see what role the college can play in evolving issues.

Nonprofit Board Members

Community college foundation boards are a subset of nonprofit foundation boards. Because of this relationship, it makes sense to look at research on nonprofit boards. The literature on those boards is rich, with a large number of studies examining how nonprofit boards function and what best practices they use (e.g. Drucker, 2012; Kaplan, 2001; Oster, 1995). But, when narrowing the scope of focus to the themes of why individuals serve and how they see their roles one can see parallels with and contrasts to how community college trustees see themselves.

Nonprofit boards are an amazingly varied group. There are over 1.5 million registered 501 (c) 3 organizations, the IRS designation that allows a group to have nonprofit status in the United States (McKeever, 2019). Entities with this status must meet a number of requirements, including the establishment of a volunteer board that oversees the finances and actions of the group. This distinguishes nonprofits from family foundations and religious organizations, which face different IRS scrutiny and designations (Cullinane, 2018). The research that is highlighted in this section focuses on 501 (c) 3 organizations.

There is great diversity in the over 1.5 million nonprofits in the United States. Some are small nonprofits that manage less than \$10,000 and focus on very specific issues like sports programs for a small town, a community park in a major city, or a health problem that affects less than 100 people nationally. Other nonprofits are billion-dollar organizations with national or international reach like the Salvation Army, American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, and Habitat for Humanity. With this great diversity of size comes a diversity of who serves on nonprofit boards. Small nonprofits may only have a board of three to five members. These individuals are usually community members like retirees, small business owners, and stay at-home parents. Large nonprofits may have celebrities, CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, and industry magnates on their boards (Frailey, 2017). Trying to understand what motivates such a wide range of people is a challenging effort.

A defining work that helped to codify the various motivations of nonprofit board members comes from the research of Inglis and Cleave. In their 2006 study, the researchers constructed a framework that identified six components of motivation for nonprofit board members. They identified:

- Enhancement of Self-Worth

- Learning Through Community
- Helping the Community
- Developing Individual Relationships
- Unique Contributions to the Board
- Self-Healing (Inglis & Cleave, 2006)

This framework is very important in that it began to explore how nonprofit board members benefit personally from their board work. Earlier research on nonprofit boards had focused instead on what board members perceived they should be doing. However, Inglis and Cleave (2006) turned the focus inward on the foundation board members and asked why they chose to serve.

Literature extending this discussion of why individuals serve on nonprofit boards is limited but revealing. Miller-Stevens and Ward (2019) highlighted the importance of a sense of civic responsibility. While similar to the motives of individuals who become community college trustees, a key difference is the definition of civic responsibility. In Miller-Stevens and Ward's (2019) findings, nonprofit board members see themselves fixing a community with their work. The community could be any number of specific groups, such as underprivileged youth, victims of domestic violence, or individuals afflicted with a disease. Conversely, when a community college trustee speaks generally of civic responsibility, he or she refers broadly to all citizens and to the democratic process.

Nonprofit board members also have a desire to feel they are making a difference in their community. Holland and Jackson (1998) found that nonprofit board members seem to define themselves through the work they do with the nonprofit, making it a part of their personal identity. Bradshaw (1992) found in his interviews that emotional connections were mentioned

often, with the nonprofit board member identifying with a specific cause and wanting to add to their community through the work of the nonprofit organization.

When the subject shifts to how nonprofit board members see their roles, there are echoes from the research on community college trustees. Herman and Renz (2000) found many nonprofit board members wanting to keep their charity focused on their mission. As Brown (2005) discussed, this focus can come in the form of staying true to the founding principles and ideals of a charity or making sure that the mission evolves with changing times. Inglis, Alexander and Weaver (1999) characterized nonprofit board members as keepers of the flame, passed from iteration to iteration of the board since the beginning of the charity.

In this context, nonprofit board members see their role as the embodiment of the charity they are serving. While paid staff members may carry out the literal work of the charity, and those who benefit from the service the charity provides become the visual outcome of their work, nonprofit board members perceive that in establishing policies and consistently harkening back to the mission they are keeping the nonprofit true. Since nonprofit board members make the final decisions on budgets, expenditures, hiring of executive staff, and the determination of programs or services to be offered, they are the constant for the nonprofit. It is that power, to directly affect the output of a nonprofit, that makes nonprofit board members different from community college foundation board members.

Community College Foundation Boards

Community college foundation board members have a different function than community college trustees. Rather than governing the college, the foundation board members work to align community resources with the college's needs. They seek to strengthen the capacity of the college to achieve its goals by providing the means to do so. The purpose of the foundation board

member is to bend or align external resources to the internal needs of the college. When researchers examine community college foundation boards they seem to focus on two particular areas: how the board functions and what constitutes best practices in fundraising. What is missing from these discussions is an analysis of individual board members and their motivations.

Community college foundation boards, in terms of fundraising history, are a new concept. Researchers point to the fact that community colleges originally did not need to explore private fundraising sources due to their reliance on funding formulas providing state and local tax support that was supplemented by nominal tuition fees. Community colleges, as the researchers described them, were fully subsidized educational institutions, similar to K-12 education. When community colleges did step into the fundraising arena, understanding what community college foundations were focused on varied by the needs of the college. (e.g., Grover, 2009; Milliron, de los Santos & Browning 2003; Nielsen, Newton, & Mitvalsky, 2003).

Community college foundations have unique funding sources. When compared to four-year colleges, community colleges did not tap into extensive pools of alumni for their financial donations. Instead, community colleges solicited funds from local businesses and community members, leveraging themselves as economic drivers and quasi-social service agencies by providing scholarships and economic opportunity for disenfranchised individuals (Jenkins & Glass, 1999). Community colleges foundation boards were citizens of neither established fundraising realms for four-year colleges or traditional nonprofits. As researchers finally codified how they were different, interest turned to understanding how they were able to survive in this new space of fundraising.

Community colleges foundations were working in new spaces. The Harvard University Foundation, the University of Michigan Foundation, and similar foundations received donations

from successful alumni giving back to the institution. Community college foundations did not raise funds from alumni, and alumni were not the targets of their fundraising campaigns (Skari, 2014). Instead, community colleges were bucking higher education fundraising trends and reaching out to the communities they served. Accordingly, researchers have found that successful community college foundation boards recruit board members who are prominent in their local communities, well connected, and respected by local industries. They appealed to the local community and returned quality to that community in the form of community college graduates (Babitz, 2003; Carrier, 2004; Halligan, 2008).

A concerning trait that resonates through the entire discussion of community college foundation boards is how they are treated as a monolithic structure. The research on why they exist and what they do talks about community college foundation boards as legal or collective entities, not about the individuals who serve on the boards. However, the research on community college trustees recognizes that trustee boards exist as both collective entities and as groups of individuals. This can be seen, for example, in the study of rogue trustee board members, board members of a particular gender or race, or even board members with different views on the role of community colleges. Similarly, research on foundation boards should focus on the personal motivations and perceptions of the foundation board members themselves.

Conceptual Framework

The qualitative nature of the study proposed here is truly open ended. The intent is to understand how foundation board members perceive their motivations for agreeing to serve on their boards and the roles they play in helping the community colleges they are associated with. Ultimately those motivations, as well as the board-member understandings of their contributions

to community colleges, will reflect how the board members understand the functions and purposes of community colleges.

Connecting the College to the Community

Although the creation of community college foundations reflects an effort to diversify revenue streams as state funding became uncertain, the value of the foundations also lies in how they connect the colleges to the community. Indeed, the foundations generate social capital and community connections, largely through their volunteer boards. This section explores why community college foundations need volunteer boards, how those boards connect the college to the community, and what the positive ramifications of those connections are for the college.

Establishing a foundation does not mean immediate funds. Creating a foundation is a legal function, similar to creating a limited liability corporation or a private business. For private funds to come in, action is necessary. Individuals need to work on behalf of the foundation, asking people to give. That work can be done by college or foundation staff, or by the volunteer board. An axiom in fundraising is that people do not give to institutions, people give to people. In my experience as a fundraiser, the volunteers are the most important determinant of its success. Volunteers lend the credibility, trust, and professionalism they have personally established to the charity they serve. In terms of community college foundations, the board members serve as a bridge between the community and the college.

There is a natural divide between the campus of a community college and the community it serves. The theoretical membrane that separates the two is more porous than the boundary between a four-year institution and its surrounding community. Community members come onto a community college campus for classes, use of campus space, or professional training programs. However, those interactions only exist because of the intentional interaction of a community

member to access the college. For a community college to engage and communicate with its local community, it needs ambassadors. These ambassadors act as boundary spanners, helping to span the gap between community colleges and their local community.

Boundary spanning as a theoretical concept focuses on individuals who are able to connect two separated groups. The boundary spanners reside within one group but are accepted and relate to another group (Thompson 1967). Examples of boundary spanners include labor negotiators who bring together different sides in contract disputes (Friedman & Podolny, 1990) or university outreach centers that share practical local and state applications of basic university research (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Boundary spanners are often necessary for the growth of an institution. They prevent a group from becoming isolated, and they create pathways to exchange ideas and information (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). These boundary spanners act as personifications of an organization or department, allowing outsiders to understand what organizations do and how they operate (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). A community college foundation board member can act as a boundary spanner, for example, by inviting community members to visit the community college campus. Community members who have no experience with higher education, or who only attended four-year universities, may not be motivated to interact with the community college. However, a community college foundation board member, leveraging personal or professional relationships, could invite community members to tour the campus and meet community college students and staff. Bringing the two parties together opens a variety of new relationships that are only possible through the work of the foundation board member.

Through their boundary spanning work, these board members act as the “face” of the community college foundations they serve, connecting those foundations (and their affiliated

community colleges) with potential donors in the external community. Several authors on community college foundation board members speak to their work of connecting with the community (Orcutt, 2014) and helping community members understand the importance of the community college for the community (Bock & Sullins, 1987). The success or failure of the foundation's fund-raising efforts rests to a large degree on this boundary-spanning work. Ironically, little is known about these important connectors who carry the message of the community college into the community itself.

Conclusion

The instability of state funding to community colleges demanded the growth of associated foundations with the hope that private support would offset lost revenue during times when enrollment increased. The rise of foundations did not lessen community college resource dependency on state funding immediately as many colleges likely hoped, but did open a new revenue stream signaling that community colleges did not need to be financially defined by their relationship with the state. However, the foundations provided a resource in the connections they made with the local community. The collective work of foundation boards lends credibility to community colleges, acting as ambassadors and boundary spanners between the college and the local community they serve. This connection creates avenues for support and relationships that positively affect the college. While research has been done on the motivations of volunteers to charities in general, the motivations of community college foundation board members remains unexplored. These people assist in the acceptance of community college in their surrounding area and possibly the financial viability of community colleges. The need to understand the foundation board members is critical.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Although community college foundation board members are growing in importance in the community college landscape, little is understood concerning what motivates them to serve and how they view their work. To remedy this, this study employed interviews with foundation board members to address the following research questions:

1. What motivated the community college foundation board members to serve?
2. How do the board members perceive the role of the foundation and its relationship to the community college?
3. How do the board members perceive that their own work as a board member helps the foundation carry out this role?

This chapter offers a detailed description of study procedures and method, including site and participant selection, the interview process itself, the analysis of interview transcripts, and the efforts undertaken to maintain trustworthiness.

Methodology

The focus of this study is informed by the methodological theory laid out in the work of Creswell and Creswell (2017). The authors describe that qualitative research using a constructivist approach is trying to understand how participants understand the world around them. In this view, reality is not constant, but instead is what a person perceives around them and how those perceptions interact with others. Researchers using this methodology are trying fully to understand how people perceive the world around them in terms of a particular subject. The focus of the work is on open-ended questions with broad opportunities for those being interviewed to paint the world they live in and allow the researcher to see what they are seeing. There is a strong effort to avoid altering, pushing, or challenging how the participants share their

reality. Instead, the researcher needs to remain open and aware, allowing themselves to appreciate what the individual is sharing.

Using the constructivist theory, the substantive lens I used for the interviews to reflect and inform my understanding boundary spanning is (Thompson, 1967). Boundary spanning discusses how select groups of people help one organization, institution, or subsection of society to be better understood by another section of that society. Using this theory, I saw how community college foundation board members see their roles as connecting the college to the greater community and the specific actions, attitudes, or efforts that best accomplish this in their understanding.

Site Selection

In order to elicit a variety of perspectives, the study began by trying to involve members of four foundations that serve three community colleges of varying sizes, geographic areas, and district economies. Each of the foundations are described below. However, I have chosen not to disclose the names, exact number of board members, or finite details of the area for the community college foundations in order to maintain confidentiality. Before selecting these sites, I researched all community college foundations across the state of Illinois, reviewing the web sites of each community college for its size and student body composition. Additionally, I researched the communities the college and foundation served, reviewing data from various chamber of commerce and local media sites to have a good perspective of the community and how it was functioning. My goal was to select community colleges with varied backgrounds to bring greater diversity of perspective from the board members I would interview.

Community College Foundation “A” serves one of the largest Illinois community colleges outside of the Chicago City Colleges. A Fortune 500 company is headquartered in the

district and is the predominate community employer. The college shares the community with a private, midsized four-year university founded in the late 19th century. The community college is over 50 years old and the foundation was formed before the 1970s. Foundation “A” reported assets totaling over \$25 million and a governing board of more than fifteen members. A large portion of its assets come from a series of real estate ownerships. It awards \$750,000 a year annually in scholarships. This Foundation was selected because of its large size, the relationship it has with a Fortune 500 company, and its unique income streams due to real estate.

Community College Foundation “B” was also founded before 1970. The community college it serves has a main campus in a town with fewer than 20,000 people but also has multiple satellite campuses across a geographically large, but sparsely populated area. It shares this area with a small liberal arts college that formed in the early 19th century. Foundation “B” has fewer than twenty board members and reports assets of nearly \$8 million. Foundation “B” awards \$100,000 a year in scholarships and an additional \$200,000 a year in financial support of the college. This foundation was selected because of its smaller size, the lesser-populated communities it serves, and the more rural setting it inhabits. Without a major employer in any of the communities or other major draws such as professional athletic teams, major tourist draws, or large medical facilities, there is the opportunity for the community college, and its foundation, to be a focal point of attention.

Community College Foundation “C” and Community College Foundation “D” exist in the same district but serve different campuses of the same community college. Both campuses are roughly the same physical size, with one centered in an agrarian-focused community and the other in a larger industrial-driven town. The larger industrial campus shares a home with a small private liberal arts school established in the late 19th century, while the smaller campus is the

lone higher education institution for many miles. The foundations outline in their promotional materials that they serve different student bodies and programs. Each has roughly \$3 million in assets. Foundation “C” owns residency housing and farmland the college uses while Foundation “D” is liquid in cash assets. The key divide appears to be the focus on what type of education is provided at their given campuses. The campus supported by Foundation “C” is more agrarian-focused in both its educational and scholarship offerings, while the campus supported by Foundation “D” focuses on a technical and transfer-focused curriculum.

While these were the four site locations my study began with, a number of challenges arose. Foundations “B” and “C” were quick to respond to my requests and moved into the participant selection phase outlined below. Foundation “A” leadership said they were interested in participation. However, personal challenges befell the key contact and made communication and participant selection nearly impossible. Other officials at Foundation “A” were not as excited about being a part of the study and did not return any forms of communication. Foundation “D” had a changeover in staff leadership the week they were contacted. As that Foundation searched for new leadership, other college officials followed the participant selection protocol listed below. No participants responded to the request, potentially because of the sudden change in leadership. When a new staff person was named, their first response when contacted was that appropriate efforts had been made before their arrival, and they had no desire to reach to the foundation board members again.

In the midst of all of this outreach, the entire region and country began to feel the effects of the pandemic COVID-19. Due to the virulent, highly contagious, and unknown lethality of the new disease, the entire nation went into a quarantine status for nearly twelve months. This affected how I connected with sites and participants, which I will document in the sections

below. The Institutional Review Board approved my outreach to two new site locations as a result.

The two new site locations were selected in an effort to bring diversity of communities across Illinois. The two sites selected provided contrast in make-up from the four selected above, which could have provided different points of views from the foundation board members who participated.

Community College Foundation “E” serves a community college in a mid-sized city that is also home to a major state university. The community also has several large manufacturing and health care facilities. The Foundation has over 10 million dollars in assets acquired over nearly five decades of existence. Its board consists of between 20 to 30 members. When contacted, its staff leadership was receptive to the study and reached out to its board members promptly.

Community College Foundation “F” serves a community college of one of the largest cities in the state. The city itself is the most ethnically diverse of the locations selected. The city has a large manufacturing base and faces economic challenges as its industries work to evolve into the new economies of the 21st century. The Foundation manages \$7 million in assets and is over 40 years old. Its board is between 10 to 20 members, but in reviewing the website of the Foundation, I questioned if its members reflect the diversity of the community. While the staff leadership showed interest in participation of the study in opening conversations, communication fell silent after a week. I am unsure if it was COVID related or disinterest from foundation board members once they learned of the study.

In conclusion, I researched, scouted and contacted six different community college foundations across the state of Illinois, with the goal of finding a diverse pool of foundation

board members to share their experiences and insights on their services. Due to a number of different challenges, from COVID shutdowns to shifts in college leadership at various locations, I was able to secure interviews with six foundation board members from four locations, with all six foundation board members showing a wide range in age, professional background and years serving as a foundation board member. The six interviews from four distinctly different communities across the state show a due diligence on procuring different insights on the role of the community college foundation board member.

Participant Selection

While there was change and modification in which community college foundations were selected, the next step was the recruitment of potential interviewees. At the beginning of this study, I contacted the foundation executive directors, who are the gatekeepers to the community college foundation board members, asking to attend a meeting of each foundation board. Those that did accept as a site were hesitant, and at times protective of meeting time and engagement. Pre-Covid site adopters chose to share materials via email with their board members either because a future board meeting was months away, or there was limited time on the agenda for the business they needed to attend to and could not find the space for my presentation. My contact information and a detailed description of the study and their participation was sent to all members, with instructions of how to directly contact me so they could maintain their confidentiality. Sites selected after COVID-19 quarantine did not have any possible face-to-face meeting, so they also relied on this system of information distribution. From this work, six participants emerged and were interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews are more than an oral application of a survey. They are, as Glesne (2015) notes, a dialogue between two parties that leads to a shared understanding of a subject. This understanding is reached by establishing rapport between the parties involved, exploring the subject at hand with a series of establishing questions, and then probing the responses for meaning, with the interviewer sharing back what he or she is hearing and giving interviewees an opportunity to reshape, highlight, or reframe their comments.

As an interviewer in this study, my first requirement was to establish rapport with the participants by sharing my background in community college fundraising and my motivations for pursuing this as a career. I worked to communicate that we shared an interest in community colleges and in fundraising for these institutions. Glesne (2015) explains that sharing personal information establishes the exchange, not as an examination of a specific subject or topic subject but as a shared dialogue in which the interviewer and interviewee can find common ground or understanding on a subject. It also creates a sense of vulnerability and openness on behalf of the interviewer by showing that the process is not a means of extracting information from the interviewee but is, instead, a conversation between two people.

The next part of the interview process was to ask the established questions. I asked the following series of questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How did you become a community college foundation board member?
3. How would you describe your motivation for serving?
4. Walk me through what a typical year might include for you in terms of Board responsibilities and activities.

5. What do you see as the mission or role of the community college foundation?
6. What is your perception of the Foundation's responsibility to [Name of Community College]?
7. Tell me about how the board carries out those responsibilities.
 - What examples can you provide to help me understand this work?
8. How do you see your role in helping the foundation carry out its work?
9. How are decisions made on the board?
 - Can you provide me an example?
10. What have been the largest challenges you have faced as a board member?
11. What makes the role of community college foundation board member unique?

These questions did not complete the interview experience, but instead provided entry points to dialogue with the subject. At times, in the course of answering a question an interviewee touched upon the topics of future questions or opened the door to new topics. My responsibility as an interviewer was to listen to the participant and then share back what I was hearing. Glesne (2015) sees this exchange as allowing a participant to unpack and provide texture for their thoughts. Each time I shared back, the subject could examine the information and see if it aligned with their internal views. A participant may have initially glossed over certain themes but, after further reflection, determined that they warrant greater attention. When closing the interviews, I recapped what I believed I heard from the participant over the course of our conversation. My goal was to make sure that we both left the conversation with a shared understanding of what was said. I also wanted to make sure I allowed the participant an opportunity to share ideas and concepts I may not have asked about but that nonetheless emerged in our conversation.

The interviews fell into two different periods and used different interactive methods. The first occurred before the COVID-19 outbreak. These interviews took place face-to-face and were recorded using my personal cell phone to an audio file. The files were transcribed using NVivo and were spot-checked to ensure accuracy. The second group of interviews happened after the COVID-19 outbreak that required a statewide quarantine for public health and safety. With the approval of the Institutional Review Board, these interviews were conducted and recorded over the Zoom online meeting platform. While there was the opportunity for participants to engage via a webcam, those I interviewed in this part of the process either lacked the technology or chose not to use the webcam. I made sure my web camera was on to hopefully provide a sense of comfort and allow them to see any of my nonverbal communication. The Zoom program allows for a full recording of the meeting both audio and video. Like previous interviews that were audio recorded, these interviews were transcribed in the same format as the face-to-face interviews.

Once the interviews were transcribed to text, I applied the coding analysis method described by Saldana (2015). The first step was condensing the interview text to themes and text blocks. There were a number of phrases and concepts, even though these individuals never met each other or were aware of each others interviews, that bubbled up in all of the interviews. After the audio of the interviews was converted to text, and using the notes I had taken during the interviews marking time stamps, I worked to summarize portions of each interview, roughly 20 to 30 seconds, to mini concepts. I then went back through all six interviews to see if any of the concepts I had discovered in other interviews were nestled in the thoughts and comments of other foundation board members. Once these readings were complete, I looked for larger

narrative patterns that connected the concepts. My findings from this work is discussed in Chapter 4.

Research Ethics

Because these interviews asked participants to share personal information, motivations and feelings, it is ethical that their identities were protected. While most of what participants shared can be seen as positive, there is the opportunity for social or professional harm if it is perceived the individual is sharing a negative or unflattering comment about their college, community, or other topics. As such, all participants were given alternative identifiers, and the recordings of their interviews and transcripts are kept in secure, passcode protected locations.

Additionally, an effort at reciprocity occurred with the various participating boards and individuals. In terms of reciprocity, I shared my story as a community college foundation participant as an executive director. While my position, as a paid staff member, is different from the community college foundation board volunteer, I was able to show some of the similar values and experiences we had engaging with community college students. This shows value back to the time and access they granted, as well as an opportunity to gain something from their experience in the study. Additionally, I communicated I would be sharing back the knowledge gained from the research once the study has concluded, allowing the participants to see how their insights informed a larger discussion on the issue of community college foundation board members. Finally, with this reciprocity, equality between the researcher and the participant can be shown as a similar vulnerability in sharing their work as the participant did in sharing their opinions.

Positionality

I have worked in community college fundraising for over 15 years, serving as an executive director for the past eight years. In my role, I work directly with community college foundation board members, serving as their liaison to the institution. I am of their world but not a part of their world. I work side by side with this group, hearing their stories and recruiting them to volunteer for the community college.

A current board member I work with is an executive for a Fortune 500 company. When we solicit donations from individuals and companies, he shares why he gives and serves. He recognizes that community college students are like him; the first in their family to attend college. He appreciates access to higher education that allowed him from a working class background, to access corporate success. He talks about how he was not connected to elite institutions. He felt he needed a chance to learn and grow as a person, unlocking his potential. Instead of crediting his own personal talents, he chooses to attribute his success to the power and opportunity of education.

Hearing stories like that from foundation board members creates a bias. I put halos on the work and motivations of community college foundation board members. A key function of my profession is to highlight what is good about the work of community colleges as a way of motivating and enticing donors to contribute to the foundation. That praise and motivation extends to community college foundation board members. It was necessary for me throughout the study to hear their stories and see the world through their eyes. At the same time, I needed to look beyond my bias and seek counter stories that may not be positive.

One way I was aware of and sought to overcome by bias of positivity for community college foundation board members was to be aware of and willing to explore negative

connotations the board members may have held or still potentially hold concerning community college students. It was challenging to hear those I interviewed share stereotypes about community colleges as places mostly for those not accepted at other higher education institutions, or for students with lower academic profiles. Additionally, I had to open myself up to hear members who placed restrictions around their duties and placed limitations on what they would do to benefit the community college they served. These comments did not shatter the halo I placed on those who served as foundation board members, but instead allowed for a more nuanced appreciation for the work these board members do, their own natural biases about community colleges, and an acceptance of what work felt comfortable to them in their roles as volunteers.

Conclusion

Understanding the personal motivations and views of community college foundation board members is an important academic endeavor. The qualitative study outlined and conducted in this chapter is a first exploration of the topic. A clear method and procedure with definitive processes for site and participant selection ensured that all parties involved gave full consent while also protecting the identities of the community colleges and their foundation board members. Special attention was paid to maintain trustworthiness of the findings with multiple checkpoints for validity. As a qualitative researcher, I have worked to identify my positionality and the bias and blind spots it may create for me as I learned more about community college foundation board members.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

People are not born to be community college foundation board members. There is not a DNA marker, genetic disposition, or a hereditary function that would help to identify who will become a community college foundation board member. And yet, annually over 15,000 people answer the call to serve in the role. How do they end up there? In this chapter, we will explore three archetypes that emerged from my interviews: The Super Fan, the Innocent Bystander, and the Doubting Thomas. The people described in each of these categories are not one particular individual I interviewed. Instead, they are an amalgamation of themes and characteristics that emerged across all of the interviews. Additionally, we will explore how these archetypes execute their work and what they see as the function of the community college foundation.

Before I separate out the pathways, there is one thing that all share in common: the existence of a community college foundation board was a new concept to them. Each group could speak to how they viewed the community college, but until they were approached for service, all said they were unaware there was a fundraising body that worked on behalf of the community college interests. “I knew there were charities in our community, but they were things like United Way or Kiwanis. I didn’t know the college had such a thing or even why they would need one,” was a common sentiment throughout all of the interviews. The opinions, feelings, and paths described below relate to the college itself. The foundation became a means to support the institution they knew.

For each pathway, I have developed three compilation stories that were informed by the interviews conducted. Willis (2018) describes the process as combining the multiple stories of participants into a single compilation story that allows a researcher to present an authentic yet anonymous story. A compilation approach allows for the conveying of an “emotional truth”

which defines as “an authentic representation of feeling states rather than a strict adherence to narrative truth” (Orbach, 2000). This technique was chosen because it allows me to protect the anonymity of all people interviewed, while also providing a deeper understanding of each of the archetypes presented. To summarize, I took pieces and quotes from people who represented each archetype to create a compilation story for each one.

The Super Fan

This pathway to community college foundation board membership would seem the most obvious and natural. The Super Fan loves the concept of community colleges. They speak of community colleges in glowing terms as “seeing community college students are really working hard at trying to better themselves,” that the college “has a unique and special role in higher education” and are “economically a great tool for students to use to get a broader understanding and education.” The Super Fans are self-contained marketing departments for the community college, ready to sing the praises and highlight the virtue they see at the institution.

How these people become Super Fans varies. Some come by it through personal experience. They are alumni of the community college system, either starting their higher educational journey or finding later success after challenges in the university system. The community college story is their personal story and they are excited to share it. Even more powerful is when this change happens to an important person in their life, such as a child or sibling. To see that person develop into something else can create a bond. The Super Fan appreciates the “care the college showed” to their loved one and feels a kinship for the focus on that particular person.

Others are part of the community college system in its delivery of education. Since many community colleges employ adjunct and part time faculty, community members may have taught

a course in their particular professional field or area of interest. They directly met with community college students, worked on the campuses, and witnessed the growth that comes from education. While they personally did not attend a community college, they have been part of the system and seen its results.

A final Super Fan is the donor. At some point in their existence they “established a little scholarship” to honor a family member knowing “it was nice to be able to help somebody” while remembering that individual. Others attended events where they “heard a couple of people share how it impacted their life” and they saw the difference happening in their community. Their pathways to making financial contributions can vary, but once they are there, they feel connected and have “skin in the game”. By being financially linked to the community college foundation, they are “more attentive to the information shared” because they “want to hear how the money is being used” and “feel good that I’m making a difference”. As a donor, they are already a part of the foundation in the financial sense. The next step to being a guiding influence often feels like a natural progression. The Super Fan is best seen in the story of Maria.

Super Fan Compilation Story

Maria was a first-generation college student from a working class family. Her parents had limited funds for their daughter’s education and had several other children, with Maria being their oldest. Maria also realized that “college was a new idea to all of us. It was something you saw on tv, but I don’t think I necessarily knew someone who attended. Maybe my teachers did, but it wasn’t something that we talked about a lot.” College did not appear in Maria’s life plans until her final years of high school. A few teachers and a guidance counselor said college was a path she could succeed in and would help her realize her desire to teach. As Maria looked back, these encouraging adults helped her move towards college but, “I’m not

sure if anyone talked about where I should go or even how to do it. It was just kinda, hey you'll figure it out." Maria was not really sure where to turn to. The notion of going away to college concerned her, as her extended family was centralized around the area and she hadn't lived anywhere else in her early life. She knew a few of her friends would be attending the local community college and so she decided to tag along to learn more.

For Maria, stepping foot on her community college campus was at first concerning. "It was a lot of people I knew from high school, and it just seemed like the same class but with some of the kids who weren't trying hard." However, with time she met different people, most importantly faculty and staff that continued to feed her desire to become an educator. "The faculty really got to know me as a student," and with time Maria learned what the next steps for her own education would need to be. Guided discovery of how financial aid worked, how to apply through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, and how to determine if she was meeting the graduation requirements for her area of study were very impactful. The school even worked to connect her with local universities that had a specialized focus in education. It was the personal attention that Maria remembered, and had experienced for the first time in her educational life. While she felt welcomed when she transferred, the university and future educational experiences never duplicated how the faculty and staff paid attention to her needs and dreams as they did at the community college.

Maria would earn her bachelor's in education and student teach in a suburb farther away from her home. While she appreciated the experience, she felt as though large city life and the school districts there did not fit with her expectations. She applied for a teaching position at a number of central Illinois districts, and eventually found one that felt "like my hometown, but different enough for me to build my own life."

As she worked with high school and local students, she would always identify with potential first-generation college students and guide them towards the local community college. She saw that there were mixed emotions about the quality of the college among her teaching peers and community members, but Maria felt that the college would provide the personal attention those students needed.

Maria eventually became an adjunct professor at the college, teaching her area of expertise. It was a way to help herself financially, but also a chance to be involved on the other side of the community college experience. In her time there, she never really heard much about the foundation. She was never asked to give during the early part of her career there. But she did remember that she was asked to speak on behalf of the college for a referendum. “We were all called together and told how important it was. How we needed people to hear about the college and why we needed this.” It would be the first time that Maria was an advocate for the college, and people internally took notice.

Maria would eventually be approached about creating a scholarship for students in her area of study. It was an area that had been neglected for a period of time, and now was surging back in demand for her community. She said yes and made “a tiny donation that I’m not sure anyone would really notice. I’m not sure I was even aware it was the foundation I was giving to. Our president just asked that we give to help the students and I remembered what it was like.” After a few years, the president approached her again, and asked if she could help find others to create scholarships. When she said yes, she was placed on the Foundation Board. That appointment opened her eyes to a new part of the college and her community.

Her first few meetings were just discovering how the Foundation worked and what its work actually was. It was an “aha” moment to learn that her gifts before weren’t going to the

college and the overall budget, but instead to the supporting organization in the foundation. She started on the scholarship committee, making decisions of which students would receive scholarships and who needed to create scholarships. In her eyes they were large donation asks. “Looking back, I think I underestimated the support. Getting a few hundred bucks from people I thought was big, but I’d realize later that it wasn’t as big a deal as I was guessing. I later learned they could give so much more.” While her ability to sense how much people could give would mature, her capacity to know who to ask to give was a natural instinct. Maria found the donation asks simple. She told her story, what a community college did for her, and how she was seeing that story repeated in the local high schools and the community college classroom she was teaching in. She did not see it as sales, but just telling why she was inspired. This approach resonated with people. In time, her efforts grew the scholarship program.

Her work on the foundation board felt simple and straightforward. Make sure the financial statements were balanced and clean. Award scholarships to the students who needed them. Maria would serve for a number of years in this role. The foundation would grow marginally in this time. There was the occasional estate gift from an elderly couple in the community, or a grateful booster to one of the athletic teams. When she had the chance, or on the few occasions she was asked, she would share her story and see some funds come in.

For Maria, serving on the foundation board served her personally two-fold. First, it was her opportunity to give back. “I had a scholarship, so I guessed someone had to do this for me at some time,” she would explain. She wanted to be engaged and help her community, and this pathway resonated with her the most given her personal experience. People often have a connection with a charity they serve, having seen the effects firsthand.

The second part was an opportunity to bring a little prestige to community colleges. When Maria attended, the college was seen as “high school, but you were allowed to smoke.” Her community college had a pejorative nickname that made it clear those attending were lesser than their four-year counterparts. For Maria, there almost a sense of shame with where her higher education journey began. This was hard for her to reconcile internally. How could a place that was so welcoming and helpful to her be seen by the rest of the community as lesser? While she wanted others to hear her story as a reason to give, it was also an opportunity to change the general mindset of many in her new community that held a negative impression of the community college. Maria was becoming accomplished in her work as an educator and being recognized in the community for it. She had the opportunity to share her credibility and community standing with the community college by serving on the board. She could “help people see really good kids go to school here.” Maria could serve as an example of what the community college student could become: a successful and respected community leader.

Super Fan Summary

While Maria is one example of a Super Fan, other individuals like her do not need to be sold on the idea of community colleges. Before the foundation even approached them for service, they were aware and often proud of the institution. Joining the foundation board would simply be a new extension of this positive feeling and an opportunity to explore it deeper. Super Fans have at least one, if not multiple, connection points with the community college. They feel the institution is undervalued in their community and want to see the college grow in prestige. At the most basic level, the Super Fan has a part of their identity linked to the community college. They understand the community college at a deep level. Indoctrination and education would be a more important process for the next archetype, the Innocent Bystander.

The Innocent Bystander

The Super Fan can be found easily through a simple search of their resume, LinkedIn profile, or even the college database. The literal words “community college” will appear next to their name in either educational, work, or philanthropic experience. They were on an obvious path with a distinct conclusion. The Innocent Bystander does not have the telltale signs or obvious pedigree.

The Innocent Bystander will often self-identify as being somewhat oblivious to the community college as an institution. They will have higher educational degrees but “never considered community college when I was in high school” or “didn’t really know it was there” or “it didn’t cross my radar” for large portions of their life. Ironically, some will have set foot on a community college campus but not consider themselves alums or associated because “I just needed one course for my bachelor’s degree” or “until you just asked I never thought of the course” or even “I’d drive past and wonder what those buildings were”. In the beginning for the Innocent Bystander, the community college, and by proxy the community college foundation, are Wichita, Kansas. Many never have visited, and those who did forgot because it was a stopover flight on their way to another destination.

However, for all Innocent Bystanders, there comes a moment they get sucked into the gravitational pull of the community college and the foundation through circumstances they could not have foreseen. This is the story of Stan.

Innocent Bystander Compilation Story

For Stan, community college was something that lurked at periphery of his existence. Stan’s family had a plan for his higher education journey, following in the university legacy footsteps of his parents. He knew high school classmates that would attend community college,

but it was never an option for him. He never set foot on the campus in his hometown, and maybe drove past it a few times. It was like Montana or Cornish hen. He knew it existed but didn't have an opinion about it in any regard.

Stan completed his university studies, found a job in banking, moved to a new town, then started his adult life. He would marry, have kids, coach baseball, and advance in his career. Community college would continue to sit near him, but in a blind spot. His wife was a community college graduate, but that happened before they met. She never really talked about it and was not an active alumna. His sons in high school would take occasional classes at the community college for college credit, but he saw it as part of the AP programming for academically achieving students. He and his wife took a line dancing class course as a way to stay connected that was taught by the college, but it didn't strike him as anything special that the YMCA or his local rec center might do. The local community college innocuously crept into small parts of Stan's world, but never announced its presence. Then Stan got a call to his boss's office.

Stan has a particular set of skills. He knows where numbers and funds should be, how to keep them organized, and what to do when they aren't. These skills make him very good at his job. These skills helped him advance at the bank where he worked, leading an entire department of people like him. But Stan's boss felt that Stan needed to learn new skills. Additionally, the boss felt that community members needed to know the bank was more than just keeping numbers and funds where they should be. Thus, he presented an opportunity to Stan: join the board of the local community college foundation.

It should be noted that the community college foundation was not a randomly selected community service opportunity for Stan. His boss's father helped in founding the community college, advocating for local tax support. The boss himself had served on the foundation board

for a number of years. The bank even had a sizeable scholarship with the foundation that supported several local students. Stan didn't know any of this, until the fateful meeting where his boss "suggested I join the board. You know, the same way your spouse suggests you take out the garbage."

As Stan joined the board, it quickly became obvious why he was there: his particular set of skills. The foundation was growing and had a number of new accounts and new fiscal needs. It had a paid staff of one person, and they were tasked with bringing money in. It was up to Stan to make sure that money got to the right places, the right bills got paid, and all the numbers lined up right. He was doing the same job he did at the bank, except on a much smaller scale. The numbers for Stan were easy. The real shock is what was behind the numbers.

When Stan attended university, everyone was pretty much like him. They all had just finished high school. They all had careers in mind. They were all academically sharp for the most part. They were all excited to be away from home. Sure, he met people from different cities. There were different genders, ethnicities, and cultures. He even knew a few people on financial aid who had to work in the dining hall to cover their tuition. But, on the whole, they were very similar people. Stan assumed it was the same thing at community colleges, just maybe for kids who had challenges in high school. Stan experienced culture shock in the first few years on the board.

To begin with, Stan learned that every type of kid came to community college. He was right, there were the kids that school was a challenge. However, there was also the kid who was in AP Biology with his son, the kid he coached in baseball when he was 8, and the kid who lived around the corner from his family. They were all "good kids, really smart. They picked the community college, I guess for other reasons." Stan always knew he wanted to work with

numbers. He was realizing not everyone had an obvious path before them. He began to appreciate that kids needed to find themselves, and a “big campus far from home isn’t for everybody.”

Stan also began to realize the foundation was not working with just kids. He met 30-year-olds coming to class after they worked their full time job. He saw people his age who had been laid off from the local factory after it closed trying to find a new career. He saw people who had just come to the United States, who had a full medical degree, starting over at square one academically. “There are so many different stories. So many people coming from different places.” Sometimes those places weren’t pretty.

While on the board, the foundation was approached by the faculty on a humanitarian issue. A young mother was found sleeping in her car on campus with her two-year-old daughter. She was recently kicked out of her apartment because her hours were reduced at her job. She was trying to make ends meet as she completed her nursing degree. She knew she couldn’t drop out because she was so close to finishing. A degree meant a full-time job at the local hospital. That job meant a steady income so she could provide for her daughter. Stan and the board agreed they wanted to help the student with final two months she was in school. They paid for her rent until she graduated. Stan thought it was a feel-good story and glad that one student no longer had to worry. Then came three more stories like it. Then six more. Soon, Stan and the board realized that these students needed more than just scholarships. “It just breaks your heart to hear a person who is trying to improve themselves and working hard in class, and they are basically living on the streets. How do you even focus when you have that? And it’s not like there are lunches and programs like we have for school kids. You want to help someone who is helping themselves.” Stan knew there was homelessness and hunger in his community. He gave to the

United Way and worked at the soup kitchen for his local church. It never occurred to Stan the various challenges that community college students faced due to their varied life circumstances.

It was in these moments that Stan found a new appreciation for the community college. It was more than just another higher education institution. It was no longer “a simpler version of what I went through for school”. For Stan, it became “a hidden gem I didn’t know before.” He heard the stories of more students through the scholarship program and other events at the college. He appreciated that for many in the community this may be their only pathway into higher education, and even more so into a better life. While some of the students looked and fit the mold he experienced at his university, so many more were people he would have never seen there.

But this was not a one-way street of information for Stan. He also came in with some thoughts of his own. Stan’s bank had a number of clients who were farmers and in the agricultural industry. While regional state universities had majors and courses focused on agriculture, he questioned what the local community college was doing in that area. After probing, he learned of a once thriving but now dormant agricultural program at the college. Stan began to push the president of the college, who attended foundation board meetings, to consider revitalizing the program. He mentioned the taxes farmers were paying and the potential for employment at local granaries, seed companies, and other agriculturally related employers across the district. While Stan may not have known much about the community college, he knew his bank customers and what they needed for business to thrive.

While advocating for his current business relationships, Stan found new ones as a board member. “The comradery of the board is really something. You get to know all of these different people from around the community.” Stan noticed that not everyone who came in stayed long.

Some “washed out quickly when they couldn’t find something that spoke to them.” But those who stayed were people he began to view as associates and friends. Developing relationships was the growth opportunity for him as a business and community leader. It was what his boss wanted to see happen, and in many ways, Stan wanted for himself. He was able to “step outside of his box and comfort zone” to try something new. He was able to define himself as more than just a certain skill set.

Innocent Bystander Summary

For the Innocent Bystander, joining the community college foundation board is an unusual but interesting experience. They are a *tabula rasa* in terms of learning what a community college is. With few preconceived notions, each board meeting and activity is a first impression for them. Things that Super Fans take for granted or forgot they learned about the college is “eye opening” as these individuals learn of the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and long-term goals of the institution and the students they serve. They go from zero to sixty in their experience and perceptions of the community college and the foundation, relishing the rush of new information. While the Super Fan can sympathize with current community college students and the college itself since they stood in similar shoes, the Innocent Bystander is asked to empathize with an institution and people they may have never encountered before, or never appreciated that they have. A blank slate is hard to fill, but rewriting a negative slate creates even different challenges and journeys of self-discovery. That is the journey of the Doubting Thomas.

The Doubting Thomas

The Doubting Thomas archetype is not oblivious to community colleges like the Innocent Bystander. At points in their life, the Doubting Thomas knew what a community college was. And for them, it was a much different world than what the Super Fan experienced. Often, they

actively worked to avoid the community college. Janet's story as a Doubting Thomas highlights a long arc from loathing to advocacy.

Doubting Thomas Compilation Story

Janet knew exactly what a community college was and where her local community college was located. "My parents and I had higher goals for my college experience." The community college for her was where those goals went to die. It lacked the rich academic history, field leading professors, and bastion of new knowledge that her university of choice had in spades. The community college was for the also rans of academics. She didn't actively hate it or wish to see it removed, but she also knew she would never be a part of it.

University life worked well for Janet, as it had for her parents and her siblings. She found a job and a life after she graduated. But her career began to stall, and she needed to take the next steps to get her masters so she could continue to climb. Inside of that master's program was a challenge she had avoided as an undergraduate whenever possible, math. To complete the MBA, she needed to level up where her math academic credentials were. After reviewing her options, Janet found it was only the local community college that could meet her needs for nighttime classes and cost. As a non-traditional student, she stepped foot into a classroom for what she anticipated would be a quick crash course. What she found was a world she had so wrong.

Janet was not surprised in the make up of her class. She knew that community colleges saw a wide band of backgrounds and ages. She sought out the course for that specific reason. It would have been awkward to walk into a class of 18- and 19-year-old students at the university. The surprises started in the rigor of the class. At the 100 and 200 levels in university she remembered being in large halls, taught by teaching assistants barely a few years older than her,

and becoming a general face in the crowd. As a studious individual, this setting let her excel past less focused individuals. But, in her community college math class she was one of thirteen. After the first week the professor, who had their doctorate in math, knew her name. Every student was consistently called upon to solve problems, explain theories, and work processes. The immersion into the subject was for greater depth and intensity than she anticipated. She and her fellow classmates grew and succeeded because of it. She walked in looking to check off a requirement for her MBA program, she left with a better appreciation of math, and of the community college system itself. However, the impact of community colleges would be larger and more meaningful decades later.

Becoming a parent is often noted as changing the perspective of an individual. Many parents live and die with the challenges their children face. The parents are elated when the child succeeds and are crushed harder when they fall. Janet was one of those parents. Her son entered the armed services after high school. School had been a challenge for him before his enlistment, and he saw the military as an opportunity with more potential than college had for him. After completing his service, he returned to civilian life. He had found a passion for engineering while in the military but was not sure how to translate that passion into a career. As Janet worked with her son to find his footing and future, community college stepped forward as a pathway to success.

Janet first saw community college as a place that her son could ease back into academics. In working with him, she saw him taking one semester to knock off the learning rust, and then transition into the local university. However, the success of that semester led to more time at the community college where her son blossomed into the student she always felt he could be. Janet noted the smaller classes, the more unique teaching style, and the more engaged

faculty helped her son connect to the material in ways he never had in high school. “That school gets people better, I think. Not everyone is cut out the same way, and they adjust. But it never changes how much those students learn.” Her son would continue to the university to complete his engineering bachelor’s degree, and often commented that his community college classes were harder and prepared him better than his university experience. For Janet, the community college unlocked the son she believed was always there. That experience placed the community college in the heart of Janet.

That heart found a way to give back just a few years later. Janet and her husband set up a scholarship with the community college to celebrate his retirement and keep the flame for his profession alive with another generation of people. That act of generosity led to invitations to community college events “where I heard more stories and saw just how many people the college was touching. It wasn’t just my family and lost kids. There were so many great stories.” Shortly after, a professional colleague approached her for service on the board. It was one of the quickest and easiest decisions she had made for a charity.

Being excited to help community colleges was one thing. Understanding how to do so was another. The distinction between the college and the foundation was new knowledge for Janet. While she had created a scholarship, to her it wasn’t obvious that it resided with the foundation and not at the college. While she had served on nonprofit boards before, the work there was guiding the work of the non-profit in terms of services provided. Budgets to programs were discussed and which programs should be offered. Where the money came from and how it was managed occurred in other areas of the board and organization. As Janet stepped into the community college foundation, she found herself in fundraising and financial management. It was new, but she found it simpler than expected. Her motivation was to get people involved with

the foundation in meaningful ways. She wanted others to hear the stories she had. She knew she could not replicate her life experience, but she could show her circle of contacts the impacts that were happening around the community. She wanted to challenge the views she knew she carried for so many years with people who may have felt the same. Community colleges were not what she thought they would be. They were not the dredges of higher education, living at the fringes of respectability. Instead, they were hidden gems who did not wear the airs of universities. Janet felt her goal was helping others overcome the misperceptions she held. From there, donations and support would flow.

Doubting Thomas Summary

As a Doubting Thomas, Janet began with every negative connotation that community colleges have wrestled with for decades, either accurately or unjustly earned. The Doubting Thomas knew and could verbalize each one. As such, for a portion of their life, they did not want to be associated with it. Then a change happened.

For some Doubting Thomases it was “basic maturity.” “You see more of the world than your little lens,” explained one interviewee. This version had life experience beyond high school, possibly seeing that four-year colleges had their warts just like everything else and choose to reevaluate their impression of community colleges. For others, someone close experienced community college and allowed for a new perspective. If a person they cared for attended and appreciated the community college, and the Doubting Thomas cared for that person, then the transitive property of love meant the Doubting Thomas would realign their worldview of community colleges. The cognitive dissonance of loathing something that helped a person you love is sometimes too hard to process. But for most, the Doubting Thomas believed it was community colleges that evolved since their first impression. In their mind, “the kids who attend

now are better, more traditional.” “The facilities got nicer. There seemed to be more pride in the college.” And a key influence stated was “I just heard more people talking about the college and sending their kids there.” People change over time, so it would make sense institutions can change as well.

What makes Doubting Thomases so interesting as an archetype is their journey. Unlike Super Fans who drank the community college Kool Aid early, or Innocent Bystanders who didn't appreciate community colleges were there, Doubting Thomases have a richer history where they tell how the college has evolved into something greater from its humble beginnings. The Doubting Thomas can share a story of evolution, improvement, and stock on the rise in a way the Super Fan can never fully comprehend. For a Super Fan to be an effective ambassador, the audience they are speaking to has to accept some premise of them or their beliefs. But the Doubting Thomas reaches different audiences and world views, being able to say to those who may still question the value of community colleges “I once saw them like you do. But let me tell you why that's changed.”

Archetype Conclusion

Each of these archetypes have different origin stories. Their first impressions, deepest impressions, lasting impressions, or even lack of impressions shape how they came to be community college foundation board members. But, each is valuable in how they learn about the community college and the work of the community college foundation. Each tell different stories, with different emotional drivers like empathy, sympathy, and even apathy. Just like community colleges accept students from varying backgrounds with varying goals, it only seems rational the community college foundation would be comprised of different starting points and opinions on what a community college is and why supporting a community college through its

foundation is so important. With the perspective of who these individuals are, the interviews gave insights to the research question of how they see their role as a community college foundation board member.

Perceptions of How Foundation Boards Work

Every foundation board member interviewed understood that joining the board would entail some degree of work or engagement on their part. Most began their role with an expectation of functional work for the foundation. The expected functional work of each foundation board member would vary depending on what their assignment was within the board. Foundation board members were assigned to particular activities or committees. One board member explained it:

“Well, you attend your quarterly meetings and then we're all appointed to at least one, maybe two committees. I currently serve on mini grants, which I love to review the applications and strategic planning. I like strategic planning because I like to look at the future, knowing where we've come in the past, you know, where we had temporary buildings out here at one time and it wasn't for our initiatives you know, the present wouldn't be here.”

Other work identified by the foundation board members were the finance committee overseeing the investment and spending of the foundation, the scholarship committee that awarded scholarships to students, and a celebration or gala committee that would plan and host an event that invited people to campus to learn more about the college and the foundation. Foundation board members gravitated to a committee that aligned with their professional talents or personal interests. Many found satisfaction in the work they were doing, could see the benefit

it provided to the foundation, and appreciated the comradery of working with their fellow board members. However, with time, all saw the work they were doing would change.

The speed at which the change came, and possibly perceived, differed among foundation board members interviewed. All reached the same endpoint: the foundation board was expected to be a player in terms of generating more funds for the college. For one group, this message was very obvious and intentional. The message came from the college itself, often from the president. This sentiment was best described by a foundation board member who shared:

“I think it happened the year I joined the board because I remember the president bringing in a consultant. I don't think the college has done that for the foundation, training us to ask for money. And the foundation wasn't doing that. You know, they weren't becoming these active people out in the community asking people and companies: Would you help us? Could you help us? So it was right about this time the change happened. And it was quick and obvious this is what the college wanted. I think we learned later that the college needed it because some programs needed to grow and this was the only way that was going to happen. It had to be us. We had to find the money for growth or it wasn't going to happen.”

This direct change for a foundation board member, while jarring, also opened an appreciation for what the college was trying to accomplish. Foundation board members would report that they had to learn even more about the college's finances, strategic plans, and projections than their previous work required. It created an intentional alignment between the foundation and the college. The foundation board members felt the foundation was no longer “just a scholarship awarding body” but instead had become a true partner with the college it served.

For a second group, the shift from passive foundation work to active fundraising was a circuitous and jarring sensation. In some cases, this occurred with a change in college leadership. A new president or dean would come to the college carrying expectations of the college/foundation relationship tightly aligned and fundraising active. The new leadership would make asks of the foundation financially, assuming the support would be met in a quick fashion. This resulted in cultural friction, as foundation board members were not prepared, or even aware, that active fundraising would be a part of their duties. As one foundation board member explained, “I felt that was the work of the staff. I never expected to be reaching to my contacts or even making cold asks in the community. That’s not how my work with the foundation had always been.”

In other cases, the college would express a need for more funds and financial support but would not have strong guidance on where that support would go or how much was needed. The foundation board members would feel the pressure from the college to expand their fundraising focus, so they took the impetus to learn how it should function. As explained by a foundation board member:

“Well, I think our responsibility is first to see what the priorities are, what are the needs. It's hard to ask for money when you're just saying, could you give me some money? But if you know what the needs are and then we're taught or trained to go to someone that has a passion in that area. So, you don't want all your board members, you know, going for the same thing because some board members might not have an interest or that knowledge about that. So the college and the foundation have to work closely together on this and coordinate their efforts.”

No matter how smooth the cultural shift was for the community college foundation and its board members, the first donation asks the board members made were the hardest for them. Contained within that challenges were a number of emotions: a fear of failure, a concern they were unprepared, a vulnerability amongst their fellow community leaders as they asked for help with something, as well as trepidation that comes with trying something new. Once on the other side of the first donation ask, the foundation board members said it became easier, but all interviewed said it was still the most challenging part of their foundation board experience. However, money was not the only thing foundation board members felt they brought in to the college.

“Board members are eyes and ears of the community,” explained one board member. Those eyes and ears also had mouths that were ready to share that perspective with the community college and the foundation. Several interviewees noted how they shared the perspective of their professional field and gave advice on how the community college could be training or servicing the groups better. The board members felt they were representing important taxpayers and interest groups in the community and that the college needed to either maintain or increase their focus on programs or certificate tracks in those particular areas.

This perspective also existed in how some community college foundation board members saw themselves as focus groups for the decisions and communications from the college to the greater community. That is seen in one foundation board member’s reaction to presentations from community college leaders:

“We would hear things from the president or faculty members, and I would kinda get what they were saying. But it would skip over some stuff because they lived it every day. And I would need to ask, explain this in a way to a person who has

never been to campus. I think sometimes they can forget that most people aren't thinking about the college all the time and they need to walk people along better. And you need to remind them to lay out all the pieces.”

Why Community College Foundation Members Serve

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the individuals interviewed did not realize that a community college foundation existed before they were asked to join. While I outlined where a number came from and their journey and growth as a foundation board member, there were a number of reasons of why they remained a foundation board member that were shared across all individuals.

Once the foundation board members became fully immersed in their work they all cited a deeper understanding of the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the student body and comprehension for the myriad of social and support services the college provided outside of the classroom. In terms of understanding the diverse student body, these new foundation board members expected to see more students like themselves decades earlier, traditional college aged students, some who may have been the first in their family to attend college. As one foundation board member explained, “I walked in expecting kids like my son just on a different path. I knew some of his friends had attended, so I was looking for kids like them.” What these people found instead, as they read scholarship applications and met students in various programs, were students with different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds than they had. These students were single mothers, high school students attending college early through dual credit programs, or individuals who were training for a new career at an advanced age. These varying backgrounds gave the community college foundation board member a greater appreciation for the various adaptations student services, faculty and enrollment staff faced working with such a

wide range of ages and experiences. As one foundation board member explained, “It is inspirational. You see all of these different people and it makes you change your mind about how important and how many people are touched by the role of the community college.”

Through that appreciation of the varying socio-economic backgrounds, community college foundation board members began to appreciate more the various services the college was providing. “We have a food bank, counseling, all of these other things that students need. Its more than just books and scholarships. I’ve seen it takes a little more than that to help students succeed.” explained one board member. Another noted, “If you are living in your car, how is our scholarship going to help? You have bigger problems you are working with, but if we can get them over that, you see them finishing and getting the job they need.”

Meeting these students and experiencing their stories firsthand at foundation events helped the foundation board members shift their internal perceptions of who a community college student was and the quality of students in the classroom. “You talk to these students and they already know they are going to be a doctor. They have a whole map of which schools are next and which classes they need to take. They were more ready for school than I ever was. I just didn’t realize this was how some students were preparing,” explained one foundation board member. A different board member saw students that exceeded their expectations of what a community college student could be: “So you meet and read these students scholarships, and they are top of their class and president of their club at school. These are essays you’d see for applications to U of I. But here they are with us, and you just wonder if people realize how good so many of these students are.”

The other experience that several foundation board members cited as inspiring their service is how the colleges are funded. As the foundation was asked to support funding for

programs, the financial structure and intricacies of community college finance was shared with the foundation board members. The foundation board members were both impressed with the fiscal responsibility and concerned about the tight margins of the colleges. “The vice president (of finance) came in to the meeting and walked us through where funds were coming from. And you know how Illinois is, it was so little coming from the state. I mean they said the state didn’t even pay for a few years.” explained one board member as they learned about college finances. Another pointed out how complicated financing can be:

“I mean the price of college has gone up since I went, but I get that was years ago. I saw how much we were charging and still is a better deal than [regional university] and I just didn’t know how they did it. And then when they lay out our bonds, and taxes, and the state, you see that so many pieces that go up and down. You really get why we need scholarships, but that other stuff too. Its not our job to keep track of all of that, but you need to see where our piece is.”

They saw the smaller amounts per student the colleges would receive from the state in comparison to local universities or k-12 school districts. The concept of value resonated strongly with several foundation board members after they experienced and interacted with college administrators and staff concerning college finances.

Conclusion

Community college foundation board members are a fascinating and diverse group of people. From those I was able to interview, I identified three archetypes. The “Super Fan” was a fan of the community college because of their previous interaction with the college and were excited to fill a new role in that relationship. The “Innocent Bystander” knew little of the college and its mission, but became enamored as they found parallels with their own life and values. It is

the “Doubting Thomas” that experienced the longest journey of all board members, moving from a person who looked down on the community college to becoming one of its strongest advocates.

While individuals came to community college foundation from different mental spaces, they shared similar feelings on how their work should function and why they chose to serve. They knew their board work required functional roles of oversight and leadership in how the funds of the foundation would be spent in service of the students, most often in the form of scholarships. However, all felt a large shift in their work was occurring as the college asked for more financial support for a variety of reasons. Luckily for the college, the foundation board members had strong convictions on why they were serving, citing the various examples of how their work touched the students and the difference it was making to the institution as a whole.

CHAPTER V: IMPLICATIONS

The landscape of higher education, especially community colleges, has shifted since the 1980s due to the introduction of neoliberal policies at both the state and national levels. Funding expectations for community colleges began to shift to less support from the state, specifically in Illinois (Palmer & Romano, 2018). In less than a generation, community college foundations went from ancillary scholarship managers to potentially important financial cogs for the colleges they serve. Adding to that shift were the new roles that community colleges were asked to fill in the interstitial spaces between a shrinking social service network and higher education. I believe my interviews and research of community college foundation board members show the shock, growing pains, and uncertainty many are experiencing in this transition.

In Chapter 2, I proposed a theoretical lens of boundary spanning to understand and view the work of community college foundation board members. The theory postulated that boundary spanning individuals helped to connect different groups, acting as a conduit of information and helping each group understand the other in their own terms. I felt community college foundation board members may act as boundary spanners connecting the foundation, and by proxy the community college, to the greater community it served. However, the themes and consistent messages those I interviewed shared instead focused on social and economic issues. Boundary spanning did not fully explain or frame these discussions in a meaningful way. It is for these reasons that I instead chose to use the lens of resource dependency theory to explain the views and thoughts shared by community college foundation board members.

In this chapter I will briefly explain the impact of neoliberalism policies on higher education, define the lens of resource dependency theory that highlights the reason for community college foundation shifts, and connect a number of foundation board member

thoughts in Chapter 4 that highlight the uncertainty community college foundation board members are facing during this transition as they see the foundation asked to step into the space of social services and filling larger parts of the college's overall revenue streams.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education

While the concept of neoliberalism and its affects are wide ranging in the current American society, Rhodes and Slaughter note that because of the influence of neoliberalism, higher education has shifted its focus from knowledge as a public good to knowledge as commodity that can be capitalized and sold to students as customers (2004). This attitude was perpetuated as state and national support in the 1980s began to shift funding in higher education, incentivizing seeking greater private support, rewarding private marketplace concepts such as research productivity and efficiencies, and turning student interactions from knowledge seeking to customer based interactions (Rhodes & Slaughter, 2004). These shifts gave national and state governments the latitude to greatly reduce public funding of higher education in times of economic challenge or in a desire to lower taxes (Palmer & Romano, 2018). Fowles found, through the lens of resource dependency, that universities combated these fluctuations in public funding by shifting larger portions of the revenue sources to student tuition (2014). Other researchers found universities shifting the focus and demands of faculty from teaching to grant writing and research, with the hope that funds generated from the activities could offset the budget losses from reduced public funding (Gonzales, Martinez, & Ordu, 2014).

Unfortunately community colleges have neither of these levers as drastically increasing tuition would work against their mission of accessibility and research traditionally is not in their purview of work. While some community colleges have shifted to creating formalized partnerships with local businesses to design programs that place students in local job markets in

line with the expectations of neoliberalism (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2004), it may be the community college foundation that offers one path to filling the gap left in funding due to the neoliberal shifts.

Resource Dependency Theory and Neoliberalism

While community college foundations have not made dramatic impacts on community college revenue streams, their establishment as an effort to offset changing funding patterns of the state reflects what scholars have referred to as resource dependency theory. As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) explain, resource dependency theory holds that institutions work to diversify their income streams to minimize their dependence on any one source of fiscal support. The authors note that by having multiple revenue streams, variances, or fluctuations in any one stream do not have a dramatic impact on total revenues. In addition, the capacity of any one funding entity to influence the internal operations of an organization diminishes as that organization can rely on other revenue sources. Simply put, an organization's freedom to exercise its own discretion increases to the extent that it is dependent on more, rather than fewer, revenue streams.

In terms of community colleges, state support can constitute a large income stream on which the institutions are dependent, in some cases accounting for over thirty percent of a college's budget in the state of Illinois (ICCB, 2017) with little opportunity to make up for shifting state resources through other means available to other institutional types. Changes in state budgets, political leadership and philosophy, or even taxation rates have a large effect on community college budgets. The introduction of community college foundations opens the opportunity for a new revenue stream that can potentially offset fluctuations in state funding due to the political beliefs and objectives to privatize education. However, community colleges, and

by proxy their foundations, are finding an additional pain point from neoliberalist decisions as they are being asked to absorb the social service needs of their students. To fill both the operational needs and the new responsibilities of the college, community college foundations would need to shift from being passive stewards of funds to active fundraisers aggressively seeking donations from the community they serve. This is a dramatic shift in tone, philosophy, and in some cases the work of the foundation board members. As seen in Chapter 4, this has created new questions and stresses for the board members that they are wrestling with. The impacts of these stresses are an important issue to understand for researchers and administrators at community colleges.

Effects on Community College Foundation Board Members

While we have discussed how changing public policy and funding has affected the community college and its students, community college foundation board members are also stakeholders feeling the effects of these changes. Board members interviewed referenced how their roles were changing and the stress that caused for them. Many felt the pressure from the college and shared how it was a new responsibility they were feeling. As community colleges shift, so does the relationship with the foundation that supports the community college. The foundation board members were passively and acutely aware of this shift and expressed it in two main areas: the expanded role of the college in the lives of students due to eroded social services and the increased financial demands from the college. Community college foundation board members were very aware of new demands they, and the students they supported, faced because of the changing landscape for social services.

Erosion of Social Services

The foundation board members I interviewed, once they were aware that a community college foundation existed, came into their roles expecting an academic focus for their work. As highlighted in Chapter 4, many spoke of reading and awarding scholarships, from Super Fan Maria who wanted to award scholarships like those awarded to her, to the board member who was surprised at the quality of applicants to the scholarship program when they said, “So you meet and read these students scholarships, and they are top of their class and president of their club at school. These are essays you’d see for applications to U of I.” Scholarships made logical sense as part of their role to each foundation board member as scholarships have long been associated with higher education. Tuition was the lone hurdle of access to an institution, so scholarships would be the means to remove that barrier. Now, greater hurdles were being placed in front of the students, and it was changing the scope of what community college foundation boards were seeing.

What came as a shock to them were the number of issues outside of the classroom community colleges students faced, and how the foundation needed to rally to support those students. “We have a food bank, counseling, all of these other things that students need. It’s more than just books and scholarships. I’ve seen it takes a little more than that to help students succeed.” explained one board member. Innocent Bystander Stan was very aware of the situation when he explained, “It just breaks your heart to hear a person who is trying to improve themselves and working hard in class, and they are basically living on the streets. How do you even focus when you have that? And it’s not like there are lunches and programs like we have for school kids. You want to help someone who is helping themselves.” The best summation of

the situation came from one interview who stated, “If you are living in your car, how is our scholarship going to help? You have bigger problems you are working with.”

Community colleges, and by proxy community college foundations, are feeling the crunch of a shrinking social service net. Issues of food insecurity, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health, and others that in previous generations were the issues of government programs like welfare and housing or non-profits such as Salvation Army or church soup kitchens are at the doorstep of the college. With a disproportionate percentage of low-income students enrolled (Ma & Baum, 2016) community colleges are left with no choice but to address the issues or lose large swathes of their student body to dropout or no enrollment at all. With tight budgets in the best of times, community colleges are turning to their foundations to support these needs.

The challenge this presents to community college foundations, as well as the colleges, is how to fill the interstitial space between social services and the academic work of the college. Community colleges and foundations are stretching from their role of just educational focus to trying to help students solve these problems. The community college foundation board members interviewed addressed their shock and then basic human and organizational desire to help. They see a problem and want to fix it. The unspoken tension that I believe exists for these board members is a concern of mission creep for the foundation. Scholarships made sense to these board members, it was a direct cost associated with education. Supporting programs, such as new equipment for the nursing program or new welding labs for the industrial tech areas, also clearly aligned with the educational mission of the college. However, food banks, housing support, and other base level needs are new territory for community college foundations. Additionally, that territory brings new questions that I am not sure foundation boards are considering. Who are they

responsible for with these services? Where does the foundation's obligation end? How does this change the donor pool, where their previous message was support scholarships to help with education but now would morph into helping to feed and house people while they are learning? While none of these individuals would be heartless enough to ignore the issues their students are facing, the question does loom as to whose problem is this to solve? For the short time, it appears it is the college's and the foundation's, and that is new territory for all involved.

An even larger question beyond mission creep is what are community college foundations capable of doing. As discussed before, in short order community college foundations were being asked to both fill operational budget gaps for the college and address the social service issues for the students. This is an issue K12 school systems have wrestled with in recent decades (Radin, 1989; Stone, 1993; Smrekar, 1996) but is now found its way to community colleges. The question none of the community college foundation board members asked in the interviews but will likely consider in years to come is: how much of a difference can we make? Those interviewed cited anecdotal ways they were able to help and how each story impacted them. But the issues of homelessness, hunger and domestic violence are amazingly large in every community. Simply put, community college foundations cannot raise the funds needed at this time to solve for these larger issues. That leaves the question of how do they help? As mentioned above, none of the individuals or foundations involved will look at their students hurting and simply shrug that it is outside of their focus. Do they become advocates, highlighting the issues their students are facing, asking for greater public support from state and local governments, joining other institutions who are trying to solve these issues? Do they highlight how a crippled social service network has a knock on effect to community colleges and their effectiveness? No matter the answer, it is obvious these foundations that were just learning how to fundraise and

manage scholarship programs are finding even more issues being laid at their feet. No matter how they choose to answer it, they will have to become different board members.

Passive Managers to Active Fundraisers

The individuals interviewed for this study had diversity across a number of categories. An interesting one was the amount of time the individuals had served on the foundation board. It ranged from nearly twenty years to less than three years. Even with that broad range, the tidal shift of foundation expectations was felt by all in roughly the same way. As one board member who had served for less than decade on their board explained, “And the foundation wasn't doing that (asking for money). You know, they weren't becoming these active people out in the community asking people and companies: Would you help us? Could you help us? So it was right about this time the change happened. And it was quick and obvious this is what the college wanted.”

Those interviewed conveyed that their work started as traditional management of resources. As shared in Chapter 4, they selected committees from finance, scholarship, or gala committees. No one mentioned their start on the board with a focus on major gifts, large asks, or even an inkling of resource development addressing needs like homelessness and hunger. That is in stark contrast of public university foundation boards where members are asked to join with expectation of both personal giving and soliciting large donations on behalf of the university (Worth, 2012). With the shift in expectations occurring during the community college foundation board members term, there is trepidation. Again in Chapter 4, a board member communicates this when they stated, “I never expected to be reaching to my contacts or even making cold asks in the community. That’s not how my work with the foundation had always been.”

I think the challenge for these board members is both the quickness in shift of their roles as well as being prepared to make the asks. As I noted in Chapter 4, many were apprehensive to make a donation ask and saw it as a huge hurdle to overcome. I think it is because they were not mentally prepared to do so and did not feel they had the proper skill set or training to complete the task. This was seen in one board member explaining, “I remember the president bringing in a consultant. I don't think the college has done that for the foundation, training us to ask for money. And the foundation wasn't doing that.” If asks were occurring, it was the work of the foundation staff members, as one foundation board member cited that as the work they expected from staff. The problem with this model is that volunteers, not staff, are considered the most effective individuals to make asks on behalf of a charity because of their social influence and often personal or professional connections with those who are being asked (Meer, 2011). The increased need for funds outstripped community college foundation staff’s ability alone to ask for funds. It would need to be increased work from the foundation volunteers to meet these growing needs of the college.

There is also the increased consequence to their work as active fundraisers. In their previous roles, as oversight of finance and scholarship awarding, they were tasked with making sure things did not go wrong. They were guardrails for either incompetence or maleficence of the staff they worked with. However, the shift to fundraisers added the demands that their work needed to go right. Each “no” they would hear from a perspective donor means less resources for the college. If there were enough “no” answers, it could mean the shuttering of programs or students denied support. That is a different kind of pressure for a volunteer to bear, and for it to show up mid-term for all of the individuals is likely more jarring. As one board member explained, “I think we learned later that the college needed it because some programs needed to

grow, and this was the only way that was going to happen. It had to be us. We had to find the money for growth, or it wasn't going to happen.”

An undercurrent through the interviews with the foundation board members was that these new pressures were not what they had signed up for, but they realized through their years of work was the college was important to them. The foundation members, I think, did not feel they could just leave the college in its time of need. As such, they are now muddling their way through these new demands and needs, figuring out where they can help, and trying to support an institution they realize is making a difference.

Conclusion

Neoliberal policies changed the landscape of higher education. Gone were days of knowledge as a public good, fully funded by taxes, state and federal agencies. The shift to private market attitudes about education, community colleges struggled to find new revenue sources, as public/private partnerships for various programs could only fill some of the new budget holes. While private universities always had fundraising in their DNA due to their genesis in churches and public universities shifted their fundraising from the wants of the 1950's to the needs of the 1980's as a means to manage their resource dependency, community colleges did not have these built in functions. As such, community college foundations, and specifically community college foundation board members needed to shift from passive manager to active fundraisers for their institutions.

This shift in philosophy has come rather quickly for the people serving in the role of community college foundation board members. These individuals were surprised at the roles the college was forced to take on due to shrinking social services for the community college student body to be successful. The foundation was surprised by the need for a food bank, shelter, and

mental health counselor but worked to find the funding solutions for these emerging needs. But on an even larger scale, foundation board members felt the new pressures of being larger providers of revenue for the colleges they served. The pressure was greater as these were not the jobs they had necessarily signed up for, or even had the training to feel fully successful in. And yet, the foundation board members continue to move forward to be the people their foundation and college need them to be, as they learn how to ask for the larger gifts their colleges need to survive. Much like the students they serve, community college foundation board members are adapting to their new environment with the hope of finding success where others before them had never ventured.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Community college foundation board members will continue to grow in importance within the community college landscape. While this study provides a better understanding of who chooses to serve on these boards, how they see their work, and why they find that work important, there are a number of overarching findings that speak to the community college foundation experience and provide fertile ground for future researchers. But this study also uncovered key topics current community college professionals should be aware of as they work with community college foundation board members. Three key issues that arose from this study are how community colleges are being asked to fill the gaps left by social service agencies for their students, the training gaps that exist for community college foundation board members, and how an increased resource dependency on community college foundations could shift the relationship dynamic between foundations and colleges. In this chapter, I will outline overarching issues for each of these topics and propose future lines of research and policy consideration that will be important in understanding community college foundations further.

Community Colleges Becoming Social Service Agencies

Community colleges have historically served different populations than universities and four-year colleges. Low-income students make up a higher percentage of the student population at community colleges (Smith, 2019). While this demographic information aligns with the community college mission of access to higher education, it also creates different dynamics between the institutions and the students. Previous research examined the effects of lower socioeconomic status on completion rates and persistence at community colleges (Wells, 2008; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). That research implicitly supposed socioeconomic standing affected the

student once on the community college campus. But what if those issues, and their potential solutions, were changing how community colleges function?

If we were to imagine a continuum of human needs with basic social services (shelter, food, physical safety) on one end and education at the other, with various organizations plotted out on the continuum in terms of their mission and work, we could illustrate how neoliberalism is changing American society. In the 1970's, the case could be made that at the social service end of the continuum stood various public programs like welfare, public housing programs, and other publicly funded social safety nets. They were joined by private institutions like soup kitchens, church supported shelters, and other programs. At the education end stood colleges and universities. In between the two, with a stronger placement toward education, were community colleges. But the appearance of neoliberal policies in the 1980's changed the landscape of this continuum.

With neoliberal policies, funding and support of social service programs began to dry up. Reducing the effectiveness of organizations at the social service end of the spectrum created a vacuum of need for individuals. It appears that community colleges began to be pulled by this vacuum toward basic social services. This was seen in the stories shared by the community college foundation board members in this study as they heard the stories and found funding for food pantries and dealt with students living in their cars. While foundation board members are aware of this situation, it begs several questions for future researchers.

The first question to be considered is what the financial stress is in providing social services at community colleges. As shown throughout this study, the budgets of community colleges continue to shrink with reduced state and federal funding. In that budget crunch, the community colleges may be adding a variety of services for their students to keep them engaged

and enrolled. From that question could be additional research on how these new services, and the need to find funding, changes the work of community college foundations.

Community college foundations formerly were focused on basic access, which was resolved through fundraising for scholarships. As discussed, the demand has shifted to filling budget shortfalls for the colleges and supporting programs, which means larger donation amounts than they were requesting for scholarships. However, with community colleges moving into social services, foundations may need to find new donors and new appeals to fund these demands. Would community colleges need to move into social service donor pools, asking individuals who may normally give to organizations like Salvation Army or soup kitchens? How would they segment their donation message, explaining that their students have needs beyond scholarships and new lab equipment? No matter what direction that research may show, community college foundation board members will need new tool sets and ongoing training to complete whatever direction their new fundraising demands take them.

Board Members Need Different Training

The purpose of this study was to better understand the motivations and views of community college foundation board members. I wanted to explore who they were, how they saw their role and why they chose to do it. I was able to uncover general themes on who they were as individuals. Their motivations for their work aligned with a general sense of empathy for their fellow person in the context of education. However, how they saw their work showcased the growing pains of community college funding and the role community college foundations are being asked to take.

The community college foundation board members in this study shared a concern that the role they had volunteered for had changed from being a passive manager of the funds within the

foundation to an active fundraiser. This shift, highlighted by the financial challenges their community colleges were facing, was one they understood but did not anticipate. I believe that it also highlighted a blind spot in their role as volunteers, making donation asks. This is a tool set that needs to be more actively trained, supported, and promoted in the work of community college foundation board volunteers.

I want to be clear on what I mean as a donation ask. I think the majority of current foundation board members are comfortable selling tickets to fundraising dinners, finding golfers for outings, or registering people to run in 5k races. Many also feel a degree of comfort in securing sponsors for these events, because as businesspeople, they have been consistently asked for these things. It is a natural currency and expectation among the business networks they have formed. Where the discomfort begins is in asking for larger gifts that would have substantial financial impact for their foundation and college. The size of these gifts are relative to the community. A \$50,000 gift in Muncie, Indiana may have the same impact as a \$500,000 gift in Dallas. However, in both cases, the gifts would be substantial in comparison to traditional giving patterns and giving levels in those philanthropic pools. The gifts that seem to cause concern for the foundation board members, and the ones that colleges are in desperate need of, are large financial commitments.

While the nonprofit world is filled with individuals, companies, seminars, and texts on how to make these asks, the real work begins with convincing the community college foundation board member they are capable of the ask and will be given the resources to be successful in their work. As seen with the current foundation board members in this study, this may mean a culture shift and perspective on the work of the foundation. In the recruitment of new foundation board members, it may mean explaining the expectations and support that will come in their

volunteer role. Nevertheless, it should not result in seeking different types of individuals as board members. The three archetypes described in this study, The Super Fan, the Innocent Bystander, and The Doubting Thomas, each bring compelling stories and motivations to their service. Abandoning these individuals to find more sales-driven board members will weaken the credibility of the work being done and erode the authenticity of their asks for support. It is better to coach the ability and belief to make the ask in these archetypes than to bypass it for what could be seen as mercenary fundraisers. The latter group could open doors and bring different intentions to the growing influence of community college foundation boards.

Foundation Board Members Growing Influence

The majority of this research has documented that community college foundations are fairly small and just starting to grow in financial size. As they grow, their importance to the colleges they serve will grow as well. Logic would dictate that the day will arrive soon that community college foundations will be prominent revenues sources for colleges. As these foundations fill the budget gaps left by shrinking public support, resource dependency theory explains the foundations will also grow influence for the actions and focus of community colleges.

As explained in previous parts of the dissertation, community college foundations are separate entities from the college itself. This makes them the most unique stakeholders in the ecosystem of community colleges. Unlike faculty and staff at colleges, they are not beholden to community college presidents or internal leaders at the college. The bureaucratic infrastructure of the college itself has no sway on their actions because they serve as volunteers. Unlike college presidents, the community college foundation does not serve at the pleasure of the community college trustees or other elected officials who oversee the budgets of community colleges. And

unlike college trustees, community college foundation board members are not elected or publicly appointed individuals who answer to the general public through elections or other political mechanisms. The only controlling body over community college foundation board members are their fellow board members and the donors who support the foundation. This narrow subgroup could reshape how community colleges function.

A side effect of shrinking public funds due to neoliberal policies is shrinking public input that was attached to those funds. In a theoretical, and in some cases emerging trend, subjects and courses that were formerly seen as having a public good could disappear or be truncated in the higher education landscape. Humanities, gender studies, art and other liberal arts courses that focus on societal issues as a whole are often endangered because they do not garner large private donations or investments at many universities and colleges. This trend of reallocated resources reshaping institutions could bleed into community colleges.

As shown in this study, the community college foundation board members interviewed came to their role with a desire to help their community and support local students. But, as the prominence and influence of community college foundations grow, it is possible players with bad intention creep into these board positions. Could a cadre of foundation board members, recruiting donations from various connections, convince cash strapped colleges to drop entire programs or areas of focus they do not believe in? Recent trends in local politics have found that larger donors and forces began campaigns of change by investing in individuals who aligned with their views and agendas (Mayer, 2017). Would the rise of influence for community college foundations find influx of investments that could steer what courses are taught, what projects are valued, and more importantly what community colleges stop focusing on. Many students attending community colleges are first generation students and could find their first exposure to

the critical thinking undertones of subjects like art, history, philosophy and other courses. Could foundation board members and the donations they garner, unintentionally or otherwise, limit that exposure and hamper the skill sets of students attending the college? Future researchers would be well served to track the rise of community college foundation financial power and determine what effects, if any, it has on the decision making for the community colleges they are attached to.

As a recommendation to community college foundation boards, it is imperative to continue to recruit individuals who fit one of the three archetypes described in this study. These individuals have a genuine connection to the foundation, bring insights that allow the college and the foundation to better serve the community, and give a balance to the impact community college foundations can make on their connected institutions. To shift away from these groups, in favor of those who may be better inherent fundraisers but lack a community college connection, could negatively impact the ecosystem of the community college. Those individuals, without a shared history with the community college, may not fully appreciate the power of their work or be as invested in the long-term strength and mission of the college. Additionally, it is important that community college foundations recruit a balance of the three archetypes. It may seem easier or more prudent to recruit only Super Fans as they already appreciate community colleges. One could also make the case for a board full of Doubting Thomas individuals, using their conversion as in roads to new friends of the foundation and the college. But, I believe the best outcome for a Foundation is a healthy balance between all three archetypes. Each lends and benefits from the perspective of the others, giving a more holistic view of what the community college foundation is and can be. No matter what the ratio is of the archetypes, it is important that community

college foundations do not allow immediate needs steer them away from those who have their best prospects at heart.

Research Recommendations

While I have shared a number of general observations and conclusions, there are specific research recommendations I would suggest that can help to deepen the understanding of community college foundation board members. These topics expand upon the research presented here as well as explore issues that were uncovered during the research. I will also share a few epiphanies I had while conducting this research.

Research Epiphanies

As I stepped into this study, I was aware of my positive bias for community college foundation board members. My career in working with them as a staff member gave me numerous examples of their commitment to the community college cause, their desire to help, and their rich stories of personal growth that led them to serve on the board. What I underestimated was the influence my position had on these experiences. The role of the executive director for a community college foundation is a gatekeeper of information and experiences for the board members that serve. While the financial statements and bylaws are straight forward documents that a board member can read and interpret alone, the issues that are brought before a board to consider are heavily influenced by the staff at the college. When the interviewees of this study would bring up an issue that surprised them, shifted their thinking about community college students, or inspired them to action, it was because of what their college staff introduces to them. None of the interviewees sought out to learn more about the community college they served by themselves. They did not imbed in the community college experience or act as a mystery shopper to the institution they were serving. The issues were

introduced to them by the staff who worked daily for the college and were seeking to enrich the understanding of their volunteers. I became even more aware of how college staff shape the reality of the community college for the foundation volunteers. It is from this place as gatekeepers that I believe practitioners and future researchers can help board members and the boards themselves, reach a higher purpose and impact.

Larger Sample Sizes

A follow-up to this study could benefit from a larger sample size. While the stories and qualitative data from this study was very deep, the perspectives and greater lessons learned could be enhanced by interviewing more community college foundation board members. My study has geographic limitations of community colleges in Illinois. Would foundation board members in different states, facing different financial, cultural and historical issues have the same experiences and motivations of the individuals and archetypes I identified in this study?

Additionally, a larger sample size can allow for more diversity of the participants, particularly in the areas of race and age. I will discuss this issue later in this section and in the policy recommendations, but board member perspectives informed by the race of the board member could lend new insights my predominantly Caucasian participants would not be able to access. Age may also influence the perspectives shared, as my participants all gave indications they were over the age of 50. A younger board member may identify closer with the challenges facing current college students or see societal problems the students face through a different lens.

Testing of Archetypes

In this study I identified three major archetypes of community college foundation board members. All three types help to explain the motivations and pathways to service. With reflection, I can only see two other types of paths that exist and I do not believe those types

would serve. The three types I identified started from three general dispositions about community colleges: positive, neutral and negative. All three concluded in a positive place, resulting in their service and commitment to a foundation board. I cannot see a person with a negative view of a community college that they hold strongly to serving on a foundation board to strengthen an institution they object to. I also question if a person who continues to hold a neutral position on a community college, in essence the Innocent Bystander who never evolves, would serve on a foundation board for any period of time, due to the time and energy they would be committing with no functional return. With all of that being said, I do wonder if additional research could uncover different pathways to service on a board. I also believe it would be beneficial to interview more foundation board members and see if the archetypes hold true to form or adapt with additional information.

Demographic Research

In understanding community college foundation boards, I could not find a national database or study that cataloged the demographic composition of these important boards. Having a more complete picture of the type of people who serve on these boards can paint a richer tapestry on their work, influence, and where there may be gaps in understanding. I will discuss the issues more in the policy recommendation section, but diversity, or the lack of, in a number of demographics could greatly influence how boards understand the issues their institutions and students are facing as well as bias how they view the work of the college.

This type of focused research could also help shine a spotlight on an issue the boards are facing. Do they look like the colleges and students they are serving? Whose interests are they serving? What steps and how large of steps would be needed to bring boards in line with the

colleges? Would such a move be beneficial, and whom would it benefit? I will discuss my thoughts on this more in the policy recommendation section.

Observational Data

This study asked the foundation board members about their perspectives and understanding of the work that they did. The findings compiled are an analysis of their collective understanding and view of their work. Given how limited and new the research is on these collective volunteers, it would be greatly beneficial for future researchers to observe the board members for a period of time. Were my subjects reliable narrators of their work, or are there details of their work that they missed? Are there actions they are taking, work they are conducting, or even thoughts they are expressing in the natural setting of their board work they could not access or articulate to me?

Conclusion

The study of community college foundation board members as individuals is a new frontier of exploration for higher education research. These individuals influence and are influenced by the institution they volunteer with. It would behoove both the academic and practical world to interview and understand more of them. A larger sample size of this study could uncover new viewpoints, expanding or reshaping the archetypes I presented earlier. Understanding the full demographic nature of the nearly 15,000 volunteers could uncover trends and unlock additional conversations on representation that are vitally important. The act of observing their work could link the work they think they are doing and what is actual taking place, and the impact of that gap on the foundation, the community college, the community, and most importantly the students affected by their work. The study of community college

foundations is a fertile ground for future researchers and has larger societal impacts as these boards grow in importance and influence.

Policy Recommendations

The work of the community college foundation board does not occur in a vacuum. The boards are not randomly forming collections in nature or the inventible bonds of chemistry. Instead, they are the intentional creations and assembly of various participants. In this section, I will share policy recommendations to the conveners, participants, and the institutions as a whole on issues they should examine or remain vigilant on. These issues include the education of the foundation board member, consistent awareness of a neoliberal bias in the work, maintaining diversity in the board, and the growing need for advocacy beyond the foundation and college.

Board Training

In previous parts of this dissertation, I have advocated for how board training for new community college foundation board members needs to adapt and address the increased emphasis on active fundraising and resource generation. This stays in line with the findings of the study and context of resource dependency theory. However, there are additional trainings and topics that would benefit new and current board members on topics that surfaced from my interviews.

On a number of topics, foundation board members interviewed shared how they were surprised or unaware of issues facing the students of the community college being supported. I believe board members would benefit from trainings that focused on equity literacy, understanding poverty, and recognition of the drastically reduced social safety nets in our communities. These educational moments may help board members who have never experienced these issues, or who have had decades of space from experiencing them, have a better

perspective of the issues students face from various walks of life. It also creates context for why their fundraising and focus should expand beyond scholarships and potentially address other issues at the college.

One additional training for foundation board members is training that makes them aware of performance poverty, which is requiring individuals to demonstrate a state of need before being able to access help. The issue of performing poverty is that can create a sense of shame or dependency in the individual, which is counterproductive to the objectives for many programs. A concrete example of this may be a scholarship application where points are awarded if a student must recount in writing financial challenges they face, their dependency on financial support for enrollment, or even confession they reside outside of the socio-economic circles graduates of a particular school enjoy. It is unlikely any board member wants to inflict emotional trauma on students, but instead are looking to help those with a need. Through training and awareness, board members can reach their philanthropic goals without inflicting unintended harm of those they are reaching out to help.

Neoliberal Creep Into Mission

The influence of neoliberal policies are seen throughout this dissertation. The reduction of state and other tax support created resource dependency issues that community college foundations are tasked with balancing. The removal of public service safety nets has brought societal problems such as hunger and homelessness to community college campuses, creating new issues for foundations to solve with fundraising. But, there is one additional neoliberalist trope that could still plaque the work of community college foundations.

Within neoliberalist philosophy is the idea that the sole purpose of education is job training and economic development. Community colleges become the means to an end of a

skilled workforce for the local economy. I am not saying that community colleges should denounce their capacity to help individuals train for careers and develop the local community. Instead, it is important that foundation boards do not see job training as the only reason for their and the college's existence. By consistently reminding, and making sure that funding decisions match these thoughts, board members can advocate that the community college can produce critical thinkers, citizens with greater global awareness, or informed community members prepared to engage with democratic and civic structures around them. Foundation boards can be a stalwart against community colleges devolving into just training schools. The community, institution, and most importantly the students, deserve that.

Board Diversity

The issue of board diversity has tentacles in a number of directions. The most obvious ones are diversity of race, gender, and age. An examination of the boards in my study, in observation of the pictures on the foundation websites of the members, showed individuals who presented as predominately male, older age, and white. That is not to say these individuals did not possess the capacity to empathize with community college students or were not filled with the true spirit of philanthropy to help their fellow community member. I share this issue as an opportunity for foundation boards to add different individuals, which may lend to different perspectives. Board members may learn of issues faster if they have members who could have similar life experiences and challenges that their diverse student body faces.

Another area of diversity for the board to be aware of is diversity of ideology. As discussed in the previous section, the neoliberal view of community colleges is one of job training and economic production. By actively seeking out individuals with alternate views of community colleges and their purposes, ranging from social advocacy for underrepresented

populations, to democratic distribution of education, to a collection of diverse individuals learning from each other's life experiences, the work and focus of the foundation can enrich a number of objectives for the college. By maintaining a balance of philosophical views on what education, and specifically community colleges are capable of, ensures that resources generated by the foundation can act in the collective best interests of the community and students.

Advocacy Beyond

A common theme throughout the research were community college foundation board members learning of problems and obstacles students faced beyond scholarships. They ranged from food insecurity, to domestic violence or homelessness. As foundations began to adapt to meet these problems for specific students, the board members hopefully realized these issues existed because of larger societal and systemic issues. While fundraising can solve these issues for a handful of students, it should be assumed there are countless others facing them. These issues present the opportunity for foundation board members to use their power as boundary spanners, discussed earlier in this dissertation, to become advocates in their community on these issues.

If we took homelessness as an example, foundation board members could lend their voice and experience to the larger discussion on the issue. They could share community wide how homelessness was affecting their student body and acting as a barrier to student success. Their advocacy could lend a new face and dimension to housing discussions, as the community may now see homelessness touching a student striving to better themselves through education and not the stereotypical transient male. This advocacy could also allow the foundation to partner or link services in the community, helping to bridge gaps of access and bring more resources to their student population instead of recreating a social service wheel.

Conclusion

Community college foundation boards will begin to wield a large amount of power and influence on the community college ecosystem. It is imperative that these individuals are given training to understand fully the world they entering, not just from a functional standpoint but form a cultural one as well. With that power, foundation boards can stave off community colleges being reduced to just training schools and keep education a multifaceted growth experience for all who engage with it. This can be made easier if the voices in the board meetings come from varied backgrounds and life experiences, providing textured insights on decisions and focus. And with those voices, they can reach beyond the college itself, fulfilling their abilities as boundary spanners by broadcasting to the full community the issues their students face, and working to find systematic solutions to the problems beyond the college campus.

Conclusion

The landscape of the community college foundation has changed drastically in the last twenty years. Neoliberal policies have removed a number of the social service safety nets that buoyed many low-income community college students working toward personal economic stability. As such, many of those students brought their needs to the college, challenging enrollment and completion rates. Community colleges began stepping into the social service void, providing services such as food banks, mental health services, and more. These services added to the community college budget while neoliberal policies hit the colleges as well, seeing a number of their public funding sources shrinking. To combat this dual challenge of providing more services with less revenue, colleges turned to their foundations board members to provide economic support and relief.

The larger implications and areas of research from this shift are numerous. The first area to examine is how community college foundations understand their role as social service providers. Researchers should examine how this changes the fundraising focus for the foundations and how it shifts the overall message and mission for foundations, looking for potential downsides of seeking funding in new ways. In addition to supporting these new student needs, foundation board members will need new training on how to ask for larger and more diverse gifts than they had in the past. Additionally, they may need to become advocates, linking the social service needs of the students they are serving to larger discussions of homelessness, hunger, and domestic violence. Gone are the days when community college foundations provided scholarships to meet student needs. With shrinking public support, community colleges will need foundations and their board members to provide larger income streams so that colleges can continue their educational missions. Finally, as community college foundations assume larger roles in the economic health of the college, researchers will need to examine if that changes who chooses to serve on the boards and how they see their roles.

In closing, community college foundation board members will be the most important players in the health and stability of community colleges for the foreseeable future. Understanding their motivations, supporting them as they take on expanded fundraising roles, and appreciating the impact these volunteers will make for their institutions will be vital for community college leaders.

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