

2010

Presidential transition: The experience of two interim community college presidents

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Presidential transition: The experience of two community college interim presidents

by

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2010

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving wife,

Jenifer Anne

Who has inspired, supported, and loved me every step of the way

My parents,

Dennis and Carol

Who raised me to work hard and taught me to have a passion for whatever I do in life

And my grandparents

Sherman and Millie, Bob and Doris

Who have graciously shared their wisdom and life experiences with me.

I owe this accomplishment to all of you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the experiences of two community college interim presidents, their characteristics, and how they led institutions following an abrupt presidential departure. There were two fundamental questions framing this research study,

1. How do two interim community college presidents lead community colleges during a presidential transition?
2. How is an interim community college president's leadership perceived by faculty and staff during a period of presidential transition?

There were two participating institutions in this study. The colleges, given the pseudonyms Urban Community College and Rural Community College District, were distinctly different. Urban Community College is a large community college in an urban setting and Rural Community College District is a small multi-college district in a rural setting. While these college differed in size, they shared a common experience—an abrupt presidential departure. Data collection consisted of one-on-one interviews and a review of documents. There were a total of 17 participants between the two colleges involved in a series of three interviews. Following the data analysis process, four shared themes emerged from the data. Themes from this dissertation included a) repairing institutional morale b) establishing an effective relationship with the board c) making strategic decisions to move the college forward d) dealing with budget challenges. There were also themes specific to the participating community colleges. At Urban Community College, a prevalent theme was the interim president's role in rebuilding external relationships, and at Rural Community College District an important theme was the president's emphasis on promoting openness, inclusiveness, and transparency. The dissertation is concluded with recommendations to future interim

presidents and board members enduring an abrupt presidential departure. Additionally, recommendations are made to researchers of the interim presidency.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Urban Community College and Rural Community College District have recently experienced a presidential transition. The governing boards at both colleges appointed interim presidents to lead these institutions during their presidential transition. These institutions, like a growing number in higher education, faced an interim period following an abrupt change in presidential leadership. Community College presidential transition is a topic of increased importance due to factors that include abrupt presidential change, derailment, and retirement. Stories of community college presidents who leave abruptly, derail, or retire under pressure have received media attention in local newspapers and national journals like *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, however, little research has been done in this area of study.

Statement of the Problem

Urban Community College and Rural Community College District are not the only colleges facing presidential transition. In August 2008, Iowa Central Community College President Robert Paxton resigned under pressure after photos surfaced of him on a boat opening the spigot of a mini-keg for a young woman. Paxton's lapse in judgment followed charges in 2002 of "felonious misconduct in office, falsification of public records and tampering with public records. The charges grew out of an investigation into student athletes being awarded false grades" (Kauffman, 2008, Des Moines Register). While no charges were filed against Paxton in 2008, the Iowa Central Community College forced his resignation from the institution.

In July 2007, Yvonne Kennedy and Rick Rogers, the presidents of Bishop State Community College and Shelton State Community College in Alabama resigned under pressure. Kennedy's forced resignation resulted from accusations that during her time as president the

institution had misused “\$438,000 in federal student-aid funds and sports-program money” (Lewis, 2007, p. A24). Rogers was ousted because of a questionable transaction with a private foundation that built him a \$560,000 home (Lewis, 2007). Earlier in 2007, Maricopa Community College Chancellor Rufus Glasper fired the presidents of Mesa Community College and Estrella Mountain Community College for scandalous actions at the nation’s largest community college system. These two community college presidents were asked to leave for mismanaging funds including the use of state money to take international trips. An internal audit found the institutions were guilty of “theft, enrollment fraud, misspent scholarship money, gross mismanagement and nepotism throughout the system” (Gabrielson, 2007, East Valley Tribune).

During the summer of 2005, police arrested Starkey A. Morgan, president of Holmes Community College, and charged him with six counts of embezzlement. “A state audit determined that he had misappropriated \$10,000 in college funds to pay for personal expenses like dog food, veterinary bills, and car tires” (Evelyn, 2005, p. A33). In March 2003, Des Moines Area Community College President David England was arrested and charged with possession of 2.5 pounds of marijuana. The community college immediately asked for England’s resignation (Villano, 2003).

Presidential Retirement

The future of community college leadership is in question due to abrupt prudential change, derailment and retirement. Authors have gone as far as saying community colleges have a crisis of leadership (Evelyn, 2001; Community College Leadership Development Initiative, 2000). A brief written by the Community College Leadership Development Initiative (2000) accentuates this fear, “Leadership in the community colleges has suffered from benign neglect. There is little conscious attention paid to questions of where community college leaders will

come from, how their talents will be developed and their experience valued” (p. 8). Shults (2001) suggested “looming retirements present strong evidence of an impending crisis within the leadership pipeline as well as within the presidency” (p.3). The aforementioned community college leadership crisis exists largely due to the aging population of community college presidents, the deficit of talent in the pipeline, and presidential retirements.

The average age of community college presidents has increased from 54 years in 1996 to 58 years in 2006 (Weisman & Vaughn, 2001; Weisman & Vaughn 2006). The average age of community college faculty is over 50 years and since many presidents start their careers as faculty and move into administrative roles there is a fear that the presidential pipeline is drying up (Evelyn, 2001). *The Chronicle of Higher Education* provided insight into the challenges faced by the state of California community college system due to presidential retirement. The *Chronicle* stated, “In California, home of the country's largest community-college system, the much-talked-about wave of baby-boomer retirements is a reality, with open presidential posts dotting the map” (Ashburn, 2007, A1). In 2007, 22 of California’s 109 two-year colleges were searching for community college presidents and 28 colleges had chief executives in their first year of service (Ashburn, 2007).

The current literature related to the interim presidency is limited. Currently, there is not a detailed case study addressing the experience of a community college interim president involvement during a presidential transition following abrupt presidential change, derailment, or retirement. With the recent increase in abrupt presidential changes, presidential derailments, and retirements in higher education and the subsequent utilization of interim presidents, a gap in the literature exists describing how an interim president leads a community college during a presidential transition (Cohen & March, 1974; Padilla, 2004).

Purpose

As more abrupt presidential changes and retirements occur and more interim presidents are utilized (Padilla, 2004), it is important that community colleges understand the experience of an interim president during a presidential transition. The purpose of this case study is to understand the experiences of two community college interim presidents, their characteristics, and how they lead institutions following an abrupt presidential departure.

Research Questions

This dissertation study will address the following research questions:

1. How do two interim community college presidents lead community colleges during a presidential transition?
2. How is an interim community college president's leadership perceived by faculty and staff during a period of presidential transition?

Significance

At this time, very limited literature exists examining the role of the interim president at institutions of higher education. Cases of presidential derailment have been well documented in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and in newspapers across the country (Lewis, 2007; Keller, 2007; Padilla, 1999). Because community colleges face the threat of abrupt presidential change, derailment, or retirement, there is a need to understand the impact of presidential transition. The multiple case study approach used in this research will offer rich, thick description (Merriam; 1988), and it will supply a detailed account of the interim president's experience during a presidential transition at a community college. In the future, community college interim presidents serving institutions during a presidential transition will have a resource to gain an

understanding of the experience of a community college interim president. This study will also be an important contribution to the existing literature on community college interim presidencies.

Theoretical Perspective

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) argued that having a theoretical perspective in qualitative case study research “adds philosophical richness and depth to a case study and provides direction for the design of the case study research project” (p. 54). Crotty (1998) called the theoretical perspective “the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (p.66). In case study research, a theoretical perspective is critical to focusing the study and helps me gain a better understanding of how to collect and analyze data.

Interpretivism

This study will utilize basic interpretivism as its theoretical perspective. Prasad (2005) asserted that the “interpretative traditions emerge from a scholarly position that takes *human interpretation* as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world” (p. 13). At the core of interpretivism is the concept of *Verstehen* or understanding (Prasad, 2005). While interpretivism seeks to develop an understanding of an action, the positivist paradigm focuses on explaining the action (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000). “To find meaning in action, or to say one understands what a particular action means, requires that one interpret in a particular way what the actors are doing” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that researchers following the interpretive perspective “have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they, too, are members of a particular culture at a specific historical moment” (p. 8). This philosophical identity acknowledges the important role the researcher plays in understanding the experience of participants in a study.

Definitions

Throughout this case study, the terms *president*, *interim president*, *derailment* and *abrupt presidential change* will be utilized. The *president* is the chief executive officer of the college. “The *president* serves as the presiding formal authority within the college. The president’s role is to oversee the overall functions of the institution, in order to aid it in achieving its vision and mission” (Nevarez & Wood, 2010). In a multi-college district, the title of chancellor is commonly given to the chief executive officer. This study will use the term president interchangeably with chancellor. The term *interim president* will follow the definition given by Fretwell (1999), who stated the interim president is, “the chief executive in charge when there is no ‘regular’ president” (p. viii).

The word *derailment* has several meanings. One definition offered by Lombardo and McCauley (1988) asserts derailment, “occurs when a manager who was expected to go higher in the organization and who was judged to have the ability to do so is fired, demoted, or plateaued below expected levels of achievement” (p.1). The definition posited by Lombardo and McCauley identified individuals that derailed prior to reaching their full executive potential. With the derailment of community college presidents, the leader has already reached executive office and is no longer ascending to a position of leadership. Therefore, a more appropriate definition for this case study is supplied by Leslie and Velsor (1996). They write:

The derailed manager is one who, having reached at least the general manager level, either leaves the organization nonvoluntarily (through resignation, being fired, or retiring early) or is plateaued as a result of a perceived lack of fit between personal characteristics and skills and the demands of the job (p. 1).

The two case studies presented in this dissertation could be considered presidential *derailment* by the definition posited by Leslie and Velsor (1996).

This study, however, will introduce a new term, *abrupt presidential change*, to the presidential transition vernacular. The presidents in these two cases exited the institutions abruptly. One president entered retirement, many would say she was forced into retirement and was able to fulfill her presidential contract, and the other president took a sabbatical, many would say this was part of an exit strategy introduced by the board of directors. It is important to mention that while on sabbatical, the president accepted an offer to become president at a different institution.

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 of the study provided an introduction and overview of the research study. Chapter 2 of the dissertation examines the literature on the community college presidency, presidential succession, and the interim presidency. The community college presidency literature examines the history, roles, responsibilities, skills, motivations, and career pathways of community college presidents. This section assists the reader in understanding the history of the community college presidency and its current status. The literature describing presidential transition relates directly to the experience of an interim president and an institution undergoing a presidential change. The limited existing literature on interim presidencies provides insight into the knowledge and understanding of the interim presidency. The limited literature on interim presidencies also demonstrates the need for additional research in this important area that has not received adequate attention in higher education research.

The methodology of this dissertation is described in Chapter 3. This chapter reviews the epistemology framing the study, the methodology utilized, the study's methods, goodness and trustworthiness in qualitative research, and researcher positionality. The fourth chapter offers a description of the cases studied. In this chapter, I explain the setting where the case studies took place and the characteristics of the interim presidents. The fifth chapter describes the experiences of the interim presidents through themes that emerged during the data analysis process. The final chapter of the dissertation provides a discussion of findings, my recommendations for practice, my recommendations for future research, and my reflections.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Community College Presidency

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the community college presidency, leadership succession and presidential transition, and the interim presidency. The community college presidency literature examines the history, roles, responsibilities, and skills, motivations and career pathways community college presidents. This chapter reviews the literature examining leadership succession and presidential transition looking specifically at how organizational complexity, inside versus outside succession patterns, and organizational performance impact the succession process. The final section of the reviews the paucity of literature related to the interim presidency.

History

At the inception of community colleges, institutions relied on faculty members to serve as part-time administrators. As community colleges grew, this hybrid position of part-time faculty and part-time administrator evolved into a full-time role charged with overseeing the operation of the college. Now, the community college “president carries out general administrative duties and has periodic meetings with the board and the heads of state agencies” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 127). Sullivan (2001) described the first generation of community college presidents as “White men who were married, in their 50s, and had risen through the academic ranks” (p. 561). Many of these early leaders had military experience in World War II or the Korean War and operated under “a traditional leadership style within a hierarchical organizational structure, very much like their counterparts in American industry” (p. 561). These early community college pioneers functioned with small budgets, but they were “creative” and “daring” (p. 561). Early

community college presidents developed their institutions with success and provided the foundation for the growth of community college education (Sullivan, 2001).

Current presidents are considered the third generation of community college leaders. White men continue to hold the position of community college president at a higher rate, but major strides have been made. In an American Association of Community Colleges study completed in 2006, women made up 29% of community college presidents (Weisman & Vaughn, 2006) compared to only 7.9% in 1986 (Sullivan, 2001). “In 1998, 6% of all presidents were African American, 3% were Hispanic, and 1% each were Asian American and Native American” (Sullivan, 2001, p. 561). In a 2006 study, Weisman and Vaughn found the race and ethnicity of presidents remained predominately white at 88%. Additionally, they found the race or ethnicity of presidents to be: 6% African American, 4% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Asian American or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% each American Indian or Alaska Native and other.

Typically, the community college president enters the presidency for the first time “in their early 40s, and then proceed through multiple presidencies with an average duration of under five years” (Amev, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002, p. 578). This generation of community college president grew up in a lower middle class household, were first generation college students, and see education as a way to gain upward mobility (Sullivan, 2001).

McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999) completed an extensive study on presidents at 718 community colleges. They identified common traits of outstanding community college presidents. A composite sketch of the outstanding leader suggested the president was a white male near the age of 55 who was married and had been a community college president for 14 years. The outstanding president held either an Ed.D. or Ph.D., had spent his or her career in

various roles at community colleges, understood the importance of technology, and was considered by people at their institution and by themselves to be a change advocate.

Weisman and Vaughn (2006) provided a profile of the community college president. They found the average age of the community college president to be 58 years with a range of 32 to 75 years. This data showed an increase in presidential age. Work completed prior to 2006 identified the average age of presidents as 54 years in 1996, 56 years in 2001, and 58 years in 2006 (Weisman & Vaughn, 2006). During a more recent survey of 415 community college presidents, Duree (2007) found,

The average age of all current community college presidents, both male and female, is 58. Ages range from 29 to 73 years old, and the most common reported age (mode) is 60. The greatest percentage of presidents is in an age range of 50 to 59 years old, and 90 percent of the presidents are between 50 and 69 years old. (p. 108)

Of the presidents surveyed by Weisman and Vaughn (2006), 89.3% were either married or had a domestic partner. On average, the presidents had served their institutions for seven years. The study cited 44.2% of presidents as democrats, 27% as republicans, and 26.2% as independents. Prior to becoming president, 54.5% responded they were involved in academic affairs and 8.4% came from student services. Asked if they had received their education from a community college, 22.6% responded they had taken classes at a community college, 17.6% earned an associates degree, and 59.9% had no community college education. The research cited the importance of community college presidents to meet regularly with K-12 officials, business and industry leaders, and state legislators (Weisman & Vaughn, 2006).

Roles, Responsibilities, and Competencies

Community college leaders are charged with fulfilling a multitude of roles at their institutions and in their communities. They assist in the process of educating students often under-prepared for college, work with board members to continually improve the institution, lobby local, state, and federal lawmakers for funding, attend various community functions, fundraise, and share the community college vision and values with faculty and staff. Kubala (1999) described the role of the president best saying, “they are called upon to be visionaries, fundraisers, managers, mentors, arbitrators, economic developers and, above all, public servants” (p. 183). The community college presidency is complex and requires talented leaders who possess a wide range of skills.

Pierce and Pedersen (1997) named three qualities, personal adaptability, role flexibility, and sound judgment, which successful community college presidents need. Personal adaptability helps presidents respond “to recent and rapid changes in the objective conditions of most community colleges” (p.15). Role flexibility allows presidents to take on multiple roles at the institution and in the community, and sound judgment is “the skill to listen to a wide range of often discordant opinions and the gift to cull from diverse voices points of agreement and the basis for common action” (p. 17).

Shults (2001) claimed presidents should have an understanding of fundraising and knowledge of the budgetary process as well as strong interpersonal skills. The author’s research revealed community college presidents were not prepared for “the level of politics involved, fundraising and budgeting, and the amount of relationship building they were expected to accomplish” (Shults, 2001, p. 3) when they entered office. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) supplied several skills community college presidents should

possess. These included “understanding the community college mission, effective advocacy, administrative skills, community and economic development skills, and interpersonal skills” (AACC, 2001, p. 7).

In 2005, the American Association of Community Colleges identified essential competencies for effective community college leaders. The AACC’s competencies included,

- **Organizational Strategy**
 - An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends.
- **Resource Management**
 - An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.
- **Communication**
 - An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission.
- **Collaboration**
 - An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial, and ethical internal and external relationships

that nurture diversity, promote the success of all students, and sustain the community college mission.

- Community College Advocacy
 - An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.
- Professionalism
 - An effective community college leader works ethically to set high standards for self and others, continuously improve self and surroundings, demonstrate accountability to and for the institution, and ensure the long-term viability of the college and community.

Challenges and Motivations

Previous research suggests community college presidents face challenges and work in complex environments. Duree (2007) cited fundraising, student enrollment and retention, legislative advocacy, economic and workforce development, and faculty relations as the major challenges facing current community college presidents. Nevarez and Wood (2010) suggested community college leaders are faced with the challenges of dealing with the complexity of their position, college funding, and issues related to the academic success of students with a varying backgrounds of preparation, appropriate assessment of community impact, and diversity on campus among students, faculty, staff, and administration.

Community college presidents must have a number of skills to successfully run their organization as suggested by the AACCC leadership competencies. Given the complexity of the position, why do these individuals want to serve? Community college presidents serve for various reasons, however, making a difference is the primary motivation for the majority of

presidents (Kubala, 1999; Kubala & Bailey, 2001). One study showed 76.4% of presidents viewed “the presidency as a chance to lead, create positive change, increase the quality of education, and also, to make a difference” (Kubala & Bailey, 2001, p. 796). Duree (2007) noted presidents are motivated by having an opportunity to make a difference, the professional challenge, and the personal satisfaction associated with leading a community college.

Career Pathways

Kubala (1999) surveyed first and second year community college presidents supplying insights into career pathways to the presidencies. This research cited 72.2% of presidents worked in academic affairs prior to becoming president compared to 11.1% that had student affairs backgrounds. Amey, VanDerLinden, and Brown (2002) found almost one-third of community college presidents at one time worked at four-year institutions. The most common position held at a four-year institution was faculty member or department chair. Weisman and Vaughn (2006) added to the literature on career pathway to the presidency. Their research cited,

The most traveled pathway to the presidency is through the academic pipeline. In 2006, 55% of the respondents were in academic positions prior to assuming their first presidency. This percentage has changed little since 1984. There is a huge drop to the number two feeder position on the presidential pathway: In 2006, 8% of the presidents responded that they held positions in student services prior to their first presidency. Following closely was the chief business officer at 6%.

Leadership Succession and Presidential Transition

The decline in presidential tenure (Martin & Samels, 2004), the anticipated increase in presidential retirements (Shults, 2001), and the increase in interim presidencies as a result of derailment (Padilla, 1999), requires a closer look at the role of presidential succession at higher

education institutions. Significant changes in leadership through decline in tenure, increased retirement, and the phenomenon of derailment impacts the business sector much like higher education. Clarke (2008) referred to the acceleration in CEO turnover in the corporate world as a “revolving door” (p. 5).

Organizational Complexity

Leadership succession has gained the attention of researchers because of its importance to organizational functioning. Grusky (1960) defined succession as “the replacement of key officials” (p. 105) and claimed “administrative succession always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). Research indicates, however, that successful institutions and highly bureaucratized organizations are less likely to be disrupted by leadership succession (Grusky, 1960; Grusky, 1961). Grusky (1961) explained this theory saying, “the more bureaucratized the administrative component of an organization, the less the instability that is created by administrative succession” (p. 267). While large, highly bureaucratic entities adapt to succession better than smaller firms, Grusky (1961) suggested large entities lose flexibility if they do not experience succession.

Grusky’s research placed an emphasis on the impact of leadership succession as it related to institutional size and bureaucratic structure. Gordon and Becker (1964) later refuted Grusky’s argument with their own findings “that there is no direct relationship between size of organization and succession” (p. 216). Perrucci and Mannweiler (1968) differed from previous researchers who focused on organizational size alone. They introduced the factor of organizational complexity and its role in the succession process.

Inside versus Outside Succession

Early succession literature analyzed organizational size, complexity, and bureaucratization. While acknowledging the merits of these themes, Helmich (1977) looked at predecessor tenure and institutional performance. This research noted “long office tenures of predecessors tend to bring forth a search by organizations for outside successors,” and “outsiders are more often promoted to the presidency than insiders when organizations are performing poorly” (Helmich, 1977, p.264). Dalton and Kesner (1983) studied insider versus outsider successions finding large organizations utilized insider succession at a higher frequency than small institutions. This phenomenon is attributed to larger organizations having more resources to develop executives. Research suggests large organizations may also have a power structure that promotes insider succession (Dalton & Kesner, 1983). Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) claimed outsider succession is most common in higher education because many individuals inside the organization are not interested in the position or are not adequately prepared to be president.

Organizational Performance

Leadership succession can bring about institutional instability (Grusky, 1960). The impact of leadership succession on organizational performance gained the attention of several researchers. There have been several studies examining organizational performance following succession. There are conflicting interpretations as to the impact of leadership succession on organizational performance in team sports. Some research suggests succession events can decrease organizational performance (Grusky, 1963; Grusky, 1964). A counter argument posited leadership succession had little effect on organizational performance (Gameson & Scotch, 1964; Brown, 1982). Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1986) studied performance of professional basketball organizations following succession. The findings of their study asserted, “The ability of a new

manager is in fact an important predictor of organizational performance after succession” (p. 81). Executive competence plays a part in successful transition. Individuals assuming leadership roles following succession are often associated with change and the ability to utilize their power to improve organizational performance (Miller, 1993).

Leadership Succession and Presidential Transition in Education

There is a limited existing literature on leadership succession in education. Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) contributed to the literature from the secondary level of education suggesting leadership change “may have only marginal effects on subsequent school processes, structures, and outcomes” (p. 100). Birnbaum’s (1989) work addressed presidential succession in higher education. This research noted most institutions do not go through a major change in institutional functioning during a presidential succession. Birnbaum claimed, “The act of presidential succession in itself may be symbolic” (p. 133). The effects of presidential succession may be the greatest “in institutions that had more than one president during a stated time period as each new incumbent initiated new programs and policies” (p. 130).

The research of Miskel and Cosgrove (1985) and Birnbaum (1989) point to few changes in institutional functioning when succession occurs. Kirkland and Ratcliff (1994) completed case studies looking at four presidential transitions at community colleges. The findings of their study indicated the presidential succession process was disruptive, had short-term negative effects on organizational performance, and was characterized by changes to organizational structure. Levin (1998) found, “presidential succession may be a significant contributor to perceived organizational change in community colleges, specifically in organizational processes and organizational culture” (p. 422). While this research is noteworthy, none of these case studies examined the transition process following *abrupt presidential change* or derailment.

Reflecting on their own experiences during a presidential succession, Jensen and Edmundson (2002) provided the Ten Commandments institutions should follow during a presidential transition:

- Impress upon all parties that, in a presidential transition, the needs of the institution come first.
- That said, recognize that strong supportive trustee leadership that takes into account the needs of both incoming and outgoing presidents is of immediate practical importance and sends a powerful message to all constituencies about how the college values its leaders.
- Don't underestimate the potential of a collaborative, working relationship between the two presidents for sustaining them and their abilities to lead as they adopt their new roles.
- Decide in advance how you will reconcile differences when they inevitably occur.
- Take every opportunity to honor what has been accomplished, allay fears and anxieties, articulate the college's current challenges, elicit comment and ideas from all groups, clarify what you are hearing, and suggest how the institution can embrace the future.
- Give equal attention to the new and the old, taking time to mourn what is passing and think creatively and innovatively about what is to come.
- Use formal and informal means of communication and inquiry to gather data, build relationships, pass on important information, and ensure continuity.
- Be bold when opportunities present themselves to make big decisions that will have a positive impact.
- Be clear about who is in charge and who is in the consulting role.

- Welcome the transition as a once-in-a-decade opportunity to focus the energies and talents of two experienced leaders on the well-being and long-term success of the college. (Chronicle Careers, February 26, 2002)

Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) identified the need for succession planning to strengthen the community colleges beyond 2010. They provided a list of recommendations community colleges should consider:

- Establish committees to provide oversight for the succession-planning process. When engaged in succession planning for the CEO, the committee should be composed of the present CEO and the trustees as the primary members. This committee may choose to involve additional members, such as the human resources director.
- Identify key positions within the organization that are critical for the future, recognizing that these positions must be filled if the community college is to meet the future needs of its market area.
- Establish criteria for these positions. Determine what skills and traits are necessary for individuals to be successful in meeting the long-range goals of the organization.
- Identify possibly interested and potentially successful candidates who exist within the present organization. Look for a diverse number of individuals, including diversity in gender, race, and ethnicity.
- Establish a mentoring program for the emerging leaders.
- Select mentors from within the organization who can offer the necessary guidance and support.
- Assist candidates in preparing development plans.

- Consistently evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005, p. 244).

Eddy (2010) encouraged boards of trustees to consider succession planning carefully and treat it as a “critical issue” at institutions facing future leadership change. Eddy asserted, “Thinking critically about leadership succession is not something that should be put off for another day” (p. 150). The author suggested, “New leaders can be developed through grow-your-own leadership programs or by using outside development programs” (p. 150). In the end, community college trustees need to have a plan for abrupt presidential departure, derailment, and retirement.

The Interim Presidency

Overview

The interim presidency has become a common phenomenon largely due to the increase in presidential turnover. Since World War II, there has been a marked increase in the utilization of interim presidencies. Cohen and March (1974) reported that prior to World War II, only 2% of institutions used interim presidents annually and following the war this number swelled to an annual rate of 6%. A 1998 survey indicated a similar rise in the number of interim presidents. Data gathered by this study showed “a typical public research university had a 0.11 percent chance that at least one of its last two presidents was an interim” (Padilla, 2004, p. 56). At the time this study was conducted, there was no quantitative figure specific to the usage of interim presidents at community colleges.

An interim president can assist an institution through leadership change, however, if the interim is ineffective, “a form of chaos may develop” (Dodds, 1962, p. 29). Bornstein (2003) lends support to this notion, “A poor presidential succession process may result in a diminution

of legitimacy for an institution” (Bornstein, 2003, p. 165). The uncertainty experienced by an institution during a presidential transition is noted by Everley (1994):

The unrest which accompanies presidential transitions makes the need for leadership more acute. Constituents look to interim presidents for leadership and interim presidents can exhibit it not by shifting or establishing new priorities, but instead by adhering to and working to promote established and familiar goals (p. 20).

Langevin and Koenig (2004) report that, “An experienced leader in an interim role can serve as a soothing presence while quietly keeping key issues moving forward” (Langevin & Koenig, 2004, p. 162). Padilla (2004) claimed successful interim presidents possess the following characteristics,

- Previous presidential experience
- Integrity
- Honesty
- Self-confidence
- Fair and even-handed treatment of colleagues
- Tough decision making within consultative style
- Broad and authentic communication skills
- The ability to work cooperatively yet forcefully with the board of trustees, particularly the board’s chair and its executive committee members (p. 163)

In addition to these characteristics, Fretwell (1995) recommended institutions seek interim presidents that exhibit the ability to “live creatively with ambiguity” (p. 2) due to instability that often accompanies presidential transitions. When presidents exit abruptly or leave an institution

with major problems, the interim president must have the capacity to exercise good judgment and resolve the most pertinent issues facing the institution (Fretwell, 1995).

Everley (1994) produced a study on interim presidents at public research universities. Findings from this research showed an average tenure for interim presidents of 8.5 months with 20% of interims in office over one year. At the time of this study, males filled 87% of interim presidencies and held senior level administrative positions at the institution prior to the interim presidency. Interim presidents hold considerable power despite their short tenure (Everley, 1994). In fact, experienced interim presidents can assert authority at an institution and assume “a decisive role in helping that institution to reevaluate itself and set appropriate expectations for its next leader” (Padilla, 2004, p. 170).

Discussing the increased use of interim administrators in community colleges, Riggs (2009) supplied a critical view of the interim leader,

Interim administrators are generally reluctant to take the bold actions necessary to move the organization forward, causing critical projects to be placed on hold. Those in interim positions who wish to obtain the position on a permanent basis may try to please everyone, which means maintaining the status quo and creating a pile of clean up work for the persons who follow them.

Interim presidents fulfill a number of critical responsibilities. They are often “appointed to resolve institutional problems and constituency disputes and address other matters that need immediate attention” (Stanley & Betts, 2004, p. 84). As Langevin and Koenig (2004) suggest, interim presidents can play a pivotal role in a presidential transition, however, very little is known about this phenomenon.

Summary

There is a rich literature on the community college presidency. Researchers have thoroughly examined the history, roles, responsibilities, skills, motivations, and career pathways of community college presidents. Authors have suggested community colleges face a crisis of leadership due to the impending retirements of presidents and the increase in presidential derailments. As community colleges face higher rates of presidential turnover, leadership succession and presidential transition become more important.

The business sector has produced a number of studies related to presidential and CEO succession. Several themes emerged that gained much of the attention of researchers. These include the impact of presidential or CEO succession in relation to organizational size, organizational tenure, organizational performance, inside versus outside succession patterns, and best practices in succession. Despite the many virtues of the existing literature on presidential and CEO succession, a very limited amount of work has focused on higher education (Hammons & Murphree, 1999).

There is a paucity of literature related to presidential transition in higher education. None of the existing studies address the experience of a community college interim president following an *abrupt presidential change* or derailment. The current literature is in need of a detailed case study that examines the role of interim community college presidents following an abrupt presidential change or derailment. The majority of research has focused on interim presidents at four-year public research universities, and even this research has not looked at the consequences of abrupt presidential change or derailment and how an interim president leads an institution. This case study will add an important study to the existing literature on the community college presidency, presidential transition, and the interim presidency.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

Oldfather and West (1994) described qualitative research as jazz. This metaphor is fitting when considering many of the elements of jazz exist in qualitative research. Oldfather and West (1994) explain, “Like improvisational jazz, qualitative research embodies both deep structure and creative freedom” (p. 24). While deep structure guides jazz and qualitative research, they are inclusive, improvisational, interpretative, and promote collaboration between participants. “Jazz is adaptive and is shaped by the participants. Their improvisations are collaborative and interdependent; the quality of the music depends on each musician’s hearing, responding to, and appreciating the performances of other players” (p. 22).

The qualitative approach works best to learn more about the experience of an interim president because much like the jazz metaphor, each study participant shared a similar experience at their college, but have different perspectives that can offer insight into the interim presidency. Their experience during a presidential transition is shaped by their position on-campus and their background. I appreciate each participant in this study for their willingness to share their interpretation of an interim president’s leadership following an abrupt presidential transition. Together the participants provide a rich, thick, and descriptive account of an underreported phenomenon. The detail and description of the interim president’s experience chronicled in this study is best completed in the qualitative paradigm.

Patton (2002) differentiated qualitative and quantitative research methods writing, “Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth,

openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry” (p. 14). Creswell (2003) identified the following characteristics unique to qualitative research:

- Qualitative research takes place in the natural setting.
- Qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic.
- Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.
- Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. (p. 181-182)

Qualitative research supplies “a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). This qualitative dissertation is deeply structured in its epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods. The research is inductive, interpretive, and emergent. It seeks to develop new knowledge and provide a rich, thick, and detailed description of the cases being studied.

Philosophical Foundation

The epistemology framing this qualitative dissertation research is constructionism (Crotty, 1998; Broido & Manning, 2002). Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Broido and Manning (2002) suggest that in the constructionist paradigm:

1. The researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and interdependent.
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable.
3. The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research.

4. The research product (e.g., interpretations) is context specific.

I chose constructionism as the philosophical framework for this research due to the nature of my investigation. This research was based on the interpretations of individuals working in the social context of a community college experiencing an interim presidency. The study participants constructed reality based on their individual and shared experiences. Their interaction with the interim president, with other college faculty and staff, and with members of their community during an interim presidency was complex and represents the constructionist epistemology.

The methodology for this dissertation is qualitative case study research. The next section of this chapter provides insight into the background of case study research, defines case study methodology, examines the relevance of case study methodology, explores the characteristics and misconceptions of case study, and describes case study research design, data collection and discusses how theories are created from case study research.

Research Design

Tellis (1997) suggested case study research originated in Europe and was grounded in the social sciences. Case study research has a relatively short history and became more prevalent in the United States in the early twentieth century. It is believed that sociologists at the University of Chicago popularized case study research as they examined issues related to immigration (Tellis, 1997). Researchers interested in learning more about human interactions promoted the increase in case study research.

Wilhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher, explained that the hard sciences did not capture the entire scope of ways of knowing. In 1910, Dilthey discussed the importance of studying the experiences and interactions between people from a non-positivistic perspective. Dilthey wrote:

Only from his actions, his fixed utterances, his effects upon others, can man learn about himself; thus he learns to know himself only by the round-about way of understanding. What we once were, how we developed and became what we are, we learn from the way in which we acted, the plans which we once adopted. . . we understand ourselves and others only when we transfer our own lived experience into every kind of expression of our own and other people's lives (As cited in Stake, 1978, p. 5).

Giddings (1924) assisted in the further development of case study research by distinguishing the difference between case study and case work. Giddings defined case work as that which a social worker encounters when the individual “is attempting to bring about a reconditioning or improvement” (p. 644) in a person’s life. Giddings called the case study a research technique used to provide “thoroughness” in understanding of a particular situation. Giddings asserted that the case study researchers’ role in conducting a case study “is to find out all that can be found out about it, and to scrutinize every seeming fact to make sure of actuality” (Giddings, 1924, p. 644).

Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) claimed there was an increase in case study research in the 1920s and instances of case study research grew during the 1930s and into World War II. Columbia University and the University of Chicago served as two institutions that helped in the proliferation of case study as a methodology. At the conclusion of World War II, the case study methodology decreased in occurrence at Columbia University and a shift in the prevalence of quantitative methodologies and the natural science model ascended to the forefront (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, 1991).

In the past, case studies have been utilized in multiple disciplines. Researchers in sociology, anthropology, medicine, law, political science, and education have all conducted case

study research. Because this methodology has been used in several disciplines, defining case study research is challenging. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will rely primarily on definitions offered by modern case study methodologists Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Yin (2009).

Defining the Case Study

Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995) define case study using the terminology of ethnographer, Louis Smith who introduced the phrase “bounded system” to the qualitative case study vernacular. The “bounded system” examines, “a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9). Yin (2009) offered a more technical definition of case study research:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
 - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
 - The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
2. The case study inquiry
 - Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
 - Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
 - Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

During the dissertation research process, my case study will have a “bounded system” as described by Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995) and take into consideration the technical

definition offered by Yin (2009). The experience of two community colleges, their interim presidents, and faculty and key leaders following a presidential derailment will be the “bounded system” in my dissertation.

Relevance of Case Studies

With a clear definition of case study methodology, it is important to consider the pivotal role case studies play in research. Qualitative case studies produce research with great richness and depth of information on a phenomenon that is a part of a bounded system (Creswell, 2009; Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). Authors describe qualitative case study research as rich and thick in description, which provides a deeper understanding of the case being investigated (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988). Stake (1995) claimed qualitative researchers see the outlier as unique and worthy of case study.

The case study methodology promotes the increase of knowledge through in-depth study. Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) claimed that relevant knowledge is ascertained through the use of case studies. Discussing the merits of case study research, the authors’ wrote,

1. It permits the grounding of observations and concepts about social action and social structures in natural settings studied at close hand.
2. It provides information from a number of sources and over a period of time, thus permitting a more holistic study of complex social networks and of complexes of social action and social meanings.
3. It can furnish the dimensions of time and history to the study of social life, thereby enabling the investigator to examine continuity and change in lifeworld patterns (p.6-7).

Characteristics of Case Studies

Merriam (1988) identified characteristics commonly found in case study research. The author described case studies as particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Case studies are particularistic because they examine specific situations such as an event, time period, problem, or phenomenon. This case study focuses on a particular time period, the time an institution spends without their regular chief executive officer, and the actions taken by the interim president who is leading the institution. According to Merriam (1988), case studies are descriptive. They offer rich and thick description that explains or interprets events of the particular topic being researched. Case studies are also heuristic meaning they shed light on what is being studied and offer new insight into the phenomenon. Qualitative case study research is inductive. This means qualitative research attempts to build theory through “discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understandings, rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13).

There are multiple forms of case studies. Stake (1995) described intrinsic and instrumental case studies in his writing. The intrinsic case study is completed by the researcher because of a general interest in the case. The researcher completes the case because it provides an intrinsic sense of satisfaction. The instrumental case study supplies the researcher with a “general understanding” (p. 3) of a particular phenomenon. It is an instrument used to gain insight.

Merriam (1988) offered several types of case study commonly found in educational research. This author defined and described ethnographic, historical, psychological, sociological, descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative case studies. The ethnographic case study “is characterized by its sociocultural interpretation” (p. 24). Historical case studies are descriptive in nature and look at the progression of a phenomenon over time. The historical case study relies

heavily on primary source materials to inform the study. In the psychological case study, the focus is “on the individual as a way to investigate some aspect of human behavior” (p. 25).

While the psychological case study is concerned with the individual, sociological case studies in education examine groups of people, their interaction, and how they influence social structures in society. Descriptive case studies supply a close examination of a phenomenon and often shed light on a topic. Some skeptics have been critical of descriptive case study work because they are seen as atheoretical. Merriam (1988) asserted descriptive case studies “are useful...in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (p. 27). Interpretive case studies focus on gathering data so that researchers are able to interpret the findings and begin the process of creating theory from the case study. The final form of case study research mentioned by Merriam was evaluative. The evaluative case study has similarities to other forms of case study, but its focus is on describing, explaining, and exploring the phenomenon being studied. This is completed through an evaluative process.

This dissertation research is instrumental in nature because it offers a “general understanding” of the interim presidency at two community colleges. The research follows Merriam’s descriptive case study approach. My intent is to offer an in-depth, descriptive account of the interim president’s experience, and the institution’s experience during presidential transitions that follow a derailment or abrupt change in leadership.

Components of Case Study Design

Yin (2009) named five components of case study research design. These components include:

- research question(s)
- propositions/purpose

- unit of analysis
- logic connecting data to propositions
- criteria for interpreting findings

Qualitative case study research questions usually consist of “how” and “why” questions. This research study uses “how” questions in order to gain a greater understanding of the experience of interim presidents and the leadership they provide community colleges following an abrupt presidential departure. Creswell (2009) offered insight into the number of research questions appropriate for a qualitative study suggesting a researcher, “Ask one or two central questions followed by no more than five to seven subquestions” (Creswell, 2009, p. 129).

The second component found in case study research design is the study purpose. In qualitative case study research, this component is most commonly recognized as the purpose statement. Creswell (2009) supplied a “script” for the qualitative researcher as they develop the purpose statement of the study. This “script” includes the methodology being used, what the study examined, the participants, and the research site. The purpose of this case study is to understand the experiences of two community college interim presidents, their characteristics, and how they lead institutions following an abrupt presidential departure.

The third component of the case study research design is the unit of analysis. Yin (2009) described the unit of analysis as what the case study is analyzing. Yin writes, “Selection of the appropriate unit of analysis will occur when you accurately specify your primary research questions” (Yin, 2009, p. 30). The unit of analysis is directly tied to the research questions developed by the researcher. Merriam (1988) suggested the unit of analysis of a case study is “influenced by one’s philosophical, theoretical, or disciplinary orientation” (p. 45). The units of analysis in this study are the two community colleges experiencing an interim presidency.

The fourth component of case study research design is connecting data to propositions. This is completed following the data collection phase as themes emerge. As data is being analyzed, the researcher attempts to match patterns that appear in the data to the theoretical propositions of the case study. As the themes emerge in this study, I will attempt to connect the data back to answering the research questions posed in chapter one. The fifth component of the case study design is the criteria for interpreting findings. Commonly, the qualitative case study researcher codes the data prior to developing themes (Yin, 2009). Following the theme development stage, I will carefully extract meaning from the findings to determine recommendations for practice and future research.

Theory in Case Study Research

Case study research has been criticized as being atheoretical and misconceptions have surrounded the case study methodology. Flyvbjerg (2006) identified five misunderstandings surrounding case study research:

Misunderstanding 1: General, theoretical (context independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.

Misunderstanding 2: One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.

Misunderstanding 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

Misunderstanding 4: The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.

Misunderstanding 5: It is often difficult to summarize and develop general

propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies (p. 221).

Flyvbjerg's work corrected each misunderstanding by providing counterpoints justifying the case study methodology. Flyvbjerg acknowledged the inherent limitations of case study such as small sample size and greater researcher subjectivity. The author, however, argued case studies have merit because they supply a much deeper understanding and compliment quantitative research that supplies greater breadth (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

As research for this study was conducted, I attempted to create a new understanding regarding the experience of the community college interim presidency during a presidential transition. As data analysis was completed through open coding and theme development, my desire was for the findings to lead to theory development. Eisenhardt (1989) supplied insight into the theory development process in qualitative research,

The central idea is that researchers constantly compare theory and data-iterating toward a theory which closely fits the data. A close fit is important to building good theory because it takes advantage of the new insights possible from the data and yields an empirically valid theory. (p. 541)

Research Sites

Urban Community College

Urban Community College is a large, multi-campus, multi-county community college governed by an 11-member board of directors. The college enrolls over 30,000 credit-taking students annually and offers more than 100 programs of study. Urban Community College employs over 1,500 full and part-time faculty and staff members.

Rural Community College District

Rural Community College District is a multi-college system located in a rural setting. The community college district consists of three separate colleges and a comprehensive continuing education unit. Rural Community College District is governed by a locally-elected 7-member board of directors representing the district's service area. The college district offers a multitude of academic programs on each of its campuses. Each of the colleges within the district has its own distinct history, culture, and identity. A large majority of students attending the Rural Community College District are preparing for transfer in an arts and sciences degree program. The college district enrolls nearly 3,000 credit taking students and employs 245 individuals.

Participants

Purposeful Sampling

A consideration for all qualitative research studies is how to collect data. This dissertation research followed purposeful sampling. According to Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006), purposeful sampling is done by identifying “information rich cases that hold the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 66). Esterberg (2002) offered a definition for purposeful sampling that stated researchers “intentionally sample research participants for the specific perspectives they may have” (p. 93). Jones (2002) justified the use of fewer participants in qualitative research writing, “because the focus on qualitative research is on depth, the emphasis is rarely on sheer numbers of participants” (p. 465). Purposeful sampling was completed in this case study at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District.

Urban Community College

I worked with an individual employed at Urban Community College to reach the interim president regarding participation in this case study research. After I contacted the interim

president and determined he would be willing to discuss this study, I made contact with the interim president on a visit to Urban Community College. At that time, the purpose of the study was discussed. Communication with the interim president continued via e-mail and over the phone (Appendix E: Audit Trail). After receiving Institutional Review Board approval to conduct this research, the interim president was contacted over the phone. During this phone conversation, I asked him to identify Urban Community College personnel who had direct knowledge of his role during the presidential transition. I asked him to select individuals at the institution with different genders, ages, tenures, and positions at Urban Community College. Following the telephone conversation, the interim suggested I contact several individuals at the institution that had direct knowledge of his role as interim president. The participants were sent an invitation to participate in this study through e-mail communication (Appendix F: Invitation Letter). Prior to the beginning of the in-depth interview process, I provided each participant an informed consent form, required the participant to review and sign the consent form if they were willing to participate in the study (Appendix B: Informed Consent Form).

There were a total of eleven college employees invited to participate in the research study at Urban Community College. One participant did not respond to the invitation to participate and one participant decided not to participate because I would not send an advanced copy of the interview questions. Participants included the interim president, a faculty member, an academic affairs professional, a student affairs professional, a technology and administrative services professional, an institutional advancement professional, a facilities professional, an executive assistant, and a projects coordinator. Participants were selected because of their role on-campus, their frequent interaction with the interim president during his time of service, and the unique perspective they offered.

Rural Community College District

The Rural Community College District study followed the same protocol and preparation that took place with the Urban Community College study. I initiated contact with the Rural Community College District interim president to determine if he was interested in participating in this study. After learning the interim president at Rural Community College District was interested in participating, I worked with him to identify possible participants for the study. The participants, like those at Urban Community College, were selected due to their role on their respective college campus, the closeness of interaction they had with the interim president, and the unique perspective they offered. Participants at Rural Community College District included the interim president, two faculty members, multiple academic affairs professionals, a student affairs professional, and multiple district employees. There were a total of eight participants in the Rural Community College District study. One individual that was contacted did not feel comfortable participating due to the sensitive nature of the study and communication between two other potential participants ended following initial contact.

Data Collection Methods

Jones (2006) asserted, “decisions regarding data collection must be based upon methodological strategies and the particular methods best suited to that methodology” (p. 467). In qualitative case study research, six data collection methods are relied upon heavily. These methods include interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2009). Each data collection method can supply the researcher with insight into the case being studied. Utilizing multiple forms of data collection methods allows case study researchers an opportunity to triangulate findings. The triangulation of data assists researchers in establishing goodness and trustworthiness in qualitative research

(Merriam, 2002). The primary means of data collection in this research study will include in-depth interviews and document review.

Interviews

The in-depth interview is an effective data collection method because it helps the researcher gain knowledge of the participant's experience. Seidman (2006) asserted, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). This statement encapsulates the researcher's intention for conducting interviews, and it demonstrates why interviews offer a unique perspective in qualitative research. Seidman offered a model for qualitative in-depth interviewing. This model consists of three in-depth interviews with each participant to maximize interview depth. Seidman described the first interview as a data collection time focused on learning about the participant and their experience aside from the topic being studied. In this study, the first interview will ask participants about their academic and career background. The second interview's purpose "is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study" (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). The third interview in the series is designed to allow the participant to reflect on their experience and to make meaning of it (Seidman, 2006). The three-interview approach allows the researcher to develop familiarity with the interviewee and gain better insight into that individual's experience.

Anderson and Jack (1991) discussed the importance of listening critically to the interviewee, discovering underlying feelings and emotions, learning to probe into an interviewee's language, logic, and meta-statements. Seidman (2006) reiterated the importance of listening critically to the interviewee saying, "Listening is the most important skill in

interviewing. The hardest work for many interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively” (p. 78).

Active listening is critical to conducting an effective interview. Esterberg (2002) supplied additional advice regarding how to ask questions most effectively to gain the best possible data. Esterberg (2002) acknowledged timing and the order of questions as components of the in-depth interview that assist in soliciting the most reliable data. Esterberg (2002) wrote, “You should place easier, less threatening questions at the beginning and save more controversial or sensitive questions for the middle or end, once you have developed some rapport and established some trust” (p. 96).

The interview process utilized in this research study followed the recommendations of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview approach. After participants reviewed and completed the informed consent form, the researcher met with each participant for a series of three semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded and lasted between one-half hour and one-hour. The researcher utilized an interview guide to frame the interview. Patton (2002) called the interview guide a tool “to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 343). This study used two interview guides (Appendix C; Appendix D). One interview guide was designed with specific questions for the series of interviews with the interim president. The second interview protocol was designed to ask questions appropriate for the interviews with staff members who worked directly with the interim president.

The first interview was completed using questions to gain insight into the participant’s professional background and interests. This interview helped the researcher become familiar with the participant’s background and establish rapport with the participant. The second interview

included questions directly related to the participant's experience working with the interim president and their perception of the institution during the presidential transition. The final interview took place after the participants had an opportunity to review the transcript from the second interview. This interview allowed participants to provide any additional insight they felt was not discussed in previous interviews.

At Urban Community College, I conducted the first interview in-person with seven of the nine participants and scheduled a phone interview with two participants who were unable to meet in person. At Rural Community College District, I conducted all of the first interviews over the phone with the exception of the interview with the interim president, which was completed one-on-one. The second interviews were completed in person at a location convenient and comfortable for the participants. The third interview was completed over the phone with all participants. This was completed following the transcription process. The participants received an advanced copy of the transcript, were asked to review the transcript, and given the opportunity to discuss the content over the phone during the third interview.

Direct Observation

Stake (1995) explained that during qualitative case study, observation,

keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively *incontestable description* for further analysis and ultimate reporting. He or she lets the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, resolution or irresolution of the problem (p. 62).

Yin (2009) described the direct observation as a formal or informal observation of the case being studied. This observation may take place during an in-depth interview or a scheduled visit to the case study site. The direct observation is a data collection method that has the ability to inform

the researcher on environmental factors influencing the case. Merriam (1988) offered observational strategies for researchers to consider as they complete observations:

1. *The setting*: What is the physical environment like?
2. *The participants*: Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles.
3. *Activities and interactions*: What is going on? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another?
4. *Frequency and duration*: When did the situation begin? How long did it last?
5. *Subtle factors*: Informal and unplanned activities. Symbolic and connotative meanings of words. Nonverbal communication such as dress and physical space. Unobtrusive measures such as physical clues. What does not happen if it ought to have happened? (Merriam, 1988, p.91).

The researcher intended to complete direct observation of board meetings, but once research commenced the decision was made not to complete direct observation of board meetings due to the sensitive nature of this study. Direct observation could have drawn unwanted attention to the study from board members, community members, and other staff members not involved in the research process. The strategy of not utilizing direct observation is a limitation to the study; however, it is one that helped provide additional protection to the institution and research participants. Despite the decision not to complete direct observation, the researcher listened to select board meetings posted on the college website. This data collection method provided the researcher with an understanding of the management of the institution during the interim period.

Document Review

Merriam (1988) listed “public or archival records, personal documents, and physical material” (p. 109) as the three main kinds of documents reviewed in case study research. Stake

(1995) suggested, “almost every study finds some need for examining newspapers, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and the like” (p. 68). Yin (2009) supplied the strengths and weaknesses of document review. The strengths of document review include the researcher’s ability to review documents repeatedly, it is unobtrusive, document review gives names, dates, and details of events that transpired, and documents provide information covering the duration of the event. The weaknesses of document review include: difficulty retrieving documents, incomplete selection of documents to review, and the potential for bias because documents being reviewed might be written by someone with a predisposed position.

The documents reviewed in this study include board agendas, board meeting minutes, and institutional websites. These forms of data shed light on the experiences of the interim community college presidents. These documents assisted in providing triangulation of data sources helping to provide goodness and trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in case study research is consistent with many qualitative research methodologies. The researcher has the discretion to choose the data analysis procedures for their particular study. This research study followed the data analysis procedures explained in Miles and Huberman (1994), Esterberg (2002), and Creswell (2009). Creswell (2009) described the importance of organizing and reviewing data carefully and gaining a general knowledge of the existing data prior to analysis. After gaining a general understanding of the data, I completed the open coding process. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined the codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to ‘chunks’ of varying size—words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting” (p. 57). Esterberg (2002) suggested

the open coding process is where “you work intensively with your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest” (p. 158). Once the data were examined thoroughly through the open coding process, the researcher reviewed the codes for emerging themes in the data. This research study adhered to the six steps identified by Creswell (2009) during the completion of the data analysis process:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up fieldnotes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information (p. 185).
2. Read through all of the data. A first general step is to obtain a *general sense* of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (p. 185).
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process. *Coding* is the process of organizing the material into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks.” It involves taking text, data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term) (p. 186).
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis...Then, use the coding to generate a small number of *themes* or categories, perhaps five to seven categories for a research study (p.189).
5. Advance how the description and themes will be *represented* in the qualitative narrative (p. 189).
6. A final step in data analysis involves making an *interpretation* or meaning of the data (p. 189-190).

As I completed the interview process and started data analysis, definite patterns emerged in the data. Stake (1995) discussed the emergence of patterns during data collection and analysis saying, “we can look for patterns immediately while we are reviewing documents, observing, or interviewing” (p. 78).

Goodness and Trustworthiness

The measurement of quality in qualitative research is often judged from the quantitative paradigm, however, fundamental differences exist between qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative researchers have been criticized for not adhering to standards of quality or goodness and trustworthiness in research. This qualitative doctoral study will attempt to utilize strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the standards associated with quality research in the qualitative paradigm (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility in qualitative research is reached through triangulation of data sources, member checks, and peer review (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (2002) suggested triangulation is completed by “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging finds” (p. 31). This dissertation research study attempted to meet the criteria for credibility through triangulation of multiple data sources by utilizing in-depth interviews and document review. The study featured member checks of study participants following the interview transcription process. A qualitative researcher and recent doctoral graduate from the University of Tennessee, and one community college president who once served as an interim president, served as peer reviewers for this research study.

Transferability was reached in this study by reaching maximum variation of research participants. Merriam (2002) defined maximum variation as “purposefully seeking variation or

diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of research” (p. 31). This study sought maximum variation by including mid-level and senior-level administrators as well as faculty and support staff members. Additionally, the interviewees included men and women, individuals of different ages, experience levels, ethnicities, and positions at the institutions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002).

The utilization of an audit trail (Appendix E) assisted in creating dependability in research findings for this study. The audit trail is “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Dependability in research can be achieved through data triangulation, peer review, and systematic coding and recoding (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability was attained through triangulation and researcher positionality. According to Merriam (2002) researcher positionality is the “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 31). In an effort to provide confirmability in this study, the following section addresses researcher positionality.

Researcher Positionality

Merriam (2002) suggested each researcher approaches their work with a background and set of assumptions that influences the research study. In an effort to supply goodness and trustworthiness in this study, it is important for me to provide the reader with an understanding of my positionality. Researcher positionality is a “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31).

I am a middle-class, white male who serves as an administrator at an Iowa community college. My interest in the interim presidency originates from graduate courses taken at a large research university in the South. While taking courses at the university, I was introduced to a former university president who had served as an interim president following a presidential derailment. The president and I met on several occasions and discussed his career and the experiences he had serving as a president and interim president. This initial exposure to an interim president caused me to look at the existing literature in this area of higher education. Surprisingly, I found a paucity of research studies discussing the interim presidency and none of these studies involved a community college enduring a presidential transition following a derailment or abrupt change in college presidents. My curiosity in this area of higher education continued to increase after reading issues of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and learning a number of institutions had experienced derailment or abrupt presidential change. I found a vast majority of these institutions appointed an interim president to run the institution during the presidential transition. Because little research has examined the experience of interim presidents, and since interim presidencies are becoming more common, I continued pursuing this research topic.

I entered this case study with a set of assumptions based on prior knowledge from meeting with an interim president at a large research university. The researcher believes interim presidents can be more than a caretaker of an institution during a presidential transition; they can offer stability to the institution and community; and play a critical role in the presidential transition process.

Limitations

The limitations for this doctoral research study include,

The scope of this study is limited to research at only two community college districts that have experienced a recent interim presidency, and therefore, results can be appropriated to similar contexts.

The interim presidents participating in this study included two white males, therefore; the experience of an interim president of a different gender or ethnicity is not represented in this study.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research and my intent to protect the identity of the participating community colleges, interim presidents, and other participants, I chose not to attend board meetings at either community college. Initially, I planned to attend board meetings to observe the interim president interacting with board members, however, it was decided that my presence at board meetings had the potential to draw unnecessary attention to the research study and jeopardize confidentiality of the research site and participants.

Research conducted at Rural Community College District took place only three months into the interim presidency providing less time for participants to experience the leadership of the interim president and less of a retrospective view of the presidential transition.

Following the data collection process at Rural Community College District, it was announced the previous president had accepted a presidency at a different institution and would not return from his sabbatical. Due to research deadlines and additional time constraints, I did not return to collect data after the announcement of the permanent departure of the previous president.

Delimitations

The research study is delimited to a case study involving two community college interim presidents, cabinet level administrators, and faculty and staff members. Additionally, the interim presidents, faculty, and staff members interviewed in this study worked at the institution during the presidential transition.

CHAPTER 4. DESCRIPTION OF CASES

This chapter describes cases in-depth utilizing rich, thick description where interim presidents served at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District. This study offers a description of the college settings, the presidential departure at both institutions, and the characteristics of the interim presidents. I used data gained during the in-depth interview process with the interim presidents, cabinet level administrators, faculty, and staff to offer descriptive accounts of the cases. Documents were reviewed and utilized to describe the cases and research findings. These documents included board meeting agendas and minutes. Additionally, the participants in this study were all assigned pseudonyms in an attempt to protect their confidentiality to the greatest extent possible.

Urban Community College

Urban Community College is a large comprehensive community college with more than 100 academic programs. Urban serves a four county service area with three campuses and five educational centers. The college is governed by an 11-member board of directors who are elected to four-year terms of service. Urban Community College, like many community colleges, has experienced a large enrollment increase since its inception. Urban opened its doors in the mid-1970s with an annual enrollment of nearly 2,500 students. During the 2008-2009 academic year, enrollment at the college reached almost 50,000 credit and non-credit students.

Presidential Departure

Urban Community College experienced an abrupt change in presidential leadership in 2008. The college board of governors hired Dr. Lucy Griffith with a 6-5 vote in 2005. Dr. Griffith retired in 2008 under pressure from the board of directors at Urban Community College. At the time of Dr. Griffith's "retirement", three years remained on her contract. The college

continued to employ the former president as a consultant to complete the final years of her contract. Following the abrupt departure of Dr. Griffith, Charles Stewart, executive vice president, became interim president at Urban Community College. To fully understand and appreciate the interim presidency of Charles Stewart requires knowledge of Dr. Griffith's tenure as president.

Deak Johnson, faculty member at Urban Community College during Dr. Griffith's service as president and a current administrator, suggested the former president, "brought a good appreciation of the arts to this college which I don't think was there before. She came in mid-way through a master facilities plan and some will tell you that she made it better" (Deak Johnson, Interview). Mr. Johnson commented that Dr. Griffith strengthened the nursing program by hiring a new dean of nursing who completed an extensive evaluation of the nursing program's needs. This led to a multi-million dollar building renovation to add "state-of-the-art labs, science and nursing," (Deak Johnson, Interview) enabling the college to serve the needs of the community, better equip nurses, and expand the program. Don Stephens, facilities administrator, interacted with Dr. Griffith regularly during her tenure as president. Mr. Stephens described the president as "tough, but she was a very smart lady" (Don Stephens, Interview). According to Stephens, Dr. Griffith, "did in 3 years what should have taken a normal president probably 10-15 years to do" (Don Stephens, Interview). Daniel Webb, a student affairs administrator, was hired during the interim presidency of Charles Stewart. Mr. Webb never worked at Urban during Dr. Griffith's presidency, however, he pointed out a beautification project initiated during her tenure that he viewed as positive,

She did a lot of good things. She's responsible for all the artificial plants that are all over the college and she's responsible also for these photographs (pointing

at a historic photograph hanging on his office wall). There are hundreds of these all over all of the campuses and centers – very nice. (Daniel Webb, Interview)

While Dr. Griffith initiated some positive projects as president, participants in this study found many of her methods controversial and antics unbearable. Jim Kirk, a faculty member, commented,

I think she accomplished some good things but I'm not sure her methods were always good and so there was a lot of controversy the few years she was here— within the college, the staff, within the Board – the Board was at odds with her at times and it was just kind of a rocky couple of years with that particular president. Now, the one group that she did leave alone was the faculty. So, we can actually say, if I would look at it just purely from a faculty point of view, you'd almost have to say she was good for faculty. But, if you look at it from a college point of view, I'm not so certain I would make that assessment on her tenure here as president. (James Kirk, Interview)

Jim Kirk called the culture at Urban one of “fear,” “distrust,” and “apprehension.” Other staff members shared his sentiment. Kristy Taylor, an administrator, described the Urban Community College culture during Dr. Griffith's tenure as “anxious,” “unsettled,” and “chaotic”. According to Taylor,

There was so much change and not on a long range trajectory...Such that people didn't know what to expect one day to the next and had very little control over their own work and their careers so there were a lot of question marks. It was a very unsettling time (Kristy Taylor, Interview).

Sarah Jacobs, a staff member, described her perception of the general mood at Urban during Dr. Griffith's tenure,

It was very difficult. It was very stressful. There was a lot of fear. It was not a happy or positive period when the former president was here. A lot of people were on pins and needles because they didn't know if they would lose their jobs.

(Sarah Jacobs, Interview)

Ms. Jacobs suggested the college ran on "fear" during Griffith's presidency. "The culture was to basically try to appease the president. Everything was based on fear and people were afraid to speak up. People were just basically afraid to lose their jobs or get one of their friends in trouble" (Sarah Jacobs, Interview).

Comments made by Deak Johnson reiterate Jacobs' point that the former president's style made life on-campus challenging,

Lucy had a really interesting style. She was Cruella de Vil – pick all the monsters out of history that you can come up with. She was the iron lady of Building 60 who could never stay on track and just constantly kept changing her mind.

There are stories about how she would have some of the high-ranking people in this building move just because she didn't want them farther or closer to her and spent the money to have offices re-carpeted and whatever else. (Deak Johnson, Interview)

Don Stephens called the institution "devastated" by the previous president's style. Mr. Stephens and the facilities department interacted with the former president on many occasions. His experience sheds light on the atmosphere at the college,

When she yells at you, you know you've been screamed at. And, that's what was

so hard...her mind never shut off and she was so indecisive. It was like put a wall up here. She'd walk in; I don't like it, take it down. Put a window in the wall, she'd walk out, come back, I don't like it, take it out. Put the wall back up or put the door back in. It was just that way all the time. We moved about 400 of the 600 full-time staff that were at the college at that time – we moved them to different locations and some people moved 6 or 7 times. There were feelings at the college of – a lot of emotions. (Don Stephens, Interview)

Charles Stewart, a senior level administrator during Griffith's presidency and interim president following her departure, called the college culture at the end of Griffith's tenure one of "confusion". Mr. Stewart elaborated,

Confusion over how things were to be done. A loss of direction due to so many changes at the institution – staff-wise and office-wise. A general attitude problem. Most people just didn't really like to work here anymore and the majority of our staff joined education as a safe-haven. They were willing to accept less pay for the safety of working in education instead of a corporate culture and the reason they joined Urban no longer existed. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

The interim president faced the challenge of healing a college that was, as one participant noted, "largely beat up and experiencing what you'd call 'learned helplessness'" (Kristy Taylor, Interview). Iris Young, a staff member, offered her insight into the internal damage done by the former president. Ms. Young stated, "there was damage done to the fabric of the institution and some of it is damage that we can never mend" (Iris Young, Interview).

Aside from the internal damage created by the former president, there was a deterioration of external relationships within the community. Don Stephens suggested the former president

brought negative attention to the college in the media. The newspaper featured articles displaying the “president fighting with the board, the president fighting with the community, the board fighting with the community” (Don Stephens, Interview). Dr. Griffith contributed to the development of external damage by making promises that were not followed and by not listening to community business leaders or donors. Kristy Taylor commented on the treatment of external partners and their feeling that the former president did not listen,

A couple of key donors were very interested in some projects that we had going on at the college and they had initially approached the institution during the prior (Dr. Griffith’s) administration and left those meetings so completely frustrated because they were never able to talk and they just heard about Urban or whatever was going on but they didn’t get to share their objectives or their perspectives and they walked away from those previous meetings saying as long as that individual (Griffith) is here in that position we’re not going to have anything to do with the college. (Kristy Taylor, Interview)

Dr. Griffith’s actions and behavior are not the focus of this study; however, they have a great impact on the presidential transition and interim presidency of Charles Stewart.

Charles Stewart

The interim presidency of Charles Stewart was framed not only by the actions of the previous president; it was shaped by his personal and professional background, his core values, leadership style, and administrative experience. To understand his interim presidency, you need to know Charles Stewart. This section provides an introduction to the interim president’s background.

Stewart grew up in the Midwest in a small town of 300 people. Stewart’s career started in K-12 education as a business teacher and coach. After several years of high school teaching and

coaching, Stewart took a job at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. It was at this college Stewart entered student services and continued his coaching career. He reflected on this five-year period of time saying,

I was dean of students, assistant to the president, dean of enrollment management, business officer, athletic director, head football coach, and chaplain for awhile.

And, it was a great learning experience. One of the best learning experiences I ever had in my life. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

Stewart's passion for education was evident throughout our meetings together. This passion is fundamental to understanding his approach to serving Urban Community College,

I never did see myself doing what I'm doing today. I did, in time, see myself making a commitment to education when I had some other choices. That was probably the first time maybe in the middle part of my career that I ever decided that, you know, education would be my choice...I never did see the value added aspect of business. In fact, I'm the only one in my family (who is not in business) – my father – he owned a grain elevator, he worked for himself. He really couldn't understand why I didn't want to run my own business and do my own thing. It went beyond what anybody – what I could explain and it went to my soul. My soul told me that, you know, people helped you get to where you're at, you need to help others. And, that's what I wanted to do. Maybe, I was meant to be a preacher (smiling, chuckling) and just didn't do that- I don't know. I have a missionary zeal about helping others in education because I think it's the answer.

(Charles Stewart, Interview)

Following his five years of student services administration and coaching at the Midwestern liberal arts college, Stewart was hired by Urban Community College. Stewart began

his twenty years of service at Urban as the director of enrollment management. Throughout his career at Urban, Stewart has held the positions of dean of students, vice president of student services, vice president of academic affairs, business officer, executive vice president, and interim president. Reflecting on the multiple positions he has held at Urban, Stewart demonstrated his sense of humor, “It sounds like I couldn’t hold a job here. I was lucky they had that many jobs” (Charles Stewart, Interview).

An interim president’s leadership is imperative during a presidential transition that follows an abrupt presidential departure. This is especially true when the previous president has severely damaged the college’s internal and external relationships. Stewart discussed his leadership style,

I’m interested in being able to be flexible enough to deal with a wide array of people. I can make decisions with the best of them. I can make the hard decisions and I can terminate and I can do anything you want me to do. My druthers are that I want others to participate and understand why we’re making these decisions and share in the decisions. I’m interested in hiring people that are a lot smarter and a lot better at things than I am. The more I don’t have to do, the better. My leadership style is to try to empower people and when you empower people you just can’t leave them out there on their own. You can’t say well, I empower you to do that, good luck I’ll see you later. You have to work with them; you have to continue to be part of what they do so I guess the best way to explain my leadership style is that I share leadership readily. My ego is a very low ego for what I do. This is not about Charles. This is about education. I don’t want to come across as a bureaucrat, as a dictator. I want to come across as a co-worker that has a job

to do and if you want me to respect you then on the other hand, you know, I expect that you're going to respect me too. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

In addition to being a flexible leader who promotes shared decision-making and collaboration, Stewart utilized methods he developed as a coach in his role as interim president. Stewart explained the importance of coaching in his development as a leader,

coaching to me was the core that helped me grow into what I am today...I found out that many of the skills that I liked in coaching benefited me in being an administrator. Listening, talking to people, trying to understand, seeking where they're coming from, seeking to understand their problems. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

Stewart's core beliefs, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and his coaching experience have translated into him being an effective leader. Participants in this study expressed the importance of Stewart's coaching background as essential to his leadership approach. When asked what qualities Stewart possessed making him an effective leader, Iris Young stated, "He's a coach!" She expounded on this comment, "Everything is a team effort. He puts the best possible teams together...He's a great thinker and he uses strategy. He's a really good coach. He's got that ability and I think that's what has made him successful" (Iris Young, Interview). Sharon Davis, an administrator at Urban, described Stewart's leadership style, "I think it's coaching. His style, to me, I would call it coaching, teaming, and fact gathering" (Sharon Davis, Interview, November 18 2009). Kristy Taylor stated, "He's a good coach. He doesn't go out there and try to play everybody's position for them. He just shows them how to do it, gives them advice and pointers and sends them out" (Kristy Taylor, Interview). Daniel Webb called Stewart a "servant leader" who "leads by example." Webb noted,

He's a worker and does not like the spotlight, he hates the spotlight, he deflects the spotlight and credit. He sets up opportunities for other people to get credit for things. That is the kind of guy he is and he works long hours and he's very dedicated to the college...I've been at seven institutions and he's the only president I have ever worked for whose agenda is not Charles Stewart. His agenda is the college. (Daniel Webb, Interview)

Kristy Taylor's experience working with the interim president supports the notion that Stewart practices servant leadership. Taylor remarked, "It's not about him, it is about the organization, and the purpose it serves in the community" (Kristy Taylor, Interview).

Stewart's leadership characteristics reflect his personal qualities and core values. The participants in this research study expressed their belief that an interim president needs to possess strong personal characteristics. Study participants described Stewart's personal characteristics that made him a successful interim leader. These characteristics included,

- Unquestioned integrity,
- Honesty,
- Organizational skills,
- Sense of humor,
- Approachability,
- Humility,
- Calm,
- Work-ethic,
- Good listening skills,
- Intelligence,

- Strong negotiator,
- Institutional knowledge,
- Experienced leader,

According to Jim Kirk, the personal quality that made Stewart most successful as an interim was, his ability to connect with people...he can talk with us trades faculty and he's not the big academic person when he's talking to us. He can go talk to the Governor and interact very well at that level. When he's talking to you, you've got his full attention, he really connects with people. (Jim Kirk, Interview)

Sharon Davis described the personal qualities making Stewart a strong interim president, "I would say his organizational skills, his leadership skills, and involving and communicating with people. Most importantly, his honesty – people respect him because of that. They know that Charles doesn't play games. He's always going to be straight forward" (Sharon Davis, Interview).

The circumstances inherited by Charles Stewart placed an incredible responsibility on him to heal the institution, make strategic decisions to move the college forward, redevelop trust among employees, the board of directors, and the community. This responsibility takes a great deal of time, effort, and is stressful. Stewart noted that his workday began early in the morning and extended late into the night. He worked seven days a week and endured a high level of stress. Stewart discussed his method of dealing with the long days, stress, and challenges related to the presidential transition and his time as interim president,

I learned a long time ago in coaching where there's a lot of stresses that ebb and flow throughout the week that you must remain consistent. You have to eliminate the peaks and valleys so that you're not living too high on the mountain and

you're not dealing with yourself too low in the valley. So, I try to remain very consistent and constant... we're dealing in education, we're dealing in role modeling. We're not working at a medical center where somebody's dying. So, this isn't a life-threatening situation but it could be a life-altering situation. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

Stewart's consistent approach served as a way for him to remain grounded and able to complete the required duties as interim president.

The time spent working with Charles Stewart on this project allowed the me to better understand his core values and the high level of importance he placed on his family life. While his positions in senior level administration have required maximum effort and many hours of work, Stewart discussed the importance of balance in his life. During the interview process, Stewart and I discussed the pitfalls of the presidency and how a number of presidents make poor decisions that jeopardize their reputations and careers. I mentioned the increased number of abrupt changes and derailments among community college presidents, and asked Stewart how he avoided the pitfalls made by other executive leaders. Stewart noted,

I rate what I do as a president as the third most important thing in my life. Not the first most important thing. I've been highly successful at being a good spouse. I've been married 35 years, my wife and I have a family of four, she's a professional, she's a great friend and so my greatest success in my life is that I've been able to go through all the twists and turns that it takes to establish a good relationship. The second thing is that I've been a good Dad. I've been a good Dad for the kids and I had a role...I was Dad (said with a serious voice). I wasn't friend, I wasn't enemy, I was Dad and so in doing those two things well I think it taught me that, you know, establish yourself, set some rules, set

some parameters but don't live outside of what you do in a vivacious, extraordinary way. You're just an average person trying to do an above average job. And, surround yourself with good people as you do in your family and in the end you'll be in good shape.

(Charles Stewart, Interview)

Stewart entered the interim presidency facing enormous challenges internally and externally. During the interim president's fourteen months of service, the institution benefitted from Stewart's vast experience as a senior administrator at Urban Community College, his leadership style, interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, and core values. These qualities equipped the interim president with the skills and abilities needed to be a successful interim leader. The experience of Stewart and his approach to leading the institution as an interim president is described in detail in chapter five of the dissertation.

Rural Community College District

Rural Community College District consists of three separate colleges governed by one 7-member board of directors. In this study, the colleges will be referred to as College A, College B, and College C.

Presidential Departure

In 2009, Rural Community College District experienced a change in presidential leadership. James Smith, president of the college district, met in closed session with the board of directors on six separate occasions prior to going on leave for a six month period of time. Participants in this study explained the process as highly confidential and suggested the campus community did not know the nature of the board discussions during the six sessions. One participant noted,

We would follow what was going on in the newspaper as the paper would come to cover the board meeting and by law the board secretary had to post the notice of the meetings so, therefore, it kept it alive in the paper for about 12 weeks minimum. (Elizabeth Johnson, Interview)

Prior to the president's leave, there was "confusion" and "a sense of distrust" within the college district based on decisions made by the college president. A faculty member explained that one of the events that created confusion and distrust was the development of a cross-country course at one of the colleges. The president "told us all that it didn't cost the college a dime, even though it cost us over \$30,000, but he told our Chief Financial Officer not to tell anybody that" (Kyle Gregg, Interview).

Multiple participants in this study cited issues with the allocation of bond funds as a precipitating factor to Smith's departure. Earlier in James Smith's presidency, Rural College District sought a bond referendum that over time created tension within the college district.

Elizabeth Johnson, a staff member at Rural, explained the details associated with the bond issue,

We had a referendum, a bond effort and when we ran this referendum to seek \$35 million for bond funds to build facilities and to make improvements to some projects on our campuses. When we did the initial strategy of those campuses, it was, 'What does College B want, what does College A want,' and I think we created this wish list and the money was separated accordingly where \$10 million would go to College B - \$10 million would go to College A. That process right there, I feel started some confusion among the campuses on, 'Well, we were to get this much and they were to get this much,' and then after the referendum was over and the projects were starting to be constructed some of the projects ran into some issues on cost overruns, or maybe other circumstances that

required some of the money from one campus to now be given to the other campus and so there was a mixed message sent in the halls and that's just one example. And, now, they (faculty and staff) became sensitive to the original decision that was made on what the bond funds were to be used for and granted they were all projects and the bond funds were being spent wisely, but a mixed message went to both campuses on what is our President doing. 'I thought we were to get this amount of money and now we're giving a portion of it to another campus.' It is decisions like that that created some reservations about whether we like him (president) or whether we don't like him. (Elizabeth Johnson, Interview)

Uncertainty and problems with morale developed prior to Smith's leave. This increased among district staff during the six closed sessions held by the board of directors. One cabinet member said this time period "was hard on morale—it was hard on relationships that people had had for a long time because there was a lot of divide" (Emily Paulsen, Interview). The uncertainty of the president's status stalled decision-making. Emily Paulsen noted, "It was almost like we began to be this lame duck cabinet. We were not doing anything. We were not really moving. It was almost like we were just going through the motions because it was wait and see" (Emily Paulsen, Interview). Dr. Michael Sharp, an academic administrator and current interim president recalled the time leading up to the abrupt presidential departure, "It was the lowest sense of morale that I had ever experienced in my 20 some years in administration anywhere I'd been. It had created that much anxiety, frustration, anger and just an overall sense of or atmosphere of low morale" (Dr. Michael Sharp, Interview). Another academic administrator echoed the sense that there was uncertainty and concern among staff members at Rural Community College District,

There may have been some concerns, you know...Are we headed in the right direction right now with the college and how decisions are being made are critical for people. Do they have input into decisions? I think you could probably get a whole wide range spectrum in terms of 'we have lots of input, we're not getting any input, and we need more input' (David Alexander, Interview).

Bradley Clinton, a faculty member at College A, expressed the notion that a number of district staff viewed James Smith's administration of the college as "very top down," and that a growing number of individuals were saying, "I don't want to be involved because it will be of no value...I'm not going to try to do anything because all I'm going to do is just get cut down" (Bradley Clinton, Interview).

Sophia Erickson, a district staff member, described the institution's culture during the administration of James Smith as "laissez-faire." She commented that Smith, had a tendency to appear—not in a hurry, but there was a point when what you said was—you could just tell he had kind of shut down so he didn't continue to listen and you knew that you just needed to stop talking cause it wasn't going anywhere" (Sophia Erickson, Interview).

Carol Swanson, a district administrator, referred to the district's culture as "very decentralized,"

We are the epitome of a loosely coupled organization where we have four distinct parts, very independently distinct. Not real strong communication among those parts. Some people might say all those parts are at least on the same track and, sometimes, I'm not even sure if we are on the same track...It's been described as sort of a silo effect. (Carol Swanson, Interview)

Michael Sharp offered a description of the culture during James Smith's administration. He reiterated Swanson's claim that Rural Community College District is "loosely coupled." Sharp explained,

Loosely coupled but to a point where we were so loosely coupled that there was disconnect, lack of vertical, horizontal communication. Lack of depth of knowledge on any given issue. People operating in silos. A lot of suspicion— suspicion about decision-making that things were being decided or decisions were being made that they couldn't trust because all of the facts weren't being presented. It was reaching a point where even a good decision could be made and people were questioning it to the nth degree because they felt like they no longer could trust any decision made based on a lack of evidence and data. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

With James Smith on sabbatical, Michael Sharp entered the interim presidency at Rural Community College District facing several challenges stemming from Smith's actions as president. He inherited low morale among faculty and staff members, distrust of top management, and an increased concern among district employees due to lack of transparency and input in the decision-making process.

Michael Sharp

The Rural Community College District Board of Directors interviewed three internal candidates to fill the role of interim president following the announcement of James Smith's sabbatical. The board of directors selected Dr. Michael Sharp to fill the role of interim president. Dr. Sharp, an experienced community college leader, served as an administrator at one of the district's colleges prior to being appointed interim president. He retained his role as top administrator at one of the district's colleges while serving as interim president. Dr. Sharp

stepped into the interim role with a multitude of relevant experience. Earlier in his career Dr. Sharp served as a K-12 principal, a community college career and technical dean, and academic vice president. Dr. Sharp's ability to serve as interim president at Rural Community College District during a time of presidential transition was shaped by his strong belief in the power of education, personal and professional experiences, leadership style, and leadership characteristics.

Dr. Sharp's passion for education started early in his life. During an interview for this study, Sharp explained that his desire to be an educator started when he was in college,

It was at the end of the Vietnam War, a lot of Vietnamese were being transported to the United States and setting up tent camps. The college that I attended happened to be a host for many of those families and in many cases they really weren't families, they were individuals who had lost their families and had come to the United States to start a new life and as part of a campus service project I became involved with mentoring and tutoring some of those individuals and also during that time period I was doing volunteer work out in an elementary school helping young kids with reading disabilities learn how to read. I've had outstanding opportunities educationally. I realized how privileged I was to have those opportunities very early on and how unfortunate it would be to be in school and not know how to read. Or, if you were coming from another country and no clue where to start with the English language and how frustrating that would be and so I had a lot of intrinsic reward working with young people, old people – helping them with their education in this country. That ultimately drove me to feeling I had a real desire and a knack for teaching and working with people to help them further their education and be successful with it. (Michael Sharp,

Interview)

Dr. Sharp's personal and professional experiences shaped his perspective, approach to leadership, and ability to cope with the challenges he faced as an interim president. One of Sharp's personal experiences that had a tremendous impact on his life was a severe car accident that left him critically wounded. He explained this incident and the impact it has had on his life,

I almost died in a car accident in 2004 and through all of that suffered an enormous amount of physical pain and learned 'that too shall pass' and, you know, I overcame that by not pouting or being on that 'self pity pot' that my body was in severe pain and that it was a long road back to recovery. I chose to look at it as I could have died, but I lived so let's make the best of it. And, so I aggressively got after getting myself mentally and physically back on the road to recovery and I did that even before I ever left the hospital and so, you know, again, it's a choice to look at it as, you know, I'm hurting, I'm in pain – certain things aren't ever going to be the same or you can look at it – I'm going to take everything I have that I was left with because I was allowed to live and I'm going to make the best of it and we're going to get after it. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

The interim president at Rural Community College District is deeply committed to education and values modeling quality leadership. As a college district experiences a transition, quality leadership by an interim president is needed to provide a sense of institutional stability. Dr. Sharp described his leadership style using the metaphor of a wheel. In the center of the wheel is the hub of "collaboration" with spokes on the wheel that include, "commitment to creating a shared vision," "commitment to creating partnership," "knowledge building," and "quality and accountability." Sharp explained his leadership metaphor saying,

You've got that hub of collaboration. You're working on creating a shared vision so everybody knows and understands the direction that you want the ship to travel and that they've all had a part in charting the course. You accomplish some of that by building partnerships, internally and externally. Not just amongst faculty and staff but you're building partnerships with all of your area constituents – your K-12's, your business and industry, your Chambers, service organizations – you're paying attention to all of that. The knowledge building factor is huge and the primary point in all of that is with the true theme of collaboration and they all know that you are working with them and that you're encouraging them to work with you. You're opening up all kinds of lines of communication and people then feel free to share the knowledge that they bring in because we have an incredible number of outstanding people with many, many good ideas and so you make sure that they have a platform where they can express all of that and feel free to come with any ideas and it will be valued and respected. And then last of all, just to summarize is that theme of quality and accountability. That in a nutshell would be my leadership philosophy and everything I try to create. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

Interview participants discussed Sharp's leadership style during his interim presidency.

Emily Paulsen called Sharp a "servant leader" saying,

I think servant leadership is his thing and people sense that and I think that he is here working for the greater good. It's not about him at all. It's about where he can take this institution. He's definitely a good communicator; he's very willing to share information. (Emily Paulsen, Interview)

Carol Swanson labeled Dr. Sharp a “transformational leader,” who makes change where it is needed and attacks challenges by “hitting them head on.” Swanson suggested Dr. Sharp is a “student of leadership” and “he is very academic and practical about who he is as a leader” (Carol Swanson, Interview). David Alexander characterized Dr. Sharp’s leadership style as one of “open communication” and a style that is “not afraid to address the real issues. Not the side issues or symptoms but the actual causes” (David Alexander, Interview). Kyle Gregg called Dr. Sharp a “consensus builder” who is not “trying to make every decision in a vacuum” (Kyle Gregg, Interview). Elizabeth Johnson described Sharp as a leader with a “vision” for the college. Johnson noted, “He has a vision as to where he thinks the college district should be on many different levels,” and “he doesn’t dwell on the past” (Elizabeth Johnson, Interview).

Study participants listed characteristics possessed by Dr. Sharp that made him a successful interim leader. These characteristics included,

- Experienced,
- Effective communicator,
- Visible leader,
- Openness,
- Dedicated to transparency,
- Intelligent,
- Organized,
- Vision,
- Integrity,
- Honest,
- Sense of humor (not afraid to laugh at himself),

- Approachable,
- Commitment to professional development

Summary

Charles Stewart and Michael Sharp are two individuals who value people, education, and service. Their personal and professional experiences and strong leadership characteristics assisted them during their service as interim presidents at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District. Faced with a number of institutional challenges stemming from the prior presidencies at their colleges, the interim presidents tapped into all of their previous experiences to lead their colleges. The details associated with their service as interim presidents are found in themes that emerged during the data collection and analysis process completed for this research study. The research themes are reported in chapter five of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

This chapter provides themes that emerged during the data analysis of this case study. These themes supply a framework for developing a greater understanding of two interim presidents' experiences following abrupt presidential departures. The two colleges shared four common themes and each college district had one theme unique to their institution. The shared themes included:

- *Repairing Institutional Morale*
- *Establishing an Effective Relationship with the Board*
- *Making Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward*
- *Dealing with Budget Challenges*

The theme unique to Urban Community College was the interim president's role in *rebuilding external relationships* that was damaged during the previous administration. The data suggested a theme unique to Rural Community College District was the interim president's need to *promote openness, inclusiveness, and transparency* at the institution. The themes from both of the college districts involved in this case study are presented in remainder of this chapter.

Theme 1: Repairing Institutional Morale

Charles Stewart entered the interim presidency with what one participant called a "homegrown mess" (Don Stephens, Interview). The participants in this study described the culture under the previous president as one of anxiety, fear, chaos, distrust, confusion, and apprehension. One participant suggested the previous president instituted a sense of learned helplessness among college staff members. During the data analysis process, a theme that quickly emerged was the interim president's role in *repairing institutional morale*.

The interim president entered the period of presidential transition during a time when the institution “was functioning with very low morale” (Daniel Webb, Interview). Daniel Webb, a student affairs administrator, said, “his first order was to restore trust in administration and to restore equilibrium in the morale of the institution” (Daniel Webb, Interview). According to one faculty member, Charles Stewart used his previous experience at the institution and his many connections at the college to improve morale and heal the institution,

He’s a fixture at the college and 99% of the people that I talk with, that I see across all parts of the college have a great deal of respect for Charles...I would say he came in and has been the healer over that interim period. He took us back to some things that had been eliminated before with the previous president and it was almost kind of a sigh of relief. You just felt the tension kind of lowering because you knew when he makes a decision it’s a thoughtful, carefully studied decision not an impulsive, knee-jerk reaction in anyway.

(James Kirk, Interview)

Kristy Taylor explained the methods Charles Stewart utilized to repair institutional morale, He didn’t do it with fanfare, he didn’t do it with emails, and he didn’t do it by saying that he was going to do it. He just did it. When he interacted with somebody and I saw this on a lot of different levels, he acknowledged their skills, he acknowledged their talents and he let them vent once and then after that we were going to get on with it. We just weren’t going to reside in the past and that worked very well for many people. (Kristy Taylor, Interview)

Iris Young expressed the immediate impact the interim had on institutional morale, “You could hear the weight being lifted off people’s shoulders literally the day he took over. It actually was

that day—you just knew, you could just tell—it was like a whole different place” (Iris Young, Interview, November 18, 2009). Don Stephens described the difference the interim made on institutional morale using a metaphor. Stephens called Urban Community College under the previous president, “a lake in an uproar with a storm.” According to Stephens, the interim president took over and “a calming effect came across the lake...the sun came out and the lake was calm” (Don Stephens, Interview).

Sarah Jacobs commented the institutional morale made “a complete change—a reversal” after the interim president took over. Jacobs explained,

Charles was always well-respected at the college and so when he was appointed interim it was like a whole veil of dark clouds was lifted. I could tell that the mood was completely different, people were talking...For several months people were just, letting it all come out. And, I think it was a way for them to heal, being able to first talk about it and then for them to move on. Now, they are able to openly talk about their feelings, about what happened to them and Charles was there to hear it and they saw a change in the direction of the college as soon as Charles took over. People were just so happy. (Sarah Jacobs, Interview)

During an interview with Charles Stewart, he discussed the approach he chose to take during a time when the institution was experiencing low morale. Stewart shared his strategy for getting the college back on track and important decisions he made to improve institutional morale,

I never made an announcement to the college that I couldn't keep up my end of the deal. I didn't go out there and make some grand announcements to the whole staff and the college and send some big emails and say we're going to do this and

do that and do this and do that. I was very cautious and made virtually no announcements and I just got to work...I would go out on campus and spend time talking to students, going in and watching teachers teach, going to the auto body, auto collision lab and having students talk to me about what they're learning. That helped me. It also made people aware that the president was out there supporting what they were doing. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

Charles Stewart explained the culture he attempted to instill at the institution while serving as interim president. This culture was one that he believed needed to exist at the college to fully meet the mission of the institution and to make strategic decisions to move the college forward following a difficult time. Stewart emphasized the importance of service and the focus that was placed on service as a way to help repair morale and culture, he stated,

I think our staff and myself enhanced the service we brought to the students and the staff. It was a culture of helping each other, a culture of making sure that our staff and students were taken care of. A culture of care and concern for others. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

At Rural Community College District, the interim president entered an institution experiencing a level of uncertainty due to the circumstances surrounding the abrupt departure of the previous president. During an interview for this study, Dr. Sharp expressed that part of his interim leadership philosophy was to change the inconsistent decision-making process that was demonstrated by the previous administration. This was one way of regaining the trust of faculty and staff at the institution and repairing institutional morale. Dr. Sharp explained how he started to improve morale,

From day one what we *stopped* was not telling people the truth. We stopped sugar

coating our issues. We have stopped allowing people to be granted favors based on who they were – not necessarily what they were doing. We have stopped people being allowed to make bad decisions that were based on no credible evidence of needing to make the decision in the first place. We also stopped people from having a mindset that the sky was falling and that we're going to be okay we just have to think and act differently and behave differently and that will ultimately determine where we're going but we're going to think positive and we are going to think and behave ethically and we believe that will determine where we go and we think where we are going is in the right direction.

(Michael Sharp, Interview)

Bradley Clinton, a faculty member, commented that Dr. Sharp's demeanor in college staff meetings promoted an environment where faculty and staff felt comfortable sharing ideas. Clinton suggested Sharp's presence and genuine interest in people helped repair institutional morale,

I think people just feel – they feel more willing to talk, they feel more willing to ask questions. I'll give you a perfect example of this. We were at a faculty meeting and the interim person was a guest at Faculty Senate and he said I'm here for any questions you have, which we had never seen the previous one (president) – never at a Faculty Senate...The interim president was there and the first question was – and in all my years of being here I'd never seen this – the first question was – how are you doing? How are you physically and emotionally doing? It wasn't about the budget, it wasn't what's happening, it was how are you personally doing. Now, that to me says a lot about the culture of an organization.

(Bradley Clinton, Interview)

Emily Paulsen suggested Sharp's "visibility" at all of the district's colleges impressed faculty and staff members and created a positive opinion of the interim leader,

He's been everywhere...People told him in a meeting that we were in a couple weeks ago how much they just appreciated seeing him because they probably had only seen the old President last year at graduation...if they saw him three times a year that was probably it.
(Emily Paulsen, Interview)

The visibility of Dr. Sharp during his interim presidency left a strong impression on Elizabeth Johnson. She felt his visibility and ability to listen to the needs of faculty and staff was a major asset,

He's a very good listener, so by listening to a lot of people he's been able to create a new atmosphere for our college district because of his extremely strong ability to walk the halls and listen. Listen to what the people are saying – what was done wrong, what might have been done right but questions were there. He has been able to learn from people. The greatest task that our interim has done is to not stay in an office with the door closed.

Theme 2: Establishing an Effective Relationship with the Board

An important theme that developed in this study was the interim president's ability to *establish an effective relationship with the board* following the abrupt departure of the previous president. Study participants indicated a significant responsibility of Stewart during the interim presidency was to work with the board of directors in a manner that was productive. This was especially difficult according to study participants due to the controversial nature of the board of directors. Don Stephens discussed board behavior at Urban Community College and Stewart's management of the board during his interim presidency,

The board is a very political board...they have an awful lot of demands and a lot of personal interests that take a lot of time and a lot of conflict that you have to settle between them all the time. It's just something that day-by-day over a period of probably 20 years that Charles has grown into and been able to handle the situation...I don't think anybody else could have come in and handled it. They'd have tried but they would have been gone in 2 months, 3 months, and we'd of probably had several of them. (Don Stephens, Interview)

Daniel Webb talked at length about Stewart's role in effectively working with the board. He acknowledged Stewart faced many challenges as interim president, however, he believed the most difficult was,

to begin the process of managing the Board and a very difficult Board. And, I've been shocked at how well he's done managing. There's been a real change in the way they operate at meetings and elsewhere since he started working with them. Some of it was hidden but I think it was the way he worked with them that it was not divide and conquer. He's direct; he's not going to lie to you. If he doesn't like what a Board member is doing, or saying, he's going to tell them. And, I think in some circumstances he's going to tell them in a very blunt, not very polite way because that's what's appropriate and necessary. He still has some work to do...But, I think it was the directness with which Charles dealt with them and there are clearly no favorites. He works with them equally well. He works with them differently because they are widely different personalities. You know, he's been at the college for so long he understands the college, he understands the city, he understands the political context in which the Board

operates and they have a very bad reputation in the city because of the way they interacted with the former president and some of the decisions they made that were public and public bickering. I think the Board image has improved because of the way Charles works with them. (Daniel Webb, Interview)

Charles Stewart effectively worked with board due in large part to his direct, no nonsense approach. Shortly after becoming interim president, Stewart introduced what he called his “Ground Rules for Success,” at a workshop with the board of directors. The minutes from this board workshop reflect the principles shared at this meeting. The interim president indicated his management of the college and expectations for the board of directors would always include,

- Honest, open, inclusive communication
- Clear expectations
- Shared common goals
- Ongoing review
- Accountability (Urban Community College, Board Workshop Minutes).

The interim president discussed extensively his work with the board during an in-depth interview for this research study,

I provided them a set of ground rules that I live by and the number one is that I will be honest with you. I handled the Board in a no nonsense way. I was very fair, I did not call around when Board members started to talk to me about other Board members I stopped that and I said now listen, they’re on our team. I’m not interested in hearing what you think about so and so. I am interested in can you work with them because you’re a Board member, they’re a Board member. It is the hand you’re dealt and you can be upset with them but I don’t want to hear about you being upset because I need to handle each Board

member as an individual like you are - with respect. So, I set some standards for the Board to live by and when things didn't go right I privately talked to Board members. I'd say things like – that's bullshit, that's not the way to handle things, I'm disappointed. As president, I expect more out of you. You're a Board member; you're the only Board member I've got. I don't have anybody else – I can't replace you. And, a couple Board members I had to tell them I thought they'd be better off not being Board members and if they'd consider resigning because this isn't working. You seem angry, you seem political and we've got to run a college here. This isn't a big medical institution that you need to be on a Board that sets standards in surgery. It's a damn educational institution. We need your leadership, we need your vision, we need you to participate. I need your help, I need your support. If I'm going to make hard decisions, the last thing I need is you to run around saying – well, that was a poor decision because Captain Obvious you're probably right it was a poor decision but I don't need you out saying that. So, I tried to work with them as a Dad, as a coach, as a father as I would with anybody but I also understood they're a Board member. They're my boss and I didn't cross that line. I never crossed that line with them on being a friend. I've been very careful socially with them. What I do, what I say, where I go, what I elect to do with the Board. I always speak positive about the Board. I listen to others if they have a problem with the Board and try to correct whatever I hear or correct what they say. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

While the circumstances leading to the abrupt departure at Rural Community College District are not entirely clear, one participant described board relations as strained following the departure of the previous president. The strained board relations welcomed Dr. Sharp as he assumed the role of interim president. According to Emily Paulsen, the interim president

inherited a situation where there was “turmoil,” “mistrust,” and “divide” among board members at Rural Community College District. Paulsen viewed the immediate actions of the interim president as critical to *establishing an effective relationship with the board*. This was done by developing an environment of openness and trust with the board of directors. She explained,

One of the first things he (Sharp) did was have a huge Board Retreat with the whole Cabinet and just said, you know, these are the things that I think we need to be working on. It was the first time that we all had a good chance to have an open dialogue. There always was this, I don’t know, if it was calculated or if it was not. People just never felt like they had a voice with the Board and our old Chancellor seemed like he kept the Cabinet kind of at bay and then he just worked the Board and there was not really much dialogue between Cabinet and the Board. (Emily Paulsen, Interview)

David Alexander’s comments confirm Dr. Sharp’s intent to allow Cabinet members to provide input to board members. He also suggested that the interim president provided more information to board members regarding general business operations and is more thorough and comprehensive communicating the needs of the institution. Alexander stated,

I think it is much more of a deliberate discussion of items at the Board meeting...some of the stuff is more deliberate in terms of explaining – here’s what 260E, F and G are and continuing education. Here’s how we pay the different adjuncts and he’s also giving more responsibility to the rest of his team to be more active with the Board. Both at Board meetings and at Board retreats. We have another Board retreat on Monday night and most of Cabinet will be there and will be able to answer questions whereas it was maybe more controlled in the

past. So, I think it's much more open and more communicative with the Board now. (David Alexander, Interview)

Without question, the interim president's approach to working with board members was influenced by the previous president's departure. Dr. Sharp entered the interim presidency during a time when rebuilding trust with the board of directors was important. The interim effectively worked with the board by being open, honest, and informative on all institutional matters. At the onset of his interim presidency, Dr. Sharp committed to being,

100% transparent with what the real issues were that we were unraveling with the Board and not being intimidated by some of the power dynamics that we all knew were there. We have actually used the truth of all of our situation and our transparency, our commitment to transparency and being accountable – we have used that to put some of the power dynamics that were negatively affecting our institution – by being truthful and honest with people we've put that in check. It's been incredible. People thought I was absolutely crazy but as I told them – it's the only way I know how to operate. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

Elizabeth Johnson demonstrated her confidence in the interim president's ability to work with the board of directors saying,

I think we have strength in someone who has a vision and has very much common sense to know what steps are needed to get us to that vision and has studied the Board...and knows that the biggest task facing him at the time he took over as interim president was, I need unity among my Board. I want my Board to know that I appreciate them for who they are and I want them to appreciate me for who I am. (Elizabeth Johnson, Interview)

Establishing an effective relationship with the board of directors at Rural Community College District was a priority of the interim president. The relationship between the interim president and board developed relatively quickly due to the on the interim's emphasis on making data informed decisions. The interim made it one of his priorities to provide the board with pertinent information they had not been exposed to during the previous administration.

Theme 3: Making Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward

There is a general perception that interim leaders in education, business, or government should serve as placeholders or caretakers. This means not rocking the boat, maintaining the status quo, making routine decisions, and waiting for the permanent leader to takeover. It was evident when talking to the participants at Urban Community College that the placeholder/caretaker role was not what the institution needed nor was it Charles Stewart's role. Instead, Mr. Stewart focused on *making strategic decisions to move the college forward*.

Kristy Taylor mentioned Stewart encouraged institutional leaders to complete long-term planning and to not let his interim status stop the college from making strategic decisions (Kristy Taylor, Interview). Stewart indicated that he carefully approached decision-making as interim president, and set "priorities and if the priorities were such that it needed to get done now then I just did it as if I was the president" (Charles Stewart, Interview).

One of the immediate needs of the college at the time Stewart began his tenure was the replacement of two vice presidents. These positions were vacated during the previous president's administration. While many interim presidents would choose not to fill vacant positions, Stewart made the decision to fill the positions due to the importance of the positions to the effective operation of the college. The hiring of a student affairs vice president and academic vice president also showed staff members the college was moving forward during the interim period

and that was viewed positively. Stewart commented, “I didn’t expect that we would gain a lot of kudos by hiring people but it showed hope and faith for our staff that good people wanted to work here” (Charles Stewart, Interview).

Stewart moved the college forward in many ways that are incorporated in themes already discussed in this study. Stewart’s work to repair institutional morale and culture, his efforts to repair external relationships that had been damaged by the previous president all factor into the theme of moving the college forward. Stewart’s role in dealing with the state funding formula, the study’s next theme, indicates his intention to serve in a capacity as an interim that emphasized forward progress for the institution.

The theme of *making strategic decisions to move the college forward* existed at Urban Community College and following thorough data analysis it was determined this theme was prevalent at Rural Community College District. Multiple participants discussed Dr. Sharp’s interest in promoting forward progress and institutional change during his interim presidency,

I give him a lot of credit for what he’s trying to accomplish because he is making change. A person could have been put into this position and say we’re not going to do anything until some final decisions are made and let’s just roll forward – business as usual. And, he’s chosen to say – we’re changing from day one – here’s the things I want to do, here’s the places I want to go. Let’s educate people, let’s get people informed, let’s act on their input (Sophia Erickson, Interview).

Carol Swanson offered insight into the interim president’s passion for the college and his desire to make strategic decisions to move the college forward. She suggested that Dr. Sharp is,

like a rocket or let me think of other symbolic ways to describe it – no holds barred – with energy and enthusiasm for making substantial impact no matter how

long or short his tenure may be. Yeah, he's not the kind to sit back and let everything go on status quo and that may be the way other interims work, that may be the way it happens elsewhere but this one is full steam ahead – get 'er done, let's see what we can do in this short period of time. (Carol Swanson, Interview)

Dr. Sharp articulated his intent to move the college forward by implementing a culture of trust, quality, and accountability. These components are part of a “transformation” that Sharp initiated during his interim presidency. The interim president stated,

We are in the initial stage of transformation. We are using a lot of data, the AQIP report, financial data...so that people understand that we have a sense of urgency here. We can't wait. We have to move along. Right now, we are just in that initial phase of creating a sense of urgency, building trust, role modeling quality, accountability, and transparency. And, we are doing that literally throughout the entire organization including and maybe most importantly with the board of directors. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

Theme 4: Dealing with Budget Challenges

Charles Stewart entered the interim presidency during a state funding formula dispute that started during the previous presidency. A theme that developed during the review of board meeting minutes was the interim president's role in *dealing with budget challenges* and more specifically working with the controversial state funding formula. At Stewart's first board meeting as interim president, a resolution was drafted objecting to the current state funding formula. The resolution stated, “the current and proposed state community college funding formula erodes local control of education and inappropriately subsidizes other community college areas” (Urban Community College, Board Meeting Minutes).

At the center of the dispute was the Urban Community College area taxpayer subsidization of the other state community colleges. The resolution suggested the Urban Community College service area “provides 49% of the individual income tax and 47% of the sales tax receipts, but will receive 24.3% of the community college state aid” (Urban Community College, Board Meeting Minutes). The board approved the resolution and recommended several changes to the state funding formula. The Urban Community College board made the following recommendations for revision to the funding formula,

1. Allocate state aid to the community colleges based on students served instead of other non-educational factors.
2. Return property tax control to the locally elected community college board of governors, thereby giving area constituents more local control of service and funding decisions.
3. Encourage effective and efficient operations by making each community college more accountable to the area served.
4. Establish a simplified formula that is more easily explained and justified to constituents.
5. Reduce (State) taxpayer support of students who will never reside or work in (State).
6. Update REUs and clarify FTEs if they are to be used in the formula.
7. Reorganize voting membership on the state association, based on a percentage of dues paid to the association.

In addition to developing a resolution objecting to the current funding formula, the college utilized the services of a public relations firm to help the college carefully make its case for the need for a change in the funding formula. The board of directors approved the use of the

public relations firm that was recommended by the interim president and showed their full support of the interim president and his methods to deal with the funding formula. Review of minutes from board meetings and audio taped board meetings showed the funding formula dispute remained a pressing issue during the entire interim presidency of Charles Stewart.

Sharon Davis recalled one of the greatest challenges faced by Stewart “was our funding formula issue with the State” (Sharon Davis, Interview). Davis credited the interim president for the way he dealt with this issue and suggested Stewart’s “financial and budget knowledge,” assisted in his success as an interim president and in dealing with issues related to budget and the state funding formula. The dispute over state aid led to Urban Community College leaving the community college association in their state and pursuing legal action against the other state community colleges. The interim president along with the board of directors guided the institution through this precarious time. At the end of the interim president’s tenure, the funding formula dispute had not been settled; however, a temporary settlement was reached during March 2010.

Charles Stewart faced a tremendous challenge after being appointed interim president. The institution had experienced an abrupt departure of a president who had created “fear,” “anxiety,” and “confusion.” Stewart made an immediate impact on the institution’s morale, mended external relationships with businesses and donors, and skillfully established an effective relationship with the board of directors. Stewart dealt with budget challenges and represented the interests of Urban Community College in a statewide funding formula dispute. His success is largely attributed to his extensive experience as an administrator, the value he places on people, and his servant leadership approach.

Rural Community College District, like all community colleges, operates with the assistance of state funding. Due to reduced state revenues and an economic recession that started in 2008, the district faced the reality of diminished state funding. Concerns with how to best deal with the state budget impacted the interim president at Rural Community College District. Dr. Sharp discussed the challenges presented by the deteriorating budget,

In the big picture, obviously in this time of economic downturn dealing with the budget reductions and at the same time trying to keep a handle on cost and not passing that on to our consumers – being our students – so that we remain consistent with the true mission of the community college of accessibility and affordability. We’re wrestling with that. It’s requiring us to really think creatively with a lot of ingenuity. We hope to work through all of these things and still offer high quality service, high quality programming, and that we become lean enough to operate within our budget and not pass the cost onto the student. There’s a delicate balance there. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

The interim approached the budget challenges with the methodology of promoting transparency and open communication. Emily Paulsen asserted,

I felt like he really hit the budget challenge head on. He worked with the college chief financial officer (CFO) and they put together a PowerPoint presentation that they initially shared with the Board. Then, he took that same presentation and had meetings at College A, College B, College C, continuing education, and the district office folks. It really was an eye opener. It tied in with his message of “transparency” and having everyone being armed with the facts. There has been a lot of finger pointing about how the bond issue money was spent and that perhaps one unit (College B) got more than their fair share.

This gave Dr. Sharp and the CFO the ability to say that all projects went over and at the same level. That was also the start of what the tuition increase should be for the upcoming year...all in all, he's done a good job (Emily Paulsen, Electronic Communication).

Dr. Sharp dealt with budget challenges through thorough review all of the institution's expenses and revenues. He conducted informational meetings with faculty and staff at all of the district's colleges. At these meetings, the interim shared the district's budget challenges, and he solicited ideas on how to best deal with the budget challenges from the faculty and staff attending the meetings.

Urban Community College Theme: Rebuilding External Relationships

In addition to the four shared themes that emerged from the data, each institution had an individual theme that was unique to their college. At Urban Community College, the interim president faced the challenge of *rebuilding external relationships* that were damaged by the previous president. Stewart commented on the harm that had been done, "I underestimated just how hurt the college was both morale wise and person wise and just how much our reputation was hurt" (Charles Stewart, Interview). The previous president strained relations within the college, community, and among donors. According to participants in this study, some businesses and donors refused to partner with Urban with the previous president as its leader. Stewart started the process of rebuilding external relationships by communicating with business leaders, donors, and the community,

I had to go out listen and be a good listener and not be defensive. I had to be careful not to – whether somebody said well, you know, I called Urban and nobody ever got back to me and I don't think you care about me and I pay your taxes – careful not to try to fix that

right away. I came up with some questions that I would catch myself asking on a regular basis...Is there anything I can do or help do to overcome that because that doesn't sound like a good situation? That sounds like you weren't heard or the college didn't help you and I'd like to correct that and maybe it's just so bad I can't but I really would like to try...I would like to know, would you give us another chance? Would you work with us? Are there things that we could do now that would make a difference for you because we're trying to get back to being a premier educational institution in our city, for our city and the only way we'll do that is to be able to provide you service in a way that is working for you. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

As interim president Charles Stewart not only listened to external partners in need of attention; he followed up conversations by assigning college personnel to continue to rebuild trust,

I would find how we could help or what it is they needed. If they needed somebody, then I had to choose who I thought that somebody would be institutionally, and I had to tell them what we were up against and to say this is like the last resort. You can't fail at this, the pressure is on and so I had to make sure I had people that understood and would make sure that they could communicate, carry the ball and I found myself using some people over and over again because they had a better handle on doing that...I think anything we do it's important to be able to match our staff with the task at hand. The best coaches that have ever been around are the ones that are able to take players and put them in the right position at the right time for them to perform at the level they perform at. That's an important part of being in charge of something. (Charles Stewart, Interview)

Sharon Davis recalled the external work Stewart completed as interim president,

He would go to Chambers and business people. I would say that is one of his strengths because he gives people the sense that he can be trusted. Community people trust him too. You know how you get the flavor of someone's personality? Well, by knowing Charles you can feel comfortable that he understood the college; he can relate to the business world, he can hear, he can listen to what other people are saying. He brought ideas back to the college and would try to see where things fit in, how we can help the community. He did so in a team way. (Sharon Davis, Interview)

Kristy Taylor, an administrator at Urban, witnessed the benefit of the interim president's ability to rebuild external relationships. She explained how business partners and donors recognized Stewart's intention to work with them and to listen to their interests, something the previous president had not done. Taylor commented,

As soon as Charles came in as the interim, knowing him already, they were willing to take that risk and talk with us again and it was just a matter of months before we could turn those hurt feelings and frustrations into really long-lasting partnerships and significant gifts to the college. (Kristie Taylor, Interview)

Rural Community College Theme: Promoting Openness, Inclusiveness, and Transparency

A prevalent theme that developed during data analysis of the Rural Community College District study was Dr. Sharp's emphasis on *promoting openness, inclusiveness, and transparency*, a theme welcomed by participants in this study. The theme of openness, inclusiveness, and transparency was demonstrated in Sharp's daily interaction with faculty and

staff and in how he approached making decisions. The interim president commented that he has delivered,

a very consistent, true commitment to transparency and accountability and creating a culture of that – of quality and accountability. People are dying for – or are very thirsty for input into decision-making. They're very thirsty for information and having access to data and knowing that the administration is making decisions based on the good of the whole instead of personal interest. (Michael Sharp, Interview)

Kyle Gregg explained a recent interaction with the interim that sheds light on the interim's belief in providing openness and transparency at the institution,

He is not being a placeholder interim president. He is trying to figure out the messy budgets and tell us who's making money and who's losing money. He's taking information to the Board that's never been taken to the Board before – kind of opening their eyes...The budget was set up so that we didn't know if College A made money or lost money. We didn't know if continuing education made money or lost money. If College B made money or lost money. The interim changed that. (Kyle Gregg, Interview)

Carol Swanson supported the theme that the interim president is promoting openness and transparency in the district's financial dealings. Swanson asserted,

Transparency of our financial situation is a big one that he's trying to help address. It was pretty murky even at the upper leadership level and so there's an attempt to try to expose so that we can see with these tough budget times what we really need to do. (Carol Swanson, Interview)

Emily Paulsen noted the interim president not only talked about openness, inclusiveness, and transparency, he actively pursued that concept in his daily activities,

He has continually talked about transparency and that's a great term to use, and I do think he's modeling that. We are going to get at the heart of things and we are going to talk about what it is that makes this place not so good and what it is that makes this place really good. (Emily Paulsen, Interview)

The interim presidents at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District inherited several shared challenges as they entered the interim presidencies at their respective institutions. The final chapter of this research study provides discussion of the themes that developed in this study, the leadership the interim presidents provided, recommendations for practice and future research as well as my closing reflections on this study and the interim presidency.

CHAPTER 6. **CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS**

Conclusion

Literature related to the interim presidency at two-year and four-year institutions is limited. Despite the paucity of interim literature, the phenomenon is becoming increasingly important due to recent increases in abrupt presidential departure, derailment, and retirement among presidents. As noted in the literature, a poorly administered interim presidency has the potential to harm an institution (Dodds, 1962; Everley 1994; Bornstein, 2003). While successful interim presidencies aid in the transition from one president to the next while keeping key issues moving forward (Langevin & Koenig, 2004).

The purpose of this case study was to understand the experiences of two community college interim presidents, their characteristics, and how they led institutions following an abrupt presidential departure. Following a comprehensive examination of the literature, it appears this is the first study addressing interim leadership following an abrupt presidential departure at two-year institutions. This research study was framed by two fundamental questions,

1. How do two interim community college presidents lead community colleges during a presidential transition?
2. How is an interim community college president's leadership perceived by faculty and staff during a period of presidential transition?

The first research question was answered by the themes that emerged during this study. The findings of this case study suggested the interim presidents approached the presidency thoughtfully and strategically offering leadership during a critical time in each institution's history. The themes that developed during data analysis point to some commonalities in the

interim presidents' leadership of the institutions and their overall experiences. There were, however, slight differences in their experiences based on the circumstances the presidents inherited. The themes shared at Urban Community College and Rural Community College included,

- *Repairing Institutional Morale*
- *Establishing an Effective Relationship with the Board*
- *Making Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward*
- *Dealing with Budget Challenges*

While the colleges shared several common themes, each college had its own unique set of circumstances that allowed separate themes to emerge. At Urban Community College, a prevalent theme was the interim president's role in *rebuilding external relationships*. A distinct theme at Rural Community College District was the interim president's need to *promote openness, inclusiveness, and transparency* at the institution. Additionally, participants suggested the interim leaders in this study were successful due to their strong personal and professional characteristics and servant leadership. A complete review and analysis of themes answering the first research question follows:

Shared Theme 1: Repairing Institutional Morale

The interim presidents at both institutions in this case study entered the presidential transition with a great challenge, *repairing institutional morale*. The participants in this study suggested the interims successfully initiated the process of repairing institutional morale.

At Urban Community College, Charles Stewart acted as a "healer" following several years of "fear," "anxiety," "confusion," and "learned helplessness," initiated by the previous president. Stewart started the healing process and improvement of morale by listening to staff

members, helping them to process their particular frustrations with the previous president, and telling them it was time to move forward. Stewart was assisted in the process of repairing morale because of his long tenure as a senior administrator at Urban. The faculty and staff had a high degree of respect for him and trust in his ability to lead the institution. This trust in Stewart is evident in a comment made by one participant, “I don’t think anybody else could have pulled this off” (Don Stephens, Interview). Participants at Urban Community College also discussed the importance of Stewart’s focus on “service” during his interim presidency. The data suggested Stewart focused on service to the college, community, alumni, and donors. The interim and study participants repeatedly commented, “This was not about Charles. This was about the college.”

The morale at Rural Community College District did not appear to be as damaged as it was Urban Community College, however, a number of study participants suggested that there was internal discontent with the previous president leading up to the sabbatical of the district’s president. Dr. Sharp approached repairing institutional morale by having a high level of visibility at all three of the district’s colleges, offering openness and inclusiveness in decision-making, and promoting transparency of data used to make decisions.

Multiple participants at Rural Community College District discussed the importance of the interim president’s visibility as a key to improving morale. Dr. Sharp made a point to routinely visit all of the colleges to meet with faculty and staff to discuss strategic planning, the budget, and matters concerning the district’s future. One participant noted this followed a president who visited one of the colleges only three times per year and was not as visible. Participants also suggested the interim president improved morale by listening to their ideas, asking them for input into the decision-making process, and creating an environment with an emphasis on transparency and the use of good data.

Shared Theme 2: Establishing an Effective Relationship with the Board

Given the uncertainty that is inherent during a time of presidential transition, *establishing an effective relationship with the board* is essential to the success of any interim president. Data from this case study suggested this was an important theme at both college districts. The interim presidents brought stability and accountability to the institution and did this by working closely with the governing boards.

At Urban Community College, participants indicated relations between the previous president and the board had been strained. The relationship between the previous president and the board often resulted in conflict and there was fighting among board members. Stewart entered the interim presidency with a direct knowledge of the board and raised expectations for appropriate conduct between the administration and the board by creating more of a team environment.

Dr. Sharp *created an effective relationship with the board* by confronting the immediate need for the board of directors to have accurate and reliable information to use in making decisions. The interim worked directly with board members to find out what they knew about the institution, what they needed to know, and provided the board with information that assisted them in guiding the institution. The interim president emphasized the theme of openness and transparency in his dealings with the board of directors. This approach provided the interim president with credibility with the board of directors and created a sense of trust in his leadership.

These interim presidents realized the importance of working closely with the board of directors during the period of presidential transition. Given the uncertainty that often

accompanies a presidential change and more specifically, when the president departs abruptly, it is critical for an interim president to create an effective relationship with the board.

Shared Theme 3: Making Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward

The data suggested that the two interim presidents in this study placed a high degree of importance on *making strategic decisions to move the college forward* following the abrupt departure of their predecessors. The notion that interim presidents are merely “placeholders” or “caretakers” did not exist at these institutions. Charles Stewart and Michael Sharp led their respective colleges with intensity. Stewart hired executive leaders in student affairs and academic affairs while Sharp initiated the development of a new strategic plan. These are only two examples of how the interim presidents chose to make strategic decisions to move the college forward during the presidential transition process. Additionally, the interim leaders committed to putting the institution ahead of themselves and challenged the faculty, staff, board of directors, and communities to forge ahead.

Shared Theme 4: Dealing with Budget Challenges

In an era of reduced state funding, almost all community colleges and four-year public universities are dealing with budget challenges. With that said, it should come with little surprise that a theme emerging from the data suggested that the interim presidents were required to deal with budget challenges at their respective colleges.

In the case of Urban Community College, the budget challenge stemmed from a funding formula dispute that cost the institution millions of dollars. During a time of incredible enrollment growth, the existing funding formula caused Urban Community College to receive less money annually as their enrollment increased. The college governing board discontinued payments to the state’s community college association, which led to Urban being removed from

the state community college association. This situation required the interim president to not only carefully monitor the budget; it also required the college board of directors and interim president to be involved in discussions at the state level regarding the fundamental fairness of the existing funding formula. At the conclusion of the interim president's service, this matter had not been resolved, however, a short-term agreement was reached during March 2010.

At Rural Community College, the interim president dealt with budget challenges that involved questions related to cost overruns on bond projects as well as revenue generation and expenses at each of the district's colleges. In an effort to inform faculty and staff members of the overall budget picture, the interim president and chief financial officer created a detailed budget of revenue and cost for each of the district's colleges. This information was shared with the board of directors and faculty and staff at each of the district's colleges and with the continuing education unit. Faculty and staff at each college were asked to provide input into how the college could best deal with the budget challenges being faced. Study participants discussed the importance of the interim's method of dealing with budget problems. One participant stated the process was eye-opening and gave faculty and staff a clearer understanding of the college's challenges.

Along with the four themes shared by the two institutions in this case study, there was a theme unique to Urban Community College, *rebuilding external relationships*, and a theme unique to Rural Community College District, *promoting institutional inclusiveness, openness, and transparency*.

Rebuilding External Relationships

At Urban Community College the theme of *rebuilding external relationships* emerged from the data. Study participants at Urban Community College described the significant work completed by the interim president to rebuild external relationships that were damaged during the previous administration. The interim president listened to the needs of business and industry, the community, and donors in an effort to redevelop trust in the college and its mission. The interim's years of service at the institution, the community's familiarity with him and his leadership, and his reliance on talented college faculty and staff members to work with external partners enabled the interim to relatively quickly rebuild relationships that had been damaged.

The theme of rebuilding external relationships did not emerge from the data at Rural Community College District. During a post-data collection phone conversation with a study participant, I asked the participant if the interim president had needed to rebuild external relationships in the district's service area. The study participant suggested that the interim's first priority and greatest need was to handle internal issues such as morale and budget challenges. This individual explained that the interim president started working with external partners once internal matters improved.

Promoting Institutional Openness, Inclusiveness, and Transparency

A prominent theme at Rural Community College District was the interim president's emphasis on *promoting institutional openness, inclusiveness, and transparency*. Participants in this study indicated this approach was welcomed by faculty and staff following a president who was reluctant to share information related to the budget or bond referendum with faculty, staff, administrative cabinet members, or the board of directors. The interim decided openness, inclusiveness, and transparency addressed one of the institution's greatest needs during the presidential transition.

The leadership style of the two interim presidents and their personal and professional characteristics help answer the second research question,

- How is an interim community college president's leadership perceived by faculty and staff during a period of presidential transition?

Interim presidents serve in a challenging capacity whether they follow a planned or abrupt presidential departure. The term *interim* inherently denotes the lack of permanency of the position, and it is often insinuated that an interim should serve only in a caretaker role. The interim leaders in this study followed an abrupt departure of the previous president, and following careful data analysis, it has been concluded that neither interim was perceived by the faculty and staff at their respective institutions to have served in the "caretaker" capacity. Instead, the interim presidents led with passion and a servant leadership mentality.

These interim presidents were successful due to personal and professional characteristics that enabled them to be effective in the interim role. The participants and interim presidents in this study viewed the following characteristics as critical to the interim's effectiveness,

- Experience as senior administrators,
- Effective communication skills,
- Visible leadership,
- Openness,
- Intelligence,
- Organization,
- Vision,
- Honesty and integrity,
- Strong work-ethic,

In addition to these personal and professional characteristics, the participants at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District perceived the interim presidents' leadership as valuing service to the institution over self-aggrandizement. Multiple participants at both institutions named the interim presidents "servant-leaders" due to the methods they utilized during the presidential transition. The faculty and staff perceived the interim presidents at these institutions to have engaged in the servant leadership model.

Servant Leadership Model

Interim presidents often serve during a critical time in an institution's history and are faced with challenges that need immediate attention. This is documented in the literature and the research conducted at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District. Participants in this study suggested the interim presidents approached leadership with a servant mentality. They placed the institution before themselves, and dedicated their time to improving their institutions following an abrupt presidential departure. At both colleges, the interims listened to the needs of faculty, staff, community, and trustees. They acted in a way that helped heal their institutions and moved the college forward. Findings of this study indicate these two interim presidents modeled servant-leadership.

The servant-leadership model conceptualized by Robert Greenleaf in the late 1960s suggests a servant-leader emphasizes the importance of service first. Greenleaf (2002) defined the servant leadership model asserting,

The servant-leader *is* servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions (p. 27).

Additionally, Greenleaf explained the servant leader's responsibility is "to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27). The concept of servant leadership received the attention of Spears (1998) who identified ten characteristics of servant-leaders. These included,

1. Listening
2. Empathy
3. Healing
4. Awareness
5. Persuasion
6. Conceptualization
7. Foresight
8. Stewardship
9. Commitment to the growth of people
10. Building community (p. 5-8)

Spears called the servant leadership model "intuitive" and "sensible" (p. 2). The author supplied insight into the purpose of servant leadership stating,

Servant-leadership advocates a group-oriented approach to analysis and decision making as a means of strengthening institutions and society. It also emphasizes the power of persuasion and seeking consensus over the old 'top-down' form of leadership. Some people have likened this to turning the hierarchical pyramid upside down. Servant-leadership holds that the primary purpose of a business should be to create a positive impact on its employees and community, rather than using profit as the sole motive (Spears, 1998, p. 9).

Recommendations for Practice

This dissertation study, conducted at two community colleges experiencing interim presidencies following abrupt presidential departures, produced several common themes that shed light on the experience of an interim president. Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made to future interim presidents and college trustees involved in an abrupt presidential departure.

Recommendations to Future Interim Presidents

Based on the findings of this study, future interim presidents who follow an abrupt presidential departure should consider these recommendations when approaching the interim period:

- *Address the Institution's Perceived Greatest Needs*—Interim presidents should complete an environmental scan with internal and external stakeholders after being appointed to the position. This will assist the interim president in determining the institution's perceived greatest needs and addressing them accordingly.
- *Establish an Effective Relationship with the Board of Directors*—The interim presidents in this study were effective in their capacity because they worked collaboratively with the board of directors at their respective institutions. During a challenging time for the institution, the board and interim president need to unite and work together for the betterment of the college.
- *Make Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward*—Following an abrupt presidential departure, an interim president should consider making strategic decisions to move the college forward if the board of directors is supportive. This might be one of the best ways for an institution to heal.

- *Repair External Relationships*—Interim presidents who follow an abrupt presidential departure should be ready to work with external partners and be prepared to repair relationships with external stakeholders. As seen in the Urban Community College study, the previous president had strained relationships with a number of external partners and the interim president and designated college staff members worked extensively with external partners to repair damaged done by the previous president.
- *Promote Openness, Inclusiveness, and Transparency*—Interim presidents should openly communicate with faculty and staff during their interim service, include key stakeholders in the decision-making process, and offer transparency in their actions. The interim president at Rural Community College District intentionally promoted openness, inclusiveness, and transparency because the previous president did not exhibit these characteristics in his leadership at the institution.
- *Practice Servant Leadership*—The interim presidents in this study exhibited their value of people and service. These leaders offered a servant leadership model that recognized the importance of repairing morale among staff and rebuilding community relationships. They fostered a sense of trust among college staff, the community, and the board of directors through their immediate attention to the needs of the institution. These interim presidents led with a passion for people and service.
- *Practice AACC Leadership Competencies*—The 2005 AACC community college leadership competencies suggest effective leaders practice organizational strategy, resource management, strong communication, collaboration among internal and external constituents, community college advocacy, and professionalism. The interim presidents in this study exhibited the competencies suggested by the American Association of

Community Colleges. It is recommended that future interim presidents understand the AACC's community college leadership competencies and practice those competencies to the best of their ability.

Recommendations for College Trustees

When college trustees are faced with the challenge of selecting an interim president following an abrupt presidential departure, they should consider these recommendations:

- *Utilize Internal Candidates When Possible*—A significant advantage the interim presidents in this study had was their prior experience working at the institutions where they served as interim president. Both individuals were senior administrators at their respective institutions prior to serving as an interim. While there are colleges that utilize an external candidate to serve as an interim president, these two institutions chose to name internal interim presidents. In both cases, it appears that the governing boards made wise decisions as they selected the interims to fill the permanent role as president. External candidates might be in the best interest of some institutions; however, following an abrupt departure or derailment institutions may be best served by utilizing an internal candidate who knows the internal and external challenges facing the institution and can respond quickly to the needs of the institution.
- *Select an Interim with a Multitude of Relevant Experience*—Following an abrupt presidential departure or derailment, an institution is in need of someone who has the capacity to make strategic decisions to move the institution forward if the board so desires. The findings from this case study suggest interim leaders with a multitude of relevant experience are able to seamlessly move the college in the right direction. The leaders studied in this research had experience in a number of administrative positions

including academic, student services, and K-12 leadership. With a multitude of experience, interim leaders have the capacity to deal with the internal and external challenges associated with the circumstance of an abrupt presidential departure.

- *Select an Interim who Exhibits the AACC's Leadership Competencies*—Interim leaders must practice organizational strategy, resource management, strong communication, collaboration among internal and external constituents, community college advocacy, and professionalism. These competencies outlined by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2005 are essential characteristics of a regular college president and an effective interim president. Community college trustees should select an interim president who has a history of exhibiting these qualities and college trustees should expect the interim to practice these characteristics during interim service.
- *Establish an Effective Relationship with the Interim*—Board members play a critical role in directing the college. During a presidential transition, working collaboratively with an interim president will help the institution complete a successful transition. Board members should have an awareness of the institution's needs during the transition and support the interim president's efforts to address those needs.
- *Allow the Interim to Make Strategic Decisions to Move the College Forward*—Trustees who have a competent interim president should allow that person to make strategic decisions to move the college forward. Community Colleges are expected to be responsive to the needs of students, business and industry, and the community they serve. The interim president and board of directors should work collaboratively to make strategic decisions to move the college forward during a challenging time for the institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study attempted to add to the lack of literature regarding interim presidential leadership at community colleges. The qualitative case study methodology utilized in this study offered a detailed examination of the experience of two interim presidents serving institutions that had experienced an abrupt presidential departure. While this study is a start to developing a larger body of research on interim leadership at community colleges, there is further research that should be conducted. The recommendations for future research related to the interim presidency include:

1. A research study from the quantitative paradigm should be conducted to increase the breadth of knowledge related to the experiences of interim presidents.
2. An in-depth case study focusing on the experiences of interim presidents who follow a *planned* departure of a community college president would add to the existing literature and offer a comparison to the experience of an interim who follows an *abrupt* departure.
3. A study offering insight into the experience of an external interim president would add value to the literature. How does the external interim president lead a community college? Does this differ from the internal interim president?
4. A study focused on gaining the perspective of board members at an institution with an interim president following an abrupt departure or planned departure.
5. A study featuring interim presidents with diversity in age, ethnicity, and gender.

Reflections

This study developed out of an interest in how interim presidents lead institutions following an abrupt presidential departure or derailment. While my graduate committee

approved the study July 2009, it truly started at the University of Tennessee on a warm, Saturday morning during June 2005. Only two days before had Dr. Grady Bogue convinced me, on short notice, to start the university's higher education leadership doctoral program. On that June morning, long-time University President, Dr. Joseph Johnson, welcomed the new doctoral cohort to campus and discussed his most recent leadership experience, service as an interim president following an abrupt presidential departure. Dr. Johnson's lecture on leadership and his experience as an interim president sparked an interest that stayed with me. The investigation into this interesting topic of study continued with a one-on-one meeting with Dr. Johnson and hours of research of the literature. Many of those hours searching for literature were spent in frustration due to the rather limited literature available on the topic. While there was a paucity of literature on interim leadership in higher education, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* featured stories of presidents from Oregon to Alabama, Arizona to Iowa, and beyond who had abruptly departed or derailed. In many ways, "the perfect storm" existed, a qualitative researcher with a strong interest in an important topic in higher education, a limited body of literature, and an increasing number of cases available for study.

Research for this case study took place during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 at two distinctly different community colleges, one a large urban community college with multiple campuses and one a rural community college district with multiple colleges and an extensive continuing education unit. While the participating community colleges were structured differently and had contrasting demographics, they shared a common experience, having an interim president serving the institution following an abrupt presidential departure.

The data collection process at Urban Community College occurred at the conclusion of Charles Stewart's 14-month interim presidency. Stewart was named permanent president at the

institution despite not expressing an initial interest in the position. Data collection for the study at Rural Community College District occurred during months 3 and 4 of Dr. Michael Sharp's interim leadership. One week prior to the completion of this study, the Rural Community College District Board of Directors named Dr. Sharp as the college district's permanent president. Unlike Charles Stewart who had no interest in serving as president, Dr. Sharp was interested in being a candidate for the position depending on how the interim position evolved.

Following in-depth study of the interim presidency at two institutions of different size and location, I firmly believe that the interim presidency does matter whether it follows a planned or an abrupt departure. It is especially important when the interim president follows an abrupt presidential departure that has created hardship or uncertainty for an institution. The interim presidents in this case study offered critical leadership to faculty, staff, community members, and the board of directors during a challenging time. They did this through *repairing institutional morale, establishing an effective relationship with the board, moving the college forward, and dealing with budget challenges*. The interim presidents assessed the greatest need at their respective colleges. At one college, the interim president worked on *rebuilding external relationships* that were damaged by the previous president. At the other college, the interim president viewed one of the greatest needs as developing internal *openness, inclusiveness, and transparency*. The interim presidents offered quality leadership during a vital time in their institution's history. They did this by relying on their strong personal and professional skills that developed over years of service in a multitude of settings.

Following research conducted for this study and careful consideration of the interim president's role in higher education administration, I view interim leadership as critical to an institution's success during a presidential transition. I recommend that upper administrators

consider service as an interim president if given the opportunity. Effective interim leaders add value to an institution and have the ability to positively impact a community college and its stakeholders. The leaders in this study exemplified interim leadership at their respective community colleges.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Presidential transition following derailment: The experience of the interim presidents at Urban Community College and Rural Community College District.

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?

This study is being conducted by Matthew D. Thompson, Iowa State University, Community College Leadership doctoral program.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are involved in a community college presidential transition period. The interim president at your community college suggested you would be someone with an important perspective of the experience of the interim president who is serving the institution during a presidential transition. You should not participate if are not willing to meet with the researcher on three occasions for one-on-one in-depth interviews.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of a community college interim president and how the interim leads an institution during a presidential transition.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in three one-on-one, in-depth interviews. These interviews will last between one half hour and one hour each. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of each interview to verify the accuracy of your statements.

After participants review and complete the informed consent form, the researcher will meet with each participant for a series of three semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interviews will take place over a period of two months. Each interview will last between one-half hour and one-hour. The first interview will be completed using questions to gain insight into the participant's professional background and interests. This interview will help the researcher become familiar with the participant's background and establish rapport with the participant. The second interview will include questions directly related to the participant's experience working with the interim president and their perception of the institution during the presidential transition. The

final interview will allow the participant to provide any additional insight they feel was not discussed in previous interviews.

What are the possible risks and benefits of my participation?

Risks –There are no known risks associated with this research study, however, participants will be asked questions about their institution and the interim president. Sensitive information may be shared with the researcher during these interviews. The anonymity of the participant will be protected at the greatest extent possible.

Benefits – If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will provide other community colleges going through a presidential transition an understanding of your institutions experience.

How will the information I provide be used?

The information you provide will be used for the following purposes: The information participants share will be analyzed and reported in the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Each participant will be given a pseudonym. This material could be published if the researcher chooses to pursue that opportunity. The anonymity of the participant will be protected at the greatest extent possible.

What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken participants will be assigned a unique code and letter that will be used on forms instead of their name. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. This study will be kept confidential on a password protected computer file. Any material that is printed will be stored in locked file cabinet. The data will destroyed following the completion of the doctoral dissertation.

Will I incur any costs from participating or will I be compensated?

You will not have any costs from participating in this study.

What are my rights as a human research participant?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer in the semi-structured, in-depth interviews that will be completed in this study.

Your choice of whether or not to participate will have no impact on your employment at your institution.

Whom can I call if I have questions or problems?

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Matt Thompson, lead investigator, (515) 520-7012 or thompson@swcciowa.edu or Dr. Larry Ebbers, Iowa State University, Major Professor, (515) 294-8067 or lebbers@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

Investigator Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE: INTERIM PRESIDENT

Interview I: Background

What is your age, race, and educational background?

What has been your career path to this point?

What have been some of the highlights of your career to this point?

Why did you choose to work in higher education?

Earlier in your career, did you have a desire to be in your current position?

What does your typical day consist of?

How would you describe your leadership style?

How do you deal with the stress related to your job?

What are your hobbies outside of work?

Interview II: The Interim Presidency

What circumstances led to you becoming the interim president at Urban Community College?

How was it decided that you would become the interim president during the presidential transition?

What was the general mood of the college following the end of the previous president's tenure?

What personal qualities do you possess that make you a good fit for the institution as an interim president?

What professional qualities do you possess that make you a good fit for the institution as an interim president?

How would you describe the culture of the institution during the previous administration?

How would you describe the culture of the institution during your interim presidency?

Has there been a change in culture?

What has led to this change in culture?

How has your status as interim president impacted the college's culture?

What have been the major challenges for the college during your time as interim president?

How have you approached the challenges as an interim president?

What have been some of the important decisions you have made as interim president?

How does your status as interim president impact your decision-making process?

What have been the most difficult decisions you have made as interim president?

What have been the best decisions you have made as interim president?

What have been the worst decisions you have made as interim president?

Do you feel your service as interim president has been successful or unsuccessful? Why?

What recommendations would you make to an interim president who is just starting the job?

What would you tell a different institution's board of directors regarding choosing an interim president at their institution?

Interview III

What has happened at Urban Community College since our last interview?

Is there anything you would like to share that best describes your experience as an interim president that did not come up in our last interview?

In your opinion, what makes an effective interim president?

What are your lessons learned from serving as an interim president?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE: COLLEGE FACULTY/STAFF

Interview I: Background

What is your age, race, and educational background?

What has been your career pathway to this point?

What have been some of the highlights of your career to this point?

Why did you choose to work in higher education?

Earlier in your career, did you have a desire to be in your current position?

What does your typical day consist of?

What are your hobbies outside of work?

How do you deal with the stress related to your job?

Interview II

What circumstances led to the presidential transition and need for an interim president?

What was the general mood of the college during the previous president's tenure?

How would you describe the culture of the institution during the previous administration?

How has the interim president impacted the college's culture?

What have been the challenges for the interim president during the presidential transition?

How has the interim president dealt with these challenges?

What has been the best decision made by the interim president?

What has been the worst decision made by the interim president?

How would you describe the interim president's performance during the presidential transition?

What personal qualities does that interim president possess that make him successful or unsuccessful?

How would you describe the interim president's leadership style?

How does the interim president's leadership style compare or contrast to the previous president's leadership style?

Interview III

Is there anything you would like to discuss that we have not already talked about regarding the interim president's service during the presidential transition?

Would you like to add any comments about the interim president's strengths or weaknesses?

In your opinion, what makes an effective interim president?

APPENDIX D

AUDIT TRAIL

- March 19, 2009 Visited Urban Community College and met the interim president. I expressed interest in working with him and the institution as a potential case study and let him know that I would follow-up on our conversation during the summer 2009.
- March 23, 2009 Sent Urban Community College Interim President a follow-up e-mail thanking him for meeting with me March 19, 2009.
- June 29, 2009 E-mailed the Urban Community College Interim President expressing my continued interest in completing a case study with his institution and suggested we further discuss the parameters of the study during a phone meeting.
- July 2, 2009 Received an e-mail communication back from the interim president with a date and time to conduct a phone meeting to discuss my study and his involvement.
- July 9, 2009 Spoke to interim president for 15 minutes over the phone and talked about the intent of my study. I asked the interim president to think of people from different areas of the college that work directly with him. I asked him to send me a list of 10-12 names of people that might be interested in participating in the study. We also discussed when it would be a good time to complete data collection. He suggested late September and October.

- July 10, 2009 Received a list of potential participants from the interim president's assistant and plan to contact them immediately following receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
- July 17, 2009 The interim community college president e-mailed all participants regarding the study and explained they would be contacted by me. He informed them that participation was voluntary. I received an e-mail from the institutional researcher stating the institution would send a letter giving me permission to complete the study at the institution.
- October 7, 2009 Received approval to conduct research at Urban Community College from the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board.
- October 12, 2009 Sent an e-mail letter of invitation to potential study participants at Urban Community College.
- October 14, 2009 E-mailed the informed consent form to participants at Urban Community College and established first round interview meetings.
- October 29, 2009 Held first round of interviews with Jim Kirk and Charles Stewart at Urban Community College.
- October 30, 2009 Held first round of interviews with Kristy Taylor, Daniel Webb, Don Stephens, Sarah Jacobs, Sharon Davis at Urban Community College.
- November 2, 2009 First round interview with Deak Johnson over the phone.

- November 6, 2009 Second round interviews with Sarah Jacobs, Deak Johnson, Jim Kirk, and Kristy Taylor at Urban Community College.
- November 11, 2009 Second interview with Charles Stewart and Don Stephens at Urban Community College.
- November 16, 2009 First round interview with Iris Young held over the phone.
- November 18, 2009 Second round interview with Iris Young and Sharon Davis at Urban Community College.
- December 4, 2009 Second round interview with Daniel Webb at Urban Community College.
- December 24, 2009 Phone conversation with interim president at Rural Community College District. Interim expressed interest in participating in research study.
- Dec. 9, 2009-Jan. 29, 2010 Conducted third round of interviews where participants.
- February 3, 2010 Received approval from Iowa State University Institutional Review Board begin research at Rural Community College District.
- February 4, 2010 E-mailed interim president at Rural Community College to establish date for first interview.
- February 12, 2010 Interviewed the interim president at Rural Community College District to gain background information and introduce the research study.
- February 13, 2010 Sent an e-mail letter of invitation to possible study participants at Rural Community College District.

February 17, 2010	Conducted first interview with David Smith.
February 18, 2010	Conducted first interview with Sophia Erickson, Emily Paulsen, and Elizabeth Johnson.
February 26, 2010	Conducted second interview with Paul Martin, Elizabeth Johnson, David Smith, and Emily Paulsen.
March 1, 2010	Conducted first interview with Kyle Gregg.
March 2, 2010	Conducted first interview with Bradley Clinton.
March 3, 2010	Conducted second interview with Kyle Gregg, Bradley Clinton, and Sophia Erickson.
March-May 2010	Conducted follow-up conversations with study participants at Rural Community college District. This included review of transcripts and further discuss of the interim president's operation of the institution during the presidential transition.

APPENDIX E**LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS**

<DATE>

Dear <NAME>:

I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership program at Iowa State University. I also work as the dean of students at Southwestern Community College in Creston, Iowa. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study involving the presidential transition at your community college. This case study will assist me in completing my dissertation at Iowa State University.

I have communicated with the interim president at your community college and he has agreed to participate in this study. I asked him to recommend other participants, and he suggested you would be an important person on-campus to interview as part of this study. My interest is in developing an understanding of an interim president's experience during a presidential transition. Your involvement would require two interviews and a review of the interview transcripts. These interviews would last approximately one-half hour to one hour. If you agree to participate in this study, I will work with you in advance to establish dates and times that are convenient for you to complete these interviews. The interviews will take place over the phone and on your community college campus. There will be no traveled required on your part.

If you are interested in participating in this study or would like to know more, please contact me via e-mail or phone. I would be more than willing to answer any of your questions.

Sincerely,

Matthew D. Thompson
Thompson@swccioa.edu
515.520.7012

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