DEFINING AND WORKING TOWARD COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS:
A P-16 REFORM INITIATIVE

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Thesis

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The state and quality of formal education have been at the forefront of national policy discussions since the publication of the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* by the National Commission on Excellence and Education. The Commission identified a twofold ‘risk’: 1) future generations would not have the knowledge and skills needed to compete in a global marketplace and maintain the United States’ status as a world leader; and 2) undereducated citizens would become disenfranchised and subjected to living with decisions made for them by the educated citizenry. I agree with the Commission that “a high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society, and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom” (1983, p. 470). Education is the resource provided to citizens that, if equalized, transforms the recipient’s ability to interact in and with the world. Accordingly, as Dewey (1916) wrote, “Obviously a society to which stratification into separate classes would be fatal, must see to it that intellectual opportunities are accessible to all on equable and easy terms” (“2. The Democratic Ideal,” n.p., para. 3). Through inclusive and equal education and dialogue, the Nation stands to fully benefit from the wealth of diversity that resides within its citizens.
The Commission’s announcement that the nation was at-risk was based on student achievement data, taken primarily from secondary and postsecondary levels, and presented in the forms of standardized test scores, literacy rates, math remediation at the college level, and the need for remediation and training programs in businesses and the military. They also raised concerns about the decline in science proficiency and technological aptitude in response to the demand for more high-skilled workers in the rapidly changing information age. So, not only was the nation facing difficulties in cultivating citizens with the ability to create new industries based on our nation’s changing resources, it also potentially faced a steep decline in employable citizens who would fill the workforce needs, engage in civic activities, and enrich its communities by upholding the values of a democratic society. The Commission wrote about risking equality, more specifically equal opportunities for all citizens to reach their fullest potential, not just to be employable, but also for the sake of controlling their own destinies and, as a result, making positive contributions to society (NCEE, 1983, p. 471).

Education reform remains an issue of national import as states endeavor to provide equal access to education while establishing high standards and accountability. Almost a quarter of a century after A Nation at Risk, the same issues are at the crux of the education reform dialogue. American student performance indicators are measured against those of their international counterparts and the data show American students falling behind their peers in core subjects like math and science. The nation’s current emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM)
education is reflective of efforts to increase proficiency and stimulate student interest in these subjects. Further, *No Child Left Behind* ushered in more stringent accountability measures with specific emphasis placed on closing achievement gaps and providing equal access to students with disabilities. Globalization and the subsequent shift from a agrarian and manufacturing economies to a high-skill, service- and knowledge-based economy continue to inform the way educational policymakers and reformists frame P-16 education. This reframing, stakeholders might argue, is imperative if the U.S. wants to remain competitive in a global marketplace and regain its position as an economic power. However, as Dewey warned, we must be careful not to direct education to the end of producing workers specific to the demands of the market without respect to their inclinations. Dewey (1916) wrote,

> Efficiency in production often demands division of labor. But it is reduced to a mechanical routine unless workers see the technical, intellectual, and social relationships involved in what they do, and engage in their work because of the motivation furnished by such perceptions. The tendency to reduce such things as efficiency of activity and scientific management to purely technical externals is evidence of the one-sided stimulation of thought given to those in control of industry -- those who supply its aims. (“1. The Implications,” n.p., para. 6)

It is important to expose students to the range of career options and occupational forecasts while encouraging individual exploration. However, educational leaders must be careful not to groom students toward high-need career fields or a region’s fastest growing sectors, if their interests and skills are not aligned. While doing so might initially lead to more citizens being prepared to fill positions that are currently unfilled, if career cycles continue as they have new technologies will lead to the creation of new careers.
while current careers are made obsolete. Steering students into specific careers based on current economic needs also usurp students’ abilities to identify and pursue their passions.

The message from the nation’s leaders is specific – more Americans should attain certifications (certificates, degrees, licensures, etc.) beyond the requisite high school diploma. In his January 2012 State of the Union address, President Obama said, “In today’s global economy, a college education is no longer just a privilege for some, but rather a prerequisite for all.” As such, the high school diploma is more commonly viewed as the educational pre-requisite to other forms of postsecondary training (high-skilled careers, military training, skilled-trades, college, etc). According to Brand and Hooker (2010), the economic recession and its uncertain end have created a sense of urgency to address educational preparation and college access opportunities for all. Moreover, they wrote, “college graduates earn approximately $1 million more over their lifetimes than those with only a high school diploma, and they also experience better health and are more likely to vote” (p. 75).

Education policymakers, and other stakeholders, continue to focus on many of the same student achievement benchmarks and their perceived effect on the preparedness, employability, and competitiveness of Americans in this global society. Reports of American students being outperformed by their international counterparts are frequent and prevalent. Those coupled with reports on the numbers of low-skill jobs that have been outsourced to other countries for cheaper labor and the unfilled
high-skilled jobs, which have led to international recruitment efforts, reinforce the belief that America has lost its edge as a result of falling behind in educating its citizens.

*A Nation at Risk* outlined a need for educating all students and offered suggestions for parents, students, and educators, but refrained from assigning blame. The most recent iteration of the educational reform policy, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, set the stage for establishing common expectations for all students and holding educators accountable for specific student outcomes. To that end, *NCLB* calls for alignment among academic standards, curriculum, learning materials and teacher training and preparation. Moreover, it is expected that states, school districts and individual schools be held accountable for “improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education” (NCLB, 2001). Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was and continues to be an expectation for all public school districts and it is reported annually on state school report cards. And, schools that fall short of meeting AYP for consecutive years face ramifications, including school closings or in extreme cases, being taken over by the state. Baker, et al. (2005) reported that, “federal and state governments are holding public schools to more rigorous academic standards for all students” (p. 4), which is accounted for by public report cards rating schools on their progress. They continued with the statement, “in addition, educators realize that the traditional model of
teaching and learning in the public schools is not adequate to prepare students for the 21st century” (p. 4). However, state and school district pressure on teachers to reach high levels of student proficiency on state exams have impacted classroom instruction. Because of the implications of failure, not meeting AYP, many teachers are compelled to teach to test content as a strategy to ensure that students can pass high-stakes exams. In view of that, a criticism of NCLB is that school accountability measures have led to teaching and learning being specifically focused on standardized test content.

Another major criticism of NCLB is that it is a blanket policy expected to successfully apply to students with diverse skills and educational needs. In addition, the measures used to assess student achievement, high-stakes testing, are very narrow and still do not address students’ knowledge gaps or inability to transfer acquired knowledge to real-life scenarios. Students are not learning how to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom to practical, real-world situations. Therefore, they remain unclear as to how what they learn in school is relevant to what they do in other settings, and more specifically, how that knowledge will be applicable to careers of the future. Houston (2007) stated, “one of the greatest dangers posed by NCLB is that we will reach a point where most kids meet an acceptable standard set by the tests but do so at the expense of a broader and deeper learning experience” (pp. 745-6). As aforementioned, teaching based solely on test content can limit student competencies in meaningful ways. This is particularly detrimental when students are measured based on information
that is necessary to exit high school but does not provide entrance into postsecondary options.

Critics of the policy, like Houston, also discourage the laser focus on teaching to specific standards while sacrificing more subjective content like civics – the rights and obligations of citizens. When considering the role schools can play in teaching civics and fostering democratic understanding and participation for all students, this departure could have damaging and lasting effects. According to Levine (2009), “one of the most strongly supported practices for increasing civic participation is civil, balanced classroom discussion of controversial events or issues” (p. 23). He speaks further about the importance of teachers, particularly young teachers, being provided professional development opportunities to help them handle such discussions so they are not intimidated by the volatile discussions often shown as teasers to news broadcasts on television.

Levine (2009) presented an upside to youth civic engagement when he wrote, “The 2008 election provides another less heartening lesson. Although overall youth turnout rose, those who voted were almost all college students or young adults with college experience” (p. 22). If we agree that youth that become engaged in civics will grow into adults that remain engaged, then this reported increase in civic participation by youth 18-24 in the 2008 elections is positive. However, the disparity between youth participating (students with college degrees or experience) and those that are not (students who lack college experience) reinforces concerns of future
disenfranchisement. Research by College Board’s Advocacy and Policy Center (2010) on the benefits (financial and nonfinancial) of postsecondary education supports Levine’s findings. The data on voting rates show, “In every age group, adults with higher levels of education are more likely to vote than those with lower levels of education” (“Voting,” n.p.). These data underscore the importance of civic education at the primary and secondary levels. If K-12 schools discard civic education and colleges/universities become the new purveyors of democratic ideals and promoters of civic participation the risk of creating a two-class society becomes a more probable reality.

Disinterest in civic participation by some youth may also be exacerbated by personal experiences. According to Levine, there exists a civic opportunity gap between college-bound and non-college bound students, which has worsened over the last three decades (2009, p. 22). This opportunity gap is characterized by an inequality in experiences and/or opportunities provided to K-12 students, particularly those from urban or rural areas. This created feelings of disconnect between student volunteers who reported being assigned menial tasks, such as cleaning up trash in the neighborhood, as opposed to activities that add value to an organization or interest group, like completing action research to help an organization develop strategies to attract local youth. According to Levine’s research, “when these young adults mentioned their experiences with volunteering or community service, the opportunities they described were not at all empowering, educational, or inspiring” (2009, p. 22). This certainly does not suggest that there is no value in neighborhood clean-up projects.
However, in an effort to establish meaningful connections between youth and their communities care should be taken by coordinators of service opportunities to not exclusively put forward these types of service/civic opportunities to a particular group of students.

Revisiting the School’s historical role in imparting democratic ideals does not mean that schools alone are responsible. Families, churches and other external agents help form students’ understandings of the rights and privileges of citizens and their abilities to influence change. Yet, because schools play a major role in preparing students to engage in a democratic society, it is important to remain cognizant as to whether the current reforms are moving students further away from that end.

According to Fazzaro and Walter (2002),

The consequence of this consensus-forming alignment of policymakers for schooling and democracy are twofold. First, K-12 schools are likely to love their individual character, being transformed into organizations much like a franchised fast-food restaurant chain. Second, once 'standardized' in both process and content, within a generation schools would be a powerful force in normalizing consensus (sameness) as 'good' and dissensus (differences) as 'bad'. Both of these consequences are antithetical to the principles of democracy. (pp. 27-8)

Historically, our nation has benefited from a diverse populace. Education reform strategies are enhanced by widening the lens from student competency on a wide range of K-12 content standards to student mastery of fewer and more detailed standards. The standards will prepare them for college and careers and leave room in their schedules for meaningful electives. It is through the combined acquisition of academic content and interpersonal/intrapersonal skills that students will become college and
career ready. Creating unique P-16 partnerships between K-12 schools and colleges/universities and/or businesses can raise student aspirations, demystify the college/career experience, and give students an opportunity to develop skills that will be critical to their success regardless of their postsecondary choices.

Statement of the Problem

Ohio is ranked 36th in the nation for the percentage of adults 25 and older who possess at least a Bachelor’s degree (American Community Survey, 2012). Approximately 29 percent of residents 25 and older in Summit County, Ohio have at least a Bachelor’s degree (American Community Survey, 2012). As Northeast Ohio shifts from the paradigm and traditions of a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, it is imperative that more high school graduates pursue education beyond high school. It is not necessary that all high school graduates pursue a four-year degree. Holzer & Lerman (2007) reported that future workforce needs will require education beyond high school. They further concluded, “The demand for middle-skill workers will remain quite robust relative to its supply, especially in key sectors of the economy. Accordingly, accommodating these demands will require increased U.S. investment in high-quality education and training in the middle as well as the top of the skill distribution” (2007, p. 7). It is based on related research and professional practice that I make the assertion that students should graduate from high school with fundamental knowledge and skills, an understanding of their strengths and interests, and prepared to make choices about how they will participate in society.
For the past seven years I have worked as a college access professional. As the director of a program named Destination College that serves more than 100 urban and suburban high school juniors and seniors each year, many of whom are first-generation, low-income, and/or average performing students, I have an understanding of the competencies they need to be successful in postsecondary education. I have served as a core member of the Summit County P-16 Alliance that convened stakeholders from all sectors of the community including business, government, community, education (P-12 and higher education), and social services. I currently serve as a convener and co-facilitator of a county-wide network of secondary educators (administrators, counselors, and teachers) that are working toward creating a ‘college-going culture’ in their high schools, which is a concept I will describe in more detail in Chapter III. These experiences have provided me with rich insights on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in a postsecondary experience as well as the challenges educators face in ensuring students graduate prepared for life beyond high school.

Among Summit County high school graduates in the class of 2008, 15 of the 17 school districts boasted high school graduations rates above 90 percent (Ohio Department of Education, 2009). However, only seven of the 17 school districts had 50 percent or more of their high school graduates enroll in an accredited Ohio college (2- or 4-year) the fall immediately following high school graduation (Ohio Board of Regents, 2010). Furthermore, of those seven school districts, four had more than 25 percent of their graduates taking developmental math or English during their first year of college.
(Ohio Board of Regents, 2010). These data reveal aspiration and college readiness gaps for graduates from high schools rated by the Ohio Department of Education as ‘Effective’ or ‘Excellent’ meaning large percentages of students met or exceeded proficiency levels on standardized tests, are graduating from high school, and the schools are meeting AYP. These data also illuminate a misalignment between high school graduation requirements and the academic expectations of postsecondary institutions.

While graduates meet or exceed proficiency on the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), more than one-third are entering college taking developmental math or English classes— in 2008 the figure was 39 percent (Ohio Board of Regents, 2010). Moreover, the financial aid, personal income, and time spent on developmental courses further discourages the student, particularly those who were successful in high school, and increases the likelihood of 'stopping out'. Additionally, universities bear the responsibility of remediating students so they are able to take credit-bearing courses, placing an additional burden on faculty and resources.

It is simple for stakeholders to declare that more Summit County graduates need to understand the importance of education beyond high school. But, with more than one-third of Ohio’s first-year college students taking developmental courses, educators, college access professionals, and others must work together to help all students be more than college eligible. In other words, more students must be prepared not only to be accepted to college, but also have the requisite academic and non-academic skills to
be successful in college and ultimately earn a degree. Likewise, students who choose military options or to enter the workforce immediately following high school need to be equally prepared in both academic and non-academic areas in order to advance. ACT, Inc. (2007) analyzed the required reading and mathematics skills needed for entry-level workforce training and reported that they are comparable to those required of first-year college students.

Amid the national conversation about academic rigor, the concept of college readiness was introduced as a desired outcome for high school graduates. Unfortunately, college readiness has been defined differently by stakeholders with varied interests. For example, in the traditional K-12 school setting, college readiness has been determined by the difficulty of classes passed (measured by G.P.A.) and performance on high stakes tests like the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) and college entrance exams like ACT/SAT. What has been learned from this narrow definition of college readiness, as David Conley (2010) wrote, is that “many students who are eligible for college are not ready for college.” He continued,

Students become eligible for college by completing high school courses that have prescribed titles, taking necessary admissions tests, and submitting application and financial aid materials. Becoming ready to succeed in and complete college, however, demands that administrators, teachers, and staff members pay attention to a number of important attributes and characteristics beyond what’s required to be accepted. (2010, p. 18)

The concept of college eligibility, which Conley described, until recently was used to determine college readiness but, as he states, does not address the social and cultural skills or knowledge needed to be successful in college or career settings.
Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) programs and like organizations that work to increase access to college and to prepare underrepresented students for success, ultimately defined by college graduation, defines college readiness more broadly. For example, the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) defined college (and career) readiness as:

Students are prepared to successfully complete credit-bearing college coursework or industry certification without remediation, have the academic skills and self-motivation necessary to persist and progress in postsecondary education, and have identified career goals and the necessary steps to achieve them. Readiness also requires the developmental maturity to thrive in the increasingly independent worlds of postsecondary education and careers, the cultural knowledge to understand the expectations of the college environment and labor market, and the employer-desired skills to succeed in an innovation-based economy. (Brand, Hooker, 2010, p. 76)

This more comprehensive definition of college and career readiness contains core criteria often used to frame the design of college access programs that serve underrepresented, low-income, first-generation and/or non-traditional college students.

College access programs, such as the TRIO programs, are primarily funded to target students that need more directed exposure to college planning, and in some cases academic support, partly because they/their families aren’t aware of the steps that make up the college planning process. If they do not have experience with college it is difficult to anticipate timely events or to realize the importance of being actively involved in the planning process. Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini (2004) stated, compared to their peers, first-generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g.,
costs, and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school (p. 250). Yet, because these students receive comprehensive services that address the academic, social and cultural nuances of college participation, they are well prepared to thrive in a college environment.

A report written by Whitmire & Esch (2010) on a transition program created at a community college in Northern Virginia highlights the benefits to providing seamless educational pathways to first-generation students. Whitmire & Esch report, “None of Pathway’s program components is especially novel or expensive. The difference is that Pathway is centered on the student and designed to meet a range of needs—academic, financial, or personal—through one coherent program” (2010, p. 3). Although these specific demographic of students are targeted for services based on their well documented needs and challenges all students can benefit from this level of preparation. According to Barefoot (2004), few colleges/universities have escaped challenges specific to student retention and graduation. She wrote, “In fact, only a handful of the most elite liberal arts colleges and research universities have escaped what, for many U.S. campuses, has become an overriding obsession to stem a ‘tidal wave’ of student drop out, which is at its highest level between the first and second year” (p. 9). The reality that even academically prepared students from a tradition of college participation drop out, ‘stop out,’ or transfer after the first year of college suggests that high school preparation for college falls short.
College eligible students aren’t always first-generation or low-income students. Based on my experiences as a college access professional, I would argue that many of the Summit County students, discussed previously, from higher performing high schools that took developmental English or math classes their first year of college prepared while in high school in a similar fashion. Again, these are students that met the school’s academic expectations. Further, most of them completed most of the college preparation tasks, like participating in summer enrichment programs and taking college entrance exams because they were certain they wanted to pursue a college degree. Most of these students received guidance and support from school counselors, because they/their parents asked questions, met key benchmarks like visiting colleges during the spring or summer before their senior year, and anticipated large informational events like college fairs and financial aid nights. The data – more than 25% of Summit County Class of 2008 graduates from high performing high schools take remedial math or English (Ohio Board of Regents, 2010) – indicate that the support these students received, while assisting in ensuring college eligibility, ultimately didn’t ensure that students were aware of or developed the skills that would prepare them for success in college.

When examining possible explanations for the disconnect between preparing students to be college eligible versus college ready, educators should consider: 1) what questions the students asked (or did not ask) when they visited colleges; 2) what interventions were put in place to assist the students if their ACT/SAT scores appeared
out of sync with their grades and instead indicated a lack of understanding in a specific content area; and 3) were the enrichment programs building skills that would help students adapt to new and changing environments and work with peers from diverse backgrounds. Many other questions can be raised with respect to why students are not successful in gaining direct admission into college or attaining a degree, but it is important to note that not all questions are related to academics.

Readiness gaps exist when students complete the prescribed college preparation checklist, but overlook or aren’t trained to develop competencies, like self-advocacy, that are also critical to college success. Or, students are academically prepared but not receiving guidance because they aren’t actively seeking it and are not knowledgeable about the steps required to pursue and complete postsecondary education. Both of these types of students might successfully gain entrance into a college/university, or business/military training program, because they met eligibility requirements, yet many find themselves unprepared to be successful.

Ohio’s educational challenges reflect those confronted in states across the nation. Ohio’s educational attainment and workforce data are more or less comparable to other states. Nonetheless, educating the nation’s citizens is a prominent and pressing issue for all. National and state departments of education have promoted ‘college and career readiness’ as the desired standard of achievement for all students without providing a clear or comprehensive definition. As a result, individual school districts and organizations offering college access programs, like the Ohio College Access Network,
have developed their own definitions of readiness, which perpetuates uncertainty among educators, students, and parents. Strategies to align learning standards across states have been embraced and will be discussed. Nevertheless, the lack of a clearly defined goal for P-16 education thwarts goal attainment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is threefold: 1) to provide an inclusive and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ as a critical aim of P-16 education; 2) to substantiate the position that ‘college and career readiness’ is developed in an environment or ‘culture’ that is based on student success, high expectations for all, and has supports in place to ensure that students have an opportunity to realize their full potential; and 3) to strengthen the argument that true education reform will occur when educators along the P-16 continuum operate in partnership and with the mission to provide students, at every level, with meaningful and comprehensive educational opportunities.

My Position and Arguments

Based on Dewey’s (1938) theory of continuity and Martin’s (1992) concept of schools as the moral equivalent of the home, I believe that the focus on ‘college and career readiness’ as an expected outcome for all high school graduates is a move in the right direction for P-16 education reform. Dewey believed that a flaw of traditional education was that it was provided in such specific circumstances that students were unable to apply the knowledge in the future. Dewey (1938) wrote, “The principal of
continuity in its educational application means, nevertheless, that the future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process...In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality” (“Criteria of Experience” n.p., para. 28). Providing students with seamless educational experiences from pre-school through postsecondary education that assist them in acquiring the skills that result in ‘college and career readiness’ requires that educators consider continuity as it relates to the P-16 educational continuum. Additionally, equalizing expectations for students toward ‘college and career readiness’ requires that schools pass on values to all students that were traditionally shared in the home or the extended community. Martin (1992) wrote,

Make the nation home and its inhabitants kin and a different image of democratic citizenship emerges. Citizens will still be voters. But they will also call upon themselves and one another to do what needs to be done to maintain, improve and enhance everyone’s lives. (p. 172)

When applied to the P-16 educational context I discuss in this study, Martin’s Schoolhome is a place where students are held to a common educational standard and take ownership of one another’s growth and successes even though they develop their individual interests. Just as siblings in a family have different qualities, students in this school environment will grow to draw on each the strengths of others and support them as they address their weaknesses.

Variations in the definition of ‘college and career readiness’ keep educators and other stakeholders aiming at a moving target. The data presented previously regarding
Summit County graduates’ participation and remediation rates at Ohio colleges, show that focusing on academic outcomes alone is ineffective in preparing students for success in postsecondary opportunities. Furthermore, underrepresented, low-income, and/or students that will be the first in their families to go to college (first-generation) often require more access and non-academic support to successfully make the transition from high school to postsecondary experiences. Some of the larger challenges first-generation students encounter are: 1) level of preparedness (taking rigorous high school courses, college entrance exam scores, etc.); 2) the skill of knowing when to draw from available resources (counselors, professors, etc.); 3) educational aspirations (level of degree attainment); and 4) low income family backgrounds. The National Postsecondary Educational Cooperative (2007) reported on a 1996 study conducted by Terenzini et al., which found that first-generation students had lower-degree aspirations, had lower family incomes, received less encouragement from family to attend college, spent less time with peers, and spent less time talking with teachers (p. 9). The failure to define and set clear expectations with respect to readiness places all students at a disadvantage. It further intensifies the complexity first-generation students confront and can render the pursuit of postsecondary education out of the realm of possibility.

In this study, I offer a comprehensive definition of college and career readiness. More specifically, my proposed definition focuses on academic preparation and non-academic factors that a student, regardless of postsecondary experience, needs to
successfully enroll in and complete credit-bearing college courses, without remediation
or to enter the workplace in an entry-level position.

I argue that expanding and formalizing the meaning of ‘college and career readiness’ will help all stakeholders (businesses, college access professionals, community organizations, parents, K-12 schools, colleges/universities, etc.) work toward the same end. To the point of equalizing educational standards, an inclusive and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ will provide a universal understanding of what students should know and be able to do upon high school graduation. Using this example, if a student is deemed college and career ready s/he will be expected to have mastered a common set of knowledge and skills that equip her/him to successfully earn a college degree or advance in a career. As Conley (2011), pointed out regarding the Common Core State Standards, “if schools take advantage of this opportunity—redesigning curriculum and instruction in ways that fully engage students in cognitively challenging tasks—the result will be students who are better prepared to succeed in college and careers” (p. 20). Ohio's adoption of the national Common Core State Standards, examined further in Chapter II, offers a new opportunity to redesign curriculum that will prepare students for their lives beyond high school.

Second, I argue that if public P-16 education is to successfully prepare graduates for the workforce and to be global citizens, educators should first work toward system change, in this case creating a ‘college-going culture’. Embedded in this student-centered environment is the expectation that all students who graduate will be college
and career ready and go on to pursue some type of postsecondary educational experience the fall following high school graduation. Knight-Diop says of school districts that operate within a ‘college-going culture,’ “the institutional structures encompass the written expression of institutional beliefs, actions, and attitudes within such documents and activities as the school’s mission statement, initial student contracts, staffing procedures, college preparation materials, tests, courses, parent/family relationships and extracurricular activities” (2010, p. 160). The expectations for students are set forth by the adults throughout the system, and the adults receive clear and continuous reinforcement through the systematic performance standard connected to the importance of promoting and upholding equal expectations for all students while providing support to those that may need additional help.

Based on my observations, the absence of a clear and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ and multi-layered educational expectations for students further complicates the pursuit of clear benchmarks. Student tracking, course selection, and high-stakes testing produce hierarchical paths for students that reinforce different expectations for student achievement and outcomes. It is my experience that students are segregated into one of three groups: 1) those expected to go to college; 2) those expected to gain a skill and enter the workforce; and 3) those expected to drop-out or struggle to graduate from high school.

Students begin secondary education with a set of unwritten expectations based on their perceived abilities. Academically strong students that demonstrate leadership
abilities are placed in the 'college-prep' track. Those who express interest in or demonstrate technical or hands-on skills are directed toward vocations, now more commonly referred to as career and technical programs. Students that don't show an interest or ability to be successful in either (based on course grades), but not identified for special education, are often left in a general education track. Student tracking not only creates a hierarchy among postsecondary options—'college prep' students are better/more important than 'career tech' or general education students— but it also gives the inaccurate impression that students preparing for college need to acquire a different set of knowledge and skills than those preparing for other postsecondary experiences. Studies by Alvarez & Mehan (2006), and Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls (1986), point out that the distribution of students to high-, middle-, and low-ability groups, or academic and general tracks correlates with ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Children from low-income or one-parent households, families with an unemployed worker, or linguistic and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be assigned to low-ability groups or tracks (p. 83). Standardized test performance and achievement gap data fuel the perception that low-income and minority students are less capable and as a result a disproportionate number are often advised toward the vocational or general tracks.

Misinformed thinking, or tradition, have led to the belief that students entering the workforce after high school need less rigorous education than students going to college. Yet, ACT, Inc.’s research (2006) asserts that students that enter the workforce
directly from high school in a job that is “likely to offer both a wage sufficient to support a small family and potential career advancement” (p. 3) need to master the same core skills in reading and math as students who attend college. ACT, Inc. (2006) reported,

Our new finding has important implications for U.S. high school education. It suggests that all high school students should be educated according to a common academic expectation that prepares them for both postsecondary education and the workforce. This means that all students should be ready and have the opportunity to take a rigorous core preparatory program in high school, one that is designed to promote readiness for both college and workforce training programs. (p. 2)

The analysis of required reading and mathematics skills provided “empirical evidence supporting the contention that the expectations for college readiness and for workforce training readiness are comparable” (2007, p. 5). As a result, the conversation among stakeholders has begun to widen to include career readiness as an equally important outcome of high school education.

Curriculum directors and career and technical education directors must work together to reverse this misconception. Because we no longer need to train workers who can simply take direction and execute finite tasks, our schools need to reflect the skills required in the workplace and in society as well as incorporate tools (varied forms of technology) that are relevant in the current environment. This will require a significant shift in the foundation of P-12 education. However, educators must understand that colleges and careers require the same level of knowledge and skills and thus, all students, no matter what their postsecondary choices are, need to be educated at a high level to be successful. To produce innovators and entrepreneurs, we must
teach innovation and entrepreneurial thinking to the extent that it can be taught. To advance democratic ideals and engage citizens in the democratic process we must give students from diverse backgrounds and with divergent opinions and abilities the opportunity to discuss relevant issues and serve others in meaningful ways. We cannot expect these attributes to emerge in our youth or leave it to colleges or employers to identify and develop. Or, as has been shown, the division between the highly-educated and those less educated will continue to widen.

Third, I argue that colleges/universities have a responsibility to engage in meaningful P-16 partnerships so that education professionals – administrators, counselors, and teachers – are trained to lead, counsel, and/or teach in a 21st Century educational system. Moreover, they should take the lead in offering professional development opportunities to existing educators and work in partnership with local P-12 districts to ensure that the transition for students is seamless.

Significance of the Study

A generation of citizens spent their careers working in factories, primarily in the Midwest states, during a time when low-skill, high-paying manufacturing jobs were abundant. Many of these workers now have children/grandchildren who are encouraged to prepare for postsecondary education because the majority of current jobs and the fastest growing jobs require workers with skills that aren’t currently taught in high school. More specifically, today’s high school students will likely work in jobs that have not yet been created. However, because many of these parents never attended or
completed college, they lack the expertise and the resources (human, financial, academic, and cultural) to help their children/grandchildren prepare for education beyond high school. As Lindholm reported, “within the context of already difficult life circumstances, parents’ lack of experience with, and understanding of, the college-going process appears to have presented an added, and perhaps insurmountable, challenge” (2006, p. 587). Parents without postsecondary educational experience might not understand that preparation for life after high school begins before high school, as early as eighth. Eighth graders begin selecting classes that should begin to prepare them with the foundation knowledge and skills they need to progress in college courses or entry-level business/military training programs. Without appropriate advice and an opportunity to explore their career interests and abilities, these students could find themselves scrambling to catch up as they approach graduation. At the same time, parents with college experience might not fully understand the non-academic knowledge and skills that students must possess to be successful in college and might assume that if students are academically successful they will also be able to navigate the other aspects of college or careers as well. Until schools are better able to communicate with parents the battery of skills their children need to become college and career ready, educators will be left to fully shoulder the burden.

The K-12 education system continues to track and prepare students the way it always has, and has incorporated high-stakes testing as a measure of student achievement, which has extenuated knowledge and skills gaps. Institutions of higher
education continue to train educators to work in an antiquated school environment and have increasingly taken on the responsibility of remediating incoming students who did not master core content knowledge prior to graduating high school. The system is broken and 10 years after the adoption of NCLB, we continue to test multiple reform strategies instead of overhauling the system. Ensuring that students are college and career ready goes much further than implementing ‘rigorous’ curriculum and holding educators and school districts more accountable. ‘College and career readiness’ is developed in an environment that sets forth clear and equal expectations for all students and addresses rigorous curriculum and non-academic skills across all grades. In this environment, state test scores are no longer the center of curriculum and instruction and college eligibility is not the focus for 11th and 12th grade teachers and counselors.

This study is ultimately significant for two reasons. First, it offers a more comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ that all education stakeholders can work toward. Such a definition is helpful because it will clarify for all, including families and students, who are working to meet the goal, what the desired outcome is and what indicators of success are. Second, it will inform educators, many of whom serve large populations of first-generation students, particularly in urban or rural school districts, of a system reform strategy – creating a ‘college-going culture’ – that has been shown to mitigate inexperience with postsecondary options and environmental factors. As degree attainment and economic stability and vitality become
increasingly important in the state and the nation, and as civic participation and responsibility continues to reflect a two class system, P-16 educators and stakeholders must become more proactive and intentional in the strategies used to collaborate and reevaluate the needs of students.

Chapter Plan

In this chapter, I outlined the research problem – the absence of a clear and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ – and outlined three arguments for helping students graduate from high schools ready for college and careers. In Chapter II, I will offer a clear and comprehensive definition ‘college and career readiness.’ The definition will expand on the current definitions that emphasize academic achievement by incorporating six non-academic factors that students must also possess to be successful. In Chapter III, I will address the systemic changes required to ensure strategies designed to ensure all students graduate college and career ready have a framework. More specifically, I will address the need to establish a ‘college-going culture’ across the educational system to introduce and reinforce knowledge and expectations about ‘college and career readiness’ along the education continuum. In Chapter IV, I will detail some innovative P-16 partnerships and discuss the role that higher education should play in assisting P-12 educators in preparing students for postsecondary education. I will also discuss the role of states in supporting and providing resources for P-16 partnerships. In Chapter V, I will connect the research presented in the previous chapters and offer a recommendation for future research.
CHAPTER II

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

It is a challenge to develop a clear and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness.’ As more researchers and education professionals determine that there are multiple factors that facilitate readiness beyond what can be measured by grades and standardized tests, the definitions are broadened to include multiple strategies. In this chapter I will first examine some current definitions of college readiness and describe how a number of states, in particular the state of Ohio, are working to reform K-12 education to better prepare students to meet the academic requirements. Second, I will argue for including several vital non-academic aspects that when developed in concert with a strong academic foundation more completely prepare students to be college and career ready. The merging of the non-academic aspects with the academic aspects makes for a more comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ that educational stakeholders can use to reform P-16 education and work in partnership to support.

Academic Factors of College and Career Readiness

The term college readiness is widely used but deciphering its exact meaning can be difficult. Education researchers point to the emphasis schools place on college attendance and subsequent increases in student aspirations contrasted by the
misalignment between high school and college academic standards. Educators have bought in to the belief that postsecondary education is necessary, but are uncertain how to help students make the transition. Kirst (2004) points out that “state high school assessments often stress knowledge and skills that differ from college entrance and placement requirements. Students graduate from high school under one set of coursework standards only to discover that three months later, they must meet a whole new set of standards in college” (p. 51). Lloyd (2009) also criticized policymakers and education researchers for promoting college readiness without adequately defining it. The elusiveness that surrounds college readiness – college is essential but we can’t really tell you how to determine that you are ‘ready’ – leaves students and teachers with a conflicting message. He went on to write, “As a result, students and teachers may receive conflicting signals about the path to college success” (p. 34). Using these examples, as policymakers work to reform curriculum and instruction, learning assessments, and evaluations specific considerations must be factored in. Ultimately, if teachers and students continue to work toward unclear or narrowly defined goals the chances of reaching the desired outcome, readiness for and success in college/careers, is unlikely.

In 2010, Ohio passed House Bill 565 and Senate Bill 311: Ohio Core Curriculum Act to revise its core curriculum and to increase the 'rigor and relevance' of what students are required to know and be able to do. These curriculum changes were performed as a strategy to rectify the misalignment between K-12 education and
postsecondary academic expectations by reducing remediation. Accordingly, the class of 2014 will be the first cohort required to take four years of math, including Algebra II, and lab-based science to earn a diploma. According to the State School Superintendent, Stan Heffner, “The Ohio Core will give our high school students the kind of preparation they need to succeed in entry-level jobs, apprenticeships, military service and college” (Ohio Department of Education, 2008). In addition to a more prescribed course outline, the Ohio Core requires that students pass end-of-course exams and pass a high-stakes exam, which eventually will replace the current Ohio Graduation Test (OGT).

Ohio’s move to more 'rigorous and relevant' curriculum standards, fortified by its adoption of the National Common Core State Standards (Common Core) could impact the academic preparation of all students in meaningful ways. Both, in concept, could empower schools to repurpose teaching and learning to address the learning needs of all students as well as critical issues like the achievement gap. As Gary DeCoker wrote,

Will the new education standards be the panacea for all that is wrong with U.S. Education? Certainly not. But a stable common curriculum, could provide the foundation that, in the midst of these problems (bankrupt school districts, unworkable testing systems, high dropout rates), allows educators, parents, and the general public to focus on the knowledge and skills necessary for our children and young adults to lead productive and fulfilling lives. (2010, p. 31)

The Common Core offers states the ability to provide consistent learning goals in K-12 education that address knowledge and skills students will need to be successful in college and careers. There are currently more than 40 state adopters of the Common Core. According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center, 2010) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2010) the standards
are:

- Aligned with college and work expectations;
- Clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Evidence- and research-based. (n.p., para. 9)

The Standards include applications for specific sub-groups of students like English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities. States can incorporate the standards into their existing content standards or adopt them in place of their current standards. As written by the NGA Center and CCSSO (2010), “the Common Core State Standards focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades, thus enabling teachers to take the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well—and to give students the opportunity to master them” (“The Standards,” n.p., para. 2). Again, for participating states, like Ohio, there is an opportunity for educators to re-frame curriculum and instruction in a way that addresses the mastery of knowledge and skills all along the K-12 continuum that are necessary throughout life and not those which solely prepare students to pass assessments.

NGA Center and CCSSO (2010) also wrote regarding students that meet the English language arts (ELA) standards, that students will be able to transfer the knowledge so that it is useful in all aspects of their lives, which is necessary for engaged citizenship. The highlight on student demonstration elevates the expected learning beyond that of rote memorization. Because of their emphasis on higher order thinking
and application, strategies like the *Common Core* are being promoted by national and state departments of education. While academic readiness is an important aspect of success beyond high school, readiness requires further exploration. Changes in curriculum and standards will address the issue of academic readiness, but care must be taken to ensure that becoming college and career ready doesn’t continue to elude us so students truly have access to success.

Many current definitions of college readiness are limited to academic achievement measures and test performance. Lloyd reported, the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center’s (2009) annual state policy survey,

Twenty states spell out skills and knowledge students need to be college-ready. In those states, readiness expectations are communicated using one or more of the following strategies: courses, skills, standards, and tests. Fourteen states include academic-content standards in their definitions of college readiness, and 13 recommend or require college-preparatory courses. Fewer states use definitions that incorporate specific test scores or rely on narrative descriptions of skills needed for college success. Thirteen of the 20 states use multiple strategies to define readiness. (p. 36)

To reiterate, these largely academic considerations with regard to college readiness do not fully address the scope of what students need to be successful. Further, the lack of specificity used to define ‘skills’ leaves room for varied methods of implementation. If academic factors alone were sufficient for postsecondary preparation it would be difficult to explain why students who graduate from high school with strong course work, grades, and ACT/SAT scores drop out of college or forego the experience altogether.

Academic indicators might be effective in determining which students are most capable of being successful in college courses, but they don’t necessarily translate to
whom will successfully navigate the other aspects of the college environment, as evidenced by degree completion. Raley (2007) wrote, “given the variety of obstacles over which a first-year student may stumble, no one can afford to assume that any young person, no matter how academically gifted, is certain to succeed in college” (p. 75). To use a more specific example, if students are academically prepared but don’t have good time management or study skills they can immediately become overwhelmed by the freedom in the class schedule relative to the amount of work assigned in college classes. This is example is reinforced by Balduf’s (2009) research on college underachievement. She wrote,

Colleges should be aware that even their high-achieving applicants may lack the skills necessary to succeed. In addition to offering study skills courses to underachieving students, colleges should include preemptive strategies for all incoming freshmen, including motivational and time management strategies. (Balduf, 2009, p. 275)

The participants in Balduf’s research study attend an elite college and were considered high-achieving students in high school. Their lack of preparation for the demands of college related to time management, study skills, motivation, etc. resulted in a difficult transition to college and subsequent labeling as underachievers. Colleges/universities are working to ease such transition issues through first-year student seminars, but high schools must also work to enable student success in their postsecondary experiences.

To facilitate students’ acquiring a comprehensive set of competencies, it is critical to set a common definition of ‘college and career readiness’ for P-16 educational institutions and other stakeholders. A more comprehensive definition of ‘college and
career readiness’ should attend to the level of academic and non-academic preparation a student needs to successfully enroll in and complete credit-bearing college courses, without remediation at an accredited 2- or 4-year college/university or to secure an entry-level, compensated position on a growth track in a business or military setting. The academic preparation as defined by the rigor of courses taken, grades earned, and performance on college entrance exams has been established. It is important to clearly define the non-academic factors.

Non-Academic Factors of College and Career Readiness

Based on my professional experiences, of working with first-generation college students, I believe if we are to prepare students beyond college eligibility to college and career ready it is imperative that non-academic factors that include self-awareness, self-advocacy, adaptability, multicultural competence, developing personal and professional relationships, and understanding innovation in the global marketplace are developed in tandem with academic attainment. Just as implementing common learning standards should make clear to every student, parent, and teacher what the standards of success are in every school, developing a uniform and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ will help all stakeholders (policymakers, businesses, college access professionals, community organizations, parents, P-12 schools, colleges/universities, students, etc.) work toward a unified end. Students’ acquiring a core set of knowledge will possess a foundation that allows them to move forward in pursuit of their diverse interests. This core set of knowledge, as Dewey cautioned, does not aim to steer
students toward specific careers based on regional or national economic/employment
gaps. Instead, students can have access to more career options.

There are six critical non-academic factors that contribute to ‘college and career
readiness.’ They include: 1) the ability to adapt to new environments; 2) multicultural
competence; 3) understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses and the
willingness to accept direction and use criticism or challenges to enhance them; 4)
capacity to advocate for self-interests; 5) understanding the importance and benefits of
developing positive personal/professional relationships; and 6) an understanding of
innovation and its role in a global age. These factors are interrelated and combined with
academic readiness serve as a foundation for high school graduates to build their careers
and lives upon. In what follows, I will explicate the aforementioned non-academic
factors that contribute to ‘college and career readiness.’

1. Adapting to New Environments

The ability to adapt to new environments is a key skill that contributes to college
and career readiness because the culture and expectations of colleges, companies, and
military settings are very different from those of high schools. Students must have the
ability to independently observe the environment and use what they see and hear to
figure out what is expected of them as a participant in the new setting and how they can
add value. The ability to identify and understand differences in organizational hierarchy,
for example, can help ease the transition into the organization and allows students to
find their place within the organization, identify whom to ask for help, and who in the
environment are peers. John Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938) speaks to the importance of the principals of interaction and continuity and how they shape experiences. According to Dewey (1938),

> As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts... What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. (“Criteria of Experience,” n.p., para. 24)

In accordance with Dewey’s theory, if students are provided intentional opportunities to interact in different environments and are taught to identify the differences within said environments, they will develop the ability to assess future environments and adapt accordingly to changing situations. For example, Destination College members have an opportunity to explore careers. Students that are interested in health careers visit a local hospital to see the different professions first-hand and to learn more about daily responsibilities from practitioners. Prior to the site visit, students are given instructions on how to dress, how to behave when in the clinical setting and some are even asked to sign confidentiality agreements. This exposure to a career setting contrasts their experiences as students in a traditional academic environment by requiring different behaviors and levels of interaction from them in this new environment. As a result, they gain an understanding, on a limited scale, of what it takes to adapt within a health care environment.

This skill is also crucial for today’s students as they prepare for the future anticipating holding several different jobs and/or careers over the span of their careers.
and the expectation to adapt to each unique situation. Richard Greenwald (2010) points to the need for students to engage in leadership development programs. He wrote,

> Our students will find themselves in what I call a micropreneurial age. They will have multiple jobs and even multiple careers during their lifetimes... In short, they will need to be equipped to make their own opportunities. They need the skills, knowledge, and qualities that leadership programs cultivate: self-reliance, social and cultural capital, appreciation for lifelong learning, creativity, conflict-resolution and team-building skills, ethics, understanding of economics, and more. (n.p., para. 8 and 9)

Although Greenwald was writing about the need for leadership programs at the college level, based on the assumption that not all students will go to college but should be equally prepared, these skills are beneficial to students regardless of their postsecondary decisions. These skills include specific non-academic factors that assist in easing the transition for students into a college, career/military setting.

2. Multicultural Competence

The ability to cooperate with diverse groups of people with differing perspectives is critical because we live and work in an increasingly diverse society. Because most schools reflect the demographics of their surrounding neighborhoods, many students are used to going to school with peers that share similar backgrounds and experiences to their own. Yet, as students become independent adults their interactions with people from different backgrounds with dissimilar values and beliefs is inevitable. College campuses and businesses, to some degree, place people in positions of interaction with others from diverse racial, cultural, and/or religious backgrounds. To be successful in classes, on group projects, or in living environments like dorms or barracks, they will
need to be able to work cooperatively with others, to discuss differences fairly, to negotiate for things they want, and to compromise. Because the students I serve come from six different high schools in very different communities they are provided opportunities to interact based on the shared goal of preparing for the transition to college. Through initial teambuilding activities they are encouraged to work together and support one another as they face challenges. As they begin to work through challenges, leaders emerge and the students begin to identify and rely on each other’s strengths. Toward the end of the day, when students have become acquainted with their peers, they are invited to climb a 55 foot tall tower. The tower has several paths, varying in difficulty, leading to a platform at the top. Students not only encourage one another to attempt the climb, but they cheer them on during the climb, and physically support one another by helping to stabilize the safety ropes.

A respect for diversity of others can begin in primary and secondary school settings. Jane Martin (1992) in her book *The Schoolhome*, examined the role of schools as the “moral equivalent of home” in response to changing family structures and the resulting loss of domesticity. Therein, Martin purports that if schools, as partners to parents, are to meet the changing needs of students – being left at home alone because of parents exiting the home to work – they must transform the school house, where children come to learn, into the “Schoolhome”. It is within the *Schoolhome* and through the imparting of the “three C’s – care, concern, and connection,” that children are more than just classmates and can be transformed into members of a family. Martin wrote,
“Understanding that although our children may see the world differently they live in the same world, it (the Schoolhome) is committed to providing them with an education for living together” (p. 203). Etzioni furthers the argument that schools serve as moral educators as changing family dynamics create social gaps. Etzioni (1993) when considering the purpose of character development wrote, “There is little mystery as to what proper character development entails. In essence, it is acquiring the capacity to control one’s impulses and to mobilize oneself for acts other than the satisfaction of biological needs and immediate desires” (p. 91). Etzioni (1993) continued, “And self-control—together with a growing sense of commitment to values—makes people more tolerant of those from ethnic, racial, and political backgrounds. Such tolerance is a major foundation of democratic societies and polities” (p. 91). Providing students with intentional experiences that establish a feeling of interconnectedness based on shared attributes assists students in learning how to respectfully explore differences. Removing the fear of living and working with others, by teaching students to value similarities and differences is an invaluable life skill. While designing and refining core components of the college access program I direct, activities were designed to intentionally promote and reinforce concepts like Martin’s “three C’s”. Throughout the program students are reminded to use their relationships with adult mentors and one another to maximize the benefits program membership offers. While their end goal (successfully transitioning to college) is the same, they have different challenges to overcome and different resources available to them as they work to achieve it.
3. Self Knowledge

Students must also develop an understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses and be willing to accept direction and use criticism or challenges to enhance them. This is a key concept, because it is the skill students must rely on to select a major course of study or career option and it can help them persist when faced with unforeseen obstacles. Understanding what you are good at, what you enjoy, and what is a challenge is critical to exploring postsecondary options. As was revealed in Balduf’s research, students that had never faced academic challenges in high school were unaware of their own weaknesses and as a result, were unprepared to thrive in an environment that presented challenges.

When students have an opportunity to develop an understanding of self they are better equipped to make sound postsecondary choices. An important aspect of college selection, for example, is finding a college that meets your needs. Students need to understand whether they are best suited for a small campus with smaller class sizes and more staff interaction or if they are inspired by a much larger campus, with larger classes, and less staff interaction. Vincent Tinto’s research is widely used to identify causes for or to predict student dropout at the college level. In his early research, Tinto (1975) built on the work of Spady (1970) when he applied Durkheim’s theory of suicide, which states that suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society, to college dropouts. Tinto (1975) wrote,

One can reasonably expect, then, that social conditions affecting dropout from the social system of the college would resemble those resulting in suicide in the
wider society; namely, insufficient interactions with others in the college and insufficient congruency with the prevailing value patterns of the college collectivity. (pp. 91-92)

Having the ability to integrate socially on a campus is central to this argument and reinforces the need for students to recognize a good fit. For example, I take members of Destination College on college tours in the spring of their junior year. Students visit a small, 4-year, private, liberal art university, a small, 2-year, public, technical college, a large, 2-year, community college, and a mid-size, 4-year, public, urban university. After touring the campuses, speaking with current students, touring dorms, and listening to admissions and financial aid presentations, Destination College students have a better understanding of the differences between the institutions and have a sense of what setting they might be most comfortable in. This exposure helps them begin to narrow their search by specific types of institutions.

Other contributing factors to academically prepared students’ decision to leave an institution were the failure to connect to the campus social systems, financial problems, general dissatisfaction or desire to transfer elsewhere (Barefoot, 2010, p. 12). Making decisions about colleges or career choices can be a daunting task for many students. Not having a clear understanding of how college is different, what is expected, how skills and talents can lead to viable careers or majors, and what is required for success sets students up to make costly mistakes or to stumble upon a number of paths before figuring out what works. For families that can afford to finance their student’s self exploration a lack of self-knowledge might be of less concern. But, as the nation’s
leaders promote expanded access to postsecondary education, and encourage all citizens to pursue at a minimum one year of postsecondary training we must consider those with limited resources in the form of time and finances.

4. Self-Advocacy

Students must also develop the capacity to advocate for self-interests. Once on a campus, in a work, or military environment young adults are expected to make independent decisions and take responsibility for their own interactions. As such, they must be able to understand and advocate for their own interests. Freire (1970) analyzes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* the teacher-student relationship. As he critiques *banking education* where teachers only make deposits in receptacles (students) he offers *problem-posing education* as a reciprocal (teacher-students and students-teachers) and didactic distinction. While *banking education* renders students spectators in the learning process, *problem-posing education* relies on their contributions for learning to occur. According to Freire, it is through *problem-posing education* that teachers and students employ critical thinking and conversation to effectuate learning. Freire (1970) wrote,

>In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflection on the students. The students—no longer docile learners—are now critical co-investigator in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the materials to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. (p. 62)

It is through this reciprocal process that students can be taught to think critically and grow to feel empowered to approach situations that they might typically rely on others to reconcile. Self-advocacy much like self-knowledge is a competency developed through
exploration and opportunities to practice over time.

An example of self-advocacy and its import fits well in the university setting. When students take classes that challenge them beyond their abilities it can be difficult to make decisions about how to move forward. Students that have not previously faced adversity, like those in Balduf’s research, might respond by passively accepting a poor or failing grade in the course. Students that are trained to think critically will formulate a plan and begin to take steps to seek the support needed to be successful. They will take steps such as meeting with the professor during office hours to receive additional help, requesting additional work for opportunities to practice, make connections with students in class are having success, seek out tutoring and support resources on campus and so on. For those that are familiar with college, these actions might seem like the sensible thing to do. Unless students are aware of their options and approach college as problem-solving learners as opposed to being spectators in the classroom they will struggle in the environment. Rodriguez & Le (2011) support this assertion, they wrote, “Students were reluctant to seek out professors during their office hours or visit the college writing center because they feared that seeking help would stigmatize them.” (p. 80). They went on to write, “At the same time, they didn’t know that if they missed a due date, they could still advocate for themselves. Meanwhile, their savvier peers were negotiating late deadlines.” (2011, p. 80). The failure to teach students to speak on their own behalf greatly limits them. It is also important to note that several of the choice actions these students can take in the scenario given require possession of key
competencies discussed herein, like knowledge of self and developing relationships, which follows.

5. Building Support Systems

Austin (2000) opened *The Collaboration Challenge* with the following, “The twenty-first century will be the age of alliances. In this age, collaboration between nonprofit organizations and corporations will grow in frequency and strategic importance...These changes are already underway, and the changing alliance landscape is rich in variety...” (p. 1). Friedman’s (2005) *The World is Flat* builds on this idea of collaboration. Friedman offered seven rules for companies that he believed were critical for survival in a ‘flat’ world; the fourth rule addressed the need for collaboration. Friedman (2005) wrote, “The more flattening of the world connects more knowledge pools together, the more specializations and specialists there will be out there, the more innovation will come from putting them together in different combinations, and the more management will be about the ability to do just that“ (p. 353). Social media outlets like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook sustain perpetual connections and allow for immediate social or professional interactions regardless of time or space. It is for these reasons that it is imperative that students are capable of developing relationships. While much of the research on postsecondary transitions highlights the importance of students having relationships with teachers, counselors, or college advisers, there is a void in research that addresses the importance of teaching students how to initiate positive relationships. Again, students are often the beneficiaries, or victims, of their
relationships with others. If they do not have teachers and/or counselors planting seeds of promise in them they seem unaware that they can seek out the help they need.

The ability to initiate relationships requires many of the competencies listed above. Students must have knowledge of themselves. That knowledge will inform what they require from a relationship with someone else. So, if I revisit my prior example, if a student is struggling in a college course, s/he might be inclined to make a connection with a classmate that is doing well. Developing relationships also requires that students be able to work with others and advocate for their own interests. In the case of a mentoring relationship, students in my program are trained to set goals and to identify ways their mentors can help them reach those goals. It is then their responsibility to communicate those needs to their mentor and to draw from them the support they have requested.

In my experience, high school students don’t often have an abundance of positive relationships with adults. As a result, they find it difficult to approach adults and to ask for assistance. In many cases, I find, they simply do not know what questions to ask because they are unclear about what they need. Mentoring programs can be effective at providing students with the confidence they need to be proactive in developing relationships and a positive experience makes the benefits tangible and increases the likelihood that students will initiate new relationships.
6. Innovation in the Global Age

The understanding of innovation and its role in a global society is important because it can be used to help students think of their potential to shape the future in an ever-changing world. The ways people communicate, purchase and consume goods, and provide goods and services changes as frequently as the next brilliant idea is introduced to the market. According to Starkweather (2005) “innovation is happening at a very rapid pace around the world. Having been a leader in the past will not necessarily mean success in the future unless the ability to innovate is continually enhanced” (p. 28).

Today’s students must be trained to identify voids and think critically to create a niche for themselves in a rapidly changing world. They must be willing to continually seek new information and to reinvent themselves to secure their value in the market.

There is some doubt surrounding whether innovation can be taught, but Starkweather is a proponent of technology, innovation, design, and engineering (TIDE) K-12 education. His article details the need for and benefits of innovation as well as how TIDE teachers can incorporate its teaching into their practices. He wrote,

The development of talent goes hand in hand with education. It should start at the very earliest ages and continue in an organized manner throughout life...The talent needed in the future will be much different from the industrial economy of the past or the information economy that we are currently experiencing. People will be needed with different visions, approaches, and with action agendas. (2005, p. 29)

If we accept his observations as valid, it is important that we find ways to prepare students to think beyond today and anticipate future needs. In doing so, they will
develop the ability to remain open to change and to seek information that will enhance their potential to provide value in an evolving world.

The first five non-academic factors offered to expand the definition of ‘college and career readiness’ are embedded in the college access program I direct. While teaching innovation is not a component in my program, I have piloted an innovation/entrepreneurship module as a part of the program and appreciate its importance. During the innovation workshops, students were asked to take familiar objects, like a link chain, and brainstorm new uses for it. After multiple opportunities over several days to ‘think outside the box,’ students became more comfortable sharing ideas that were creative without being concerned about whether they were viable. My take away from the pilot experience was that it would take more time and practice than Destination College could offer for students to gain an understanding of innovation. As a result, I believe early and consistent exposure to this concept will help students exercise their ability to create without limitations.

Aside from understanding the role of innovation, the non-academic factors outlined in this chapter (adaptability, multicultural competence, self knowledge, self-advocacy, and relationship building) are not competencies that require educators undergo extensive training. In fact, they are tools that many adults have developed and use in their personal and professional lives. Incorporating them into lessons or daily classroom activities requires intention, but it can be done. These non-academic factors are also appropriate for students of all ages.
Preparation for life beyond high school does not begin in high school. Neither can we assume, as suggested by Martin (1992) and Etzioni (1993), that these are skills that will be introduced or developed in the home. Yet, the earlier students begin to put into practice these concepts and have controlled opportunities to practice the sooner they will become competent. As educators work to assist students in preparing for postsecondary acceptance and completion, they must incorporate these non-academic factors to set them up to excel inside the classroom and out.
CHAPTER III

THE PURPOSE AND IMPORT OF A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

The concept of culture, much like ‘college and career readiness’ is difficult to define. Culture is organic and specific to groups of people who share experiences, language, rituals, and values. According to Handwerker (2002), “culture consists, most simply, of the knowledge people use to live their lives and the way in which they do so” (p. 107). As I examine the purpose and import of schools’ establishing ‘college-going culture,’ I do so with the understanding that schools have an existing organizational culture. As organizations, schools embody unique cultures determined and influenced by its diverse members (Savitz-Romer & Weinstein, 2009). I contend that based on current education reform strategies to prepare all students for college and careers upon high school graduation that ‘college-going culture’ is a necessary organizational change solution.

In this chapter I will first argue that instituting a ‘college-going culture’ is a systemic change that frames the strategies aimed at priming all students for college and careers. As discussed in Chapter I, all students, regardless of their postsecondary choices, should be educated to the same high standard. Accordingly, I consider ‘college-going culture’ to include all postsecondary options including entry-level careers. Second, I will argue that because ‘college and career readiness’ are developed over time,
through intentional academic and non-academic experiences, establishing a ‘college-going culture’ is critical at all levels of P-12 education.

College-going Culture as a Systematic Reform

It would be naïve to suggest that students will become college and career ready solely as a result of improvements made to curriculum and instruction and student detracking. Deficiencies across the system must be identified and corrected before the strategies can be successful. One common deficiency within the *NCLB* system that is widely criticized is the tendency to teach to the test du jour. Houston’s (2007) research deemed “conflating testing with education” the second most “deadly” error made by educators since *NCLB* was introduced. He wrote,

> When student achievement is discussed, it has now come to mean test results. Yet the least sophisticated citizen among us understands that there is much more to education than what can be tested. When our sole emphasis is squarely on a single aspect of education, the entire process gets distorted. (p. 745)

Only when the system is reformed so that educators are able to address the underlying causes for poor student performance can quick-fix interventions or watered-down curriculum be discarded. The stakes are high within the current system. School districts and individual buildings face significant consequences when annual report cards feature low state indicators of student performance on achievement tests, unmet value-added measures and/or adequate yearly progress (AYP) over consecutive years. According to Peltier, Perreault, & Thornton (2004), “the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has interrupted the status quo of schools and has forced education leaders to reconsider various methods of organizational change” (p. 222). Holding states accountable to high
standards for student learning does not seem an unreasonable expectation. However, when accountability measures bring about limiting course content to generate specific results, the System is done a disservice.

I argue for establishing a ‘college-going culture’ as a systems approach to organizational change. Ludwig von Bertalanffy set the foundation for general systems theory. He adapted systems theory, which applies to biological systems, to systems in other disciplines including the social sciences. According to Bertalanffy (1972),

General systems theory requires, first, the exploration of the many systems in our observed universe in their own right and specificities. Second, it turns out that there are general aspects, correspondences, and isomorphisms common to ‘systems’...general systems theory, then, consists of the scientific exploration of ‘wholes’ and ‘wholeness’ which, not so long ago, were considered to be metaphysical notions transcending the boundaries of science. (p. 415)

Schools are a specific type of system, and “general systems theory provides concepts that are useful for understanding and analyzing the functioning of schools and the broader context in which they function” (Bowen, 2004, p. 61). Systems thinking, identified by Peter Senge as the fifth discipline that “learning organizations” exhibit “is the ability to understand (and sometimes to predict) interactions and relationships in complex, dynamic systems: the kinds of systems we [educators] are surrounded by and embedded in’” (See Peltier et al., 2004, p. 222). Additionally, “systems thinking requires leaders to see the whole school as a complex organization with many interdependent components” (Peltier et al., 2004, p. 222). By reforming the System using the framework of a ‘college-going culture’ and a systems thinking approach, school districts can identify the root causes for student performance deficits and work to correct them.
Systems thinking is used to identify, understand, and develop solutions for the root causes of problems within large, complex organizations. Non-systemic thinking produces short-term solutions, which over time can make a problem worse. For example, when students fail OGT science they are scheduled into an intervention course designed to help them pass the next administration. In this course the students will focus on correctly answering the types of questions that make up the science test. However, science teachers will not receive individual or aggregate data on all the students that failed OGT science in order to establish where the learning gaps are or to identify data trends. The intervention course might help students pass OGT science, but it neither informs classroom instruction nor reveals the root cause(s) for student failures. Peltier et al., note that “holistic analyses of problems are required. Instead of pushing harder on the various components of the system, leaders need to foster organizational learning, identify root causes of low achievement, and then systematically make adjustments” (2004, p. 223). The reauthorization of NCLB and more rigorous accountability measures for school districts and students is forcing districts to examine organizational change. School districts’ abilities to create lasting change will be determined by their willingness to reform the System instead of employing multiple strategies designed to address separate challenges.

A Framework for Creating a ‘College-Going Culture’

Instituting a ‘college-going culture’ within an existing system is not an easy task. Some might refer to it as a “Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG)” a phrase coined by Collins
Porras (1995). BHAGs are defined when organizations set out to make lasting and visionary systems change. As aforementioned, to facilitate lasting change the System must change not just its internal components. Systems change with respect to organizational culture requires a radical modification in the beliefs and expectations of everyone in the system. Savitz-Romer & Weinstein’s (2009) research reinforces this inclusive understanding:

When a school establishes a college-going culture, it conveys a commitment to ensuring that all students have access to adults who hold high expectations and support for postsecondary success. Building such a culture requires consciously designing, structuring, and organizing the institution so that it promotes successful outcomes for all students. (pp. 2-3)

Establishing a ‘college-going culture,’ therefore, normalizes expectations for all students regardless of their future choices.

I use Schoen & Teddlie’s (2008) model of school culture, as a framework for examining the utility of ‘college-going culture’. Schoen & Teddlie (2008) developed this model after examining the diverse and ambiguous definitions of culture. They sought to clarify the concepts of school culture and school climate because of their interchangeable usage in school effectiveness research and their unification as levels of the same concept in theories of organizational management. Four separate groups of indicators of culture emerged across the works surveyed, which Schoen & Teddlie refer to as ‘the Dimensions of Culture’ (2008, p. 139). The four dimensions presented in their model of school culture are:

Professional Orientation – the activities and attitudes that characterize the degree of professionalism present in the faculty;
Organizational Structure – the style of leadership communication and processes that characterize the way the school conducts business;

Quality of the Learning Environment – the intellectual merit of the activities in which students are typically engaged; and

Student-Centered Focus – the collective efforts and programs offered to support student achievement. (2008, p. 140)

‘College going culture’ embodies each of these dimensions and as such offers a systemic solution for P-12 school reform that provides context for the goal that all students graduate college and career ready. I will use each of the four dimensions to examine their applicability in the formation of a ‘college-going’ culture within the P-12 education system.

The first two dimensions offered in the school culture model by Schoen and Teddlie (2008), Professional Orientation and Organizational Structure undergird the academic and non-academic factors, specified in Chapter II, that result in students becoming college and career ready. First, they require a shift that moves educators from non-systemic thinking to systems thinking, which elevates potential solutions to poor student performance.

When explicating Professional Orientation, defined as the activities and attitudes that characterize the degree of professionalism present in the faculty (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008), we must examine the expectations staff have for all students and the ways in which they support and work with one another. Within a ‘college-going culture,’ staff has high expectations for all students. Staff work in support of one another to
communicate and reinforce shared expectations and to assist students in meeting the expectations as outlined. So while each (administrator, counselor, and teacher) have specific roles, they also assume a shared responsibility for communicating and helping students reach clear goals. Savitz-Romer & Weinstein (2009) assert,

School leaders must articulate clear goals that demand shared responsibility for promoting a college-going culture...A pervasive college-going culture rests on a sense of shared responsibility among staff, and a clear process for teachers, counselors, and administrators to be interconnected and interdependent of one another. (p. 8)

In practice, interconnectedness and interdependence would be exhibited by administrators working with counselors on class schedules to ensure that teachers have shared planning time during the day to collaborate. Teachers will use that planning time to analyze student data, identify content weaknesses and trends, and share ideas (within and across disciplines) and develop strategies to address weaknesses. Teachers will then report findings and strategies for improvement to administrators.

Unpacking Organizational Structure, defined as the style of leadership communication and processes that characterize the way the school conducts business (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) requires that we examine the processes used to perpetuate, in this example, ‘college-going culture.’ Schools can ensure that staff is communicating a shared message, upholding standards of excellence for all, and providing the support that enables students to meet expectations by implementing processes that clarify professional expectations and hold staff accountable. The organization’s commitment to ‘college-going culture’ should be embedded in its mission and vision, job descriptions,
and staff performance evaluations. Miller & Siri (2001) described the range and interrelatedness of processes. They wrote, “These systems include aligning mission and goals, tracking data to drive decision-making, empowering staff and students, and establishing classroom learning processes and continuous improvement cycles of those processes to ensure learning is taking place” (p. 13). Furthermore, the way in which staff communicates with students, parents, and the community and the partnerships they form should clearly convey a commitment to excellence for all, as evidenced by students graduating college and career ready.

These system changes are needed in order to facilitate the level of work that is expected of educators and students alike. I recognize, however, that system change and systems thinking are not easy. Savitz-Romer & Weinstein (2009) pointed out that changes of this magnitude “must be accompanied by the availability of professional development, training, and information for teachers and other staff to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence integrating college-going behaviors into curriculum and daily practice” (p. 8). It is unrealistic to assume that school staff understand or have expertise in transmitting the academic and non-academic factors needed to prepare students for college and careers simply because they have earned a college degree(s).

The last two dimensions, Quality of the Learning Environment, defined as the intellectual merit of the activities in which students are typically engaged and Student-Centered Focus, defined as the collective efforts and programs offered to support student achievement can be addressed through standards reforms like the Ohio Core
and the Common Core, which if used to their full potentials will require that supports be implemented to help all students meet goals. Learning experiences must prepare students to think critically, transfer knowledge to different settings, and solve problems. Additionally, the learning environment must be conducive to assisting students in developing the non-academic factors outlined in Chapter II. Educators set the tone and atmosphere by establishing and upholding expectations for student success by providing opportunities for students to inquire, explore, practice, and refine key academic and non-academic skills. In Roberson’s (2011) work on creating a ‘culture of possibility,’ he specifically defined the objectives of student-centered learning. He wrote,

Student-centered learning should be a time of curiosity, exploration, and inquiry to solve real problems found in the real world outside the classroom. But even more, it should help students become more comfortable with ambiguity, thinking logically as well as creatively, formulating alternative perspectives and points-of-view, and taking risks in finding entry points to problems as well as trying out alternative solutions to solve problems. (2011, p. 895)

Providing students with opportunities to learn in ways that make relevant their experiences both in the classroom and out ultimately facilitates student success by connecting what they are learning to what they are expected to do and will continue in the future. Therefore, students that progress within a ‘college-going culture’ toward ‘college and career readiness’, not just graduation, as the goal are empowered to reflect on their knowledge, interests, and abilities when considering a full range of postsecondary options.
College-Going Culture at Every Level

From my experiences, waiting until high school to begin thinking about and preparing for college and careers is too late. Additionally, imparting self awareness, an appreciation for diversity, self advocacy, adaptability, relationship development, and global understanding takes time, intentional instruction, and on-going practical experiences, which can begin at the earliest levels of education. A distinction between first-generation college students and second- or third-generation students is that ‘college-going culture’ is an integral part of their family culture. Their families expose them to college environments through sporting or alumni events, communicate and reinforce expectations of college attendance, model networking and relationship development, make provisions by opening college savings accounts, and even dress them in college gear at very young ages. It is not unusual to see clothing or accessories (bibs, hats, etc.) for newborns showing off the university seal prominently placed in campus bookstores. Postsecondary education for these students is assumed. System thinking would lead educational leaders toward the determination that students should not be deprived of the experiences that will assist them in preparing for their futures simply because of where they live or the family they were born into. Establishing a ‘college-going culture’ beginning with early childhood education and continuing seamlessly through high school normalizes these experiences for all students and sets the expectation for P-16 experiences from the outset.
Within the current system, students that are unsuccessful in mastering content standards are often pushed along and the learning gaps widen. As these students move through the system, they are passively received at the next level, yet educators actively blame the former (school) for inadequately preparing students. For example, when children enter kindergarten unable to identify letters, numbers, shapes, and colors teachers fault parents or pre-school providers for failing to adequately prepare them for Kindergarten. These students enter school with a significant learning gap and teachers feel pressured to close the gap before moving students along to the next grade.

Likewise, when students with learning gaps transition or are socially promoted from elementary to middle school, educators take the position that they are inheriting problems that should have been addressed in elementary school. At each level, educators are helplessly receiving students, but assigning blame to those formerly in control. Instituting a P-12 ‘college-going culture’ would require that processes be in place to address setbacks immediately. Miller and Siri (2001) explained this idea well when they wrote, “Students who fall behind are identified as each standards element is taught, and extra support is provided immediately before the class moves too far into the next standards element” (p. 14). This is a clear illustration of Schoen & Teddlie’s (2008) Student-Centered Focus. If we revisit systems thinking a law of the discipline is “there is no blame” (Peltier et al., 2004). Instead, systems thinking assumes that schools can improve student achievement regardless of external circumstances (Peltier et al., 2004). Miller & Siri (2001) said of the Baldrige in Education approach, which adapts
business organizational management strategies to school improvement work, “Focusing on continuous improvement as a ‘way of doing business’ takes the blame out of any system. The Baldrige approach places emphasis on improving district, school and classroom processes – not on blaming individuals” (p. 13). If school systems would begin by breaking down internal silos and operate as partners, colleges, high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, and early childhood education providers can truly create a P-16 continuum with a shared mission and vision ensuring that all students are equipped to make the transition to the next level.

Schools systems are complex organizations that are not easily changed. To effectively establish a ‘college-going culture’ would require that members of the system be willing to modify their professional practice, adopt a shared vision, work in support of one another, and use a systems thinking approach, particularly when working to improve student achievement. Change does not have to be initiated by the head of the organization. Yet, in this context where the recommendation is to change the culture at all educational levels so as to ensure equal and early preparation for college and careers, which begins with reframing the mission and vision, top-down change is likely a good starting point.
CHAPTER IV

LAUNCHING MEANINGFUL P-16 PARTNERSHIPS

When education reform is mentioned, I, like many people, think of public P-12 education and higher education separately. It is true that they are independent systems, but they are interrelated in that they provide a similar and valuable service to the communities where they are located. Both systems train citizens to be knowledgeable and capable members of society. The paradigm shift from 4-year universities serving as the training ground for the elite to a range of institutions offering a menu of postsecondary educational options available to and recommended for most has dramatically altered the relationship between P-12 and higher education systems. This shift leads me to consider the potential higher education faculty members have in shaping their potential future students.

The War on Poverty campaign and Higher Education Act of 1965 birthed university-based college access programs like TRiO (Upward Bound Classic, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Upward Bound Math & Science, Pre-Engineering, McNair Scholars, etc.), that serve low-income and underrepresented populations of varied ages. Yet, colleges and universities are probably more well-known for collaborating with local school districts on initiatives like Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) and Dual Enrollment. These programs serve high school students that
are often socially mature and academically advanced enough to take credit-bearing courses in a university setting while still earning their high school credits for graduation. Tuition is typically subsidized by the home school district, which affords students an opportunity to reduce the time and expense of earning a college degree once they have completed high school. In other cases, high school teachers with adjunct faculty status can offer courses for college credit at the high school, which saves the school district and the student money.

Over the past ten years, colleges/universities have expanded partnerships with school districts to include more formal college access initiatives like Early College High School and Seniors to Sophomores (StS). These initiatives widen postsecondary opportunities to underrepresented, low-income, and/or first-generation students. Early College High School students (grades 9-12) are often immersed in a university setting where they simultaneously earn high school and college credits. By the time they graduate, students should have completed their general education requirements towards a Bachelor’s degree, or have earned an Associate’s degree.

Seniors to Sophomores (StS), introduced in 2008 by former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, is a dual enrollment program that affords high school seniors, with a 2.0 grade point average, the ability to spend their senior year taking first-year college courses that count as credits for both high school and college. If enough credits are earned, students enter college in sophomore standing. This program also widens access to college because of the lower grade point average requirement. Traditional Dual
Enrollment and PSEO students are typically required to meet a minimum 3.0 grade point average. Nevertheless, all of these partnerships, when done well, are valuable because they give students an early start on their postsecondary education without having to carrying the financial burden of tuition. The drawback is that these opportunities are typically, by design, only available to a limited number of students and are concentrated at the end of the educational pipeline (grades 9-12). As was discussed in Chapter II, all students should receive equal preparation to become college and career ready. A disparity exists when program limitations, not related to eligibility, prevent students from participating.

If it’s never too early to think about college and careers, and we aim to reform the system by establishing a ‘college-going culture,’ it is imperative to create P-16 partnerships that also expose elementary and middle school students to college and careers. Again, children with college educated adults in their immediate families are often introduced to campuses at very early ages through cultural or sporting events. Students without immediate family members with college degrees have a difficult time conceptualizing what college is really like. I often find myself advising my juniors and seniors to take advantage of the assistance and chances they given because college is nothing like high school and I give them examples of the differences. Still, many come back after their first year to tell me that I was right; they heard me but they didn’t really understand what I meant. These students didn’t have experiences or context to connect my advice to. While connecting students to campuses in high school is beneficial,
universities have tremendous opportunities to work with elementary and middle schools to demystify what happens and is expected of students at the college level.

Beyond opportunities to open the doors to college classrooms and campuses to children of all ages, colleges/universities have a critical role in assisting P-12 educators in preparing students for college and careers. Herein, I will make two arguments. First, P-16 educators must collaborate to establish systems alignment regarding readiness standards and maintain communication to inform practice between the systems. Kirst (2004) supports this thinking and offered strategies to reverse this problem. His first strategy was that K-12 educators must include college stakeholders when standards and assessments are developed and revised. And, K-12 educators should participate when postsecondary education admission and placement policies are under review (p. 54). It is through this type of collaboration that P-12 educators can ascertain a clear understanding of academic expectations at the college level, and in doing so can make adjustments to the curriculum to ensure that students are learning requisite skills. If we consider the integration of the Common Core’s K-12 college and career readiness anchor standards, we realize the purpose and timeliness of partaking in this type of sharing can be mutually beneficial.

Second, I argue that colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide professional development for P-12 educators and participate in providing transitional programming at the secondary level to ease the transition to college. These enhancements will ensure that teachers/counselors/administrators understand the
standard processes students are required to undergo to gain entrance and be successful or earn pre-college credits including admissions, financial aid, articulation and transfer (Dual Enrollment, StS, etc.), and diagnostic assessments. As was presented in Chapter III, a ‘college-going culture’ is successful, in part, as a result of the shared responsibility of staff for student outcomes. When teachers and counselors understand university enrollment processes they are better able to share information with parents, support students in the classroom and through advisory, and establish reciprocal feedback with university partners to monitor progress and success. Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos (2009) suggested,

A feedback loop to high schools from postsecondary on student success: high school and college transcripts include college course grades and call attention to how well courses are sequenced between high school and college and how well high schools are preparing students for college work. (p. 56)

These types of strategies for practice raise the effectiveness of secondary educators while reducing the long-term responsibility on university professionals. Sharing knowledge in this respect leverages the opportunity for universities to reach more students and families with information that could positively influence their aspirations and behaviors.

The P-16 partnerships aforementioned, while expanding access to postsecondary opportunities, do not go far enough to assist students with readiness as measured by college degree attainment. For example, in 2009, in Florida where P-16 strategies are supported by state legislation, only 25.3 percent of their residents age 25 or older had earned a Bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census, 2012). This data is likely to improve as younger
students begin to anticipate taking college classes while in high school, and as the feedback loops between higher education and the P-12 system provide more accurate information, but focusing on the end of the educational continuum is not enough. When students with college aspirations understand how to access college, what their options are, and what makes them eligible for college or pre-college programs, they are more apt to make decisions that will help them meet those requirements. Timing, however, is imperative. Sharing this information when students are in the 11th or 12th grade is less useful because their future options (participation in Dual Enrollment, StS, etc.) and college readiness will be based on actions and decisions that were made in earlier grades.

P-16 Partners: Collaboration and Communication

Partnerships between P-12 schools and higher education institutions are desirable yet challenging. Because they are such distinct systems, there is no single and simple partnership strategy that can be put into practice to create alignment. Hoffman et al. (2009) wrote, “these partnerships are challenging to build and sustain precisely because the country’s secondary and postsecondary systems are, by design, disconnected and uncoordinated” (p. 56). However, because college is the environment P-12 schools are working to prepare students to thrive in, and colleges have an interest in the preparedness of future students, P-16 partnerships intuitively make sense. Further without such partnerships, the two education systems will continue to miss out
on the chance to assuage remediation rates and risk the creation of a second-rate university system.

For meaningful changes to occur both systems must be willing to collaborate. Kirst (2004) affirmed, “Reforms across the two education systems will be difficult to implement without meaningful communication and coordinated policymaking between the levels” (p. 54). States that have a P-16 organization in place to assist with strategic partnering, data sharing, fundraising, and advocacy have an easier time managing the collaboration challenge. They are also providing useful examples and outcomes that could impact educational policy over time. For example, Florida, according to Hoffman et al. (2009), has one of the most highly articulated and centralized public education systems in the country. There, all community colleges and selected 4-year colleges are mandated by state legislation to offer dual-credit courses to high school students. But, their comprehensive data management system is a coveted model for other states. Hoffman, et al. (2009) reported, “Florida’s comprehensive K-10 education data warehouse is the nation’s leader in the linking of student-level data across K-12 and postsecondary institutions” (p. 50). As a coordinating member of a county-wide P-16 Coalition (Ohio does not have a state-wide policymaking P-16 body), I can attest to the challenge in securing gapless, aligned educational data. The lack of clear and reciprocal transitions data, graduation data, and college retention and completion data make setting goals, analyzing performance, and analyzing progress or success arduous. The
formation of clear systems of communication, resource sharing, and strategic planning will go a long way to establish meaningful P-16 partnerships that benefit both systems.

**Professional Development and Closing the Gap**

To be effective in addressing P-16 partnerships, colleges/universities must work to expand the knowledge of current education professionals. In making this argument, my intent is not to devalue the education, experiences, or practice of current educators. On the contrary, it is to advocate for the updating of knowledge for a very passionate and influential group of professionals. As was recorded in Chapter III, Savitz-Romer & Weinstein (2009) detailed reasoning for providing this type of professional development to educators so they are empowered and have the competence and confidence to incorporate ‘college and career readiness’ strategies into their modus operandi. Kirst & Venezia (2001) support this point, they wrote, “From our research, we found that few teachers, counselors, and administrators have much knowledge of college admission and placement policies. Without such knowledge, they cannot transmit accurate information to students” (p. 94).

Education professionals have experiences, information, and collegial relationships that can lay the groundwork for enhancements of their professional practice. Because many K-12 educational professionals are also required to complete a specific amount of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) within a set timeframe to maintain their certification(s)/licensure(s), there is an opening to include trainings on a number of topics. Topics should include: 1) admissions requirements; 2) financial aid-
how to interpret a Student Aid Report (SAR); 3) how to qualify for and access programs like Dual Enrollment; and 4) articulation and transfer and credit banking. Oftentimes, this information in part, or in total, is regarded as the counselor’s domain. However, present day student-to-counselor ratios and time spent attending to students’ social issues or external challenges makes ownership of college planning impractical. The more knowledgeable teachers/counselors/administrators are about postsecondary options and planning the more capable and comfortable they will be to communicate with all students about their futures.

A number of K-12 districts are also employing professional learning communities (PLCs) to fortify their professional practice. Much like the example of CEUs within PLCs exists opportunities for educators to address system changes and develop expertise in specific content areas. Bausmith & Barry (2011) suggest the best use for teacher PLCs, where the Common Core State Standards have been adopted, is to focus on pedagogical content knowledge (p. 175). It is their position that using PLCs to present examples of expert teaching via video lessons, indexed to the Common Core, will ultimately affect student knowledge and learning. They wrote, “The development of such a library of lessons would provide a rich resource for the improvement of teacher practice, thereby affording equitable access to clear college and workforce readiness expectations for all” (p. 176). Both of these options provide initial points of access to assist education professionals in becoming more effective and proactive in their interrelated roles as the requirements for students and accountability for educators and districts are amplified.
My work with a network of educators (administrators, counselors, and teachers) to create ‘college-going culture’ in their respective schools was borne out of a county-wide P-16 alliance. Although there is higher education representation on the coordinating group for the Network, the level of collaboration that I argue for in this chapter does not exist. That is not to say that the local universities are not vital partners in this and other P-12 initiatives, but we have not taken a systems approach to partnering. Yet, the Network members welcome the possibilities that creating a ‘college-going culture’ can have on their students’ overall educational experiences and postsecondary preparation. They are using their schools’ performance data, college readiness assessment data, strengths and weaknesses around postsecondary transitions, and their graduates’ college remediation rates in math and English to devise strategies to better prepare students for postsecondary experiences. They request professors (of first-year students) as speakers to share the specific learning gaps incoming college freshmen have. Yet, they struggle with expanding their sense of shared responsibility and their belief in the importance of instituting a ‘college going culture’ beyond their small teams to their extended network of colleagues. If professional development opportunities like those I have outlined were available and required, some of the groundwork for shared practice would be laid.

University partners should also provide direct support to create a seamless transition for students from high school to college. An example of a community college that has created such a ‘bridge program’ is chronicled in a case study by Whitmire &
Esch (2010). They wrote about Northern Virginia Community College, known as NOVA, and their work with local “underprepared” high school students. Six years ago NOVA created a program called *Pathway to the Baccalaureate (Pathway)* to create a pipeline from high school (Fairfax County) to community college (NOVA) to a four-year college (George Mason University). *Pathway* uses the expertise of university professionals, called transition counselors, to recruit and work directly with high school students, particularly first-generation students motivated to attain a bachelor’s degree, to shepherd them through the transition to college. Once students are enrolled in NOVA retention counselors support them and provide information and resources they need to be successful (p. 3). This hands-on approach to advising is similar to that used by Ohio College Access Network (OCAN) member programs. College access advisors, employed by supporting community organizations, work in local high schools to assist students with college planning. These programs, like NOVA, typically serve first-generation students.

Whitmire & Esch (2010) highlighted four strategies that other colleges can extricate from the Pathway example. The first is integrated student-centered services. Pathway counselors use a case management approach so that the Transition and Retention Counselors serve as one-stop contacts for students (p. 11). Second, are mandatory counseling and skill-building classes, which are designed to ensure that students receive continuous guidance as well as develop study skills and the ability to overcome challenges that could jeopardize college completion (p. 12). Third, they note,
the ongoing counselor-student relationships. Counselors develop relationships with students and provide guidance prior to them becoming college students and continue to work with students through their transition to a four-year college. The fourth strategy listed is the active recruitment of ‘nontraditional’ students. The unique program design begins with high school students with college aspirations but that often aren’t considered college material by their school counselors or families (p. 13). This is an important strategy because it provides support for students who have the potential and desire to be successful in college, but lack the experience to take the necessary steps.

NOVA offers much for colleges/universities to consider regarding P-16 partnerships to assist at-risk students, particularly in the existing system where high school counselors do not have the resources to provide intensive individual support. However, their second strategy – mandatory counseling and skill-building classes, which are designed to ensure that students receive continuous guidance as well as develop study skills and the ability to overcome challenges that could jeopardize college completion – offers an important resource to high schools as they work to develop non-academic factors in all students for ‘college and career readiness.’ Rodrigues & Le (2011) described a partnership between Worchester Public Schools and Clark University, a school called University Park. University Park, at the high school level, uses the senior year to transition students into college freshmen. The program emphasizes dual enrollment courses, provides students with opportunities for “controlled failure” by making students more responsible and independent, and requiring a college-success
Rodrigues & Le wrote, "Topics covered in the class, which meets twice weekly, include how to study for a test, how to read a syllabus, how to create a schedule and manage free time productively, and how to navigate a college website. The classes are taught by University Park faculty members" (2011, p. 82). Many universities offer this type of course during the freshman year as a retention strategy. However, the commitment to offer such a course at high schools the spring before graduation helps all students feel more assured about managing life outside of the classroom.

Partnerships like those aforementioned are beneficial for students at the end of the P-16 continuum. It is not sufficient to maintain our focus solely on 11th and 12th graders. To optimize preparation for college and careers, a number of P-16 strategies should be targeted at the elementary and middle grades. Additionally, not all readiness activities must be directly linked to physically attending college. In my work with Destination College I often look for ways to incorporate programming that gives my students (11th graders) opportunities to simultaneously practice skills and experience something new. For example, during the initial meeting after their induction into Destination College the staff works with the students to present impromptu skits on how (and why) to RSVP for events. It is a fun activity that explains RSVP etiquette and translates easily into conversations about accountability. As a follow up, less than a month after this activity, students are mailed an invitation that requests an RSVP. Students receive these types of mailings throughout the program, and at the end of their senior year they still struggle with meeting deadlines or calling in their responses.
without receiving a verbal reminder, or their parents make the call for them. To be certain, if I were able to secure funding that facilitated expanding Destination College services in earlier grades, I would do so. And, in doing so, I suspect that the support the program provides at the high school level would become much more experiential as the students moved up in grades. So, instead of working to build competencies at the 11th and 12th grade, I could focus on providing them opportunities to practice skills they have already developed in a controlled environment. Activities that build the non-academic factors necessary for ‘college and career readiness’ as in the example given, can go a long way in setting the foundation for children that might not receive this preparation in the home. P-16 partnerships should expand access to postsecondary opportunities particularly for students closest to making the transition from high school to postsecondary education. However, to build capacity we cannot ignore the opportunities that are available at the beginning of the continuum.

In Ohio, the lack of a state-supported P-16 advocate group makes managing a meaningful P-16 partnership difficult. Ohio, an 88 county state is a diverse collection of urban, rural, and suburban communities, which makes policy making from a one-size-fits-all perspective undesirable. However, creating one database similar to the one in Florida that provides consistent and aligned data would go a long way in helping community-based P-16 alliances set measurable goals. For example, in Summit County, Ohio the goal of our P-16 Alliance is to increase the percentage of high school graduates that enroll in postsecondary education to 80 percent by 2017. This goal was established,
because it could be measured using the existing data provided annually by the Ohio Board of Regents. However, the Alliance, when formed, believed that the highest impact could be made by focusing on early childhood education and preparing children to enter kindergarten. The research on the return on investment in early childhood education clearly stated that most impact could be made when working with children from birth to four-years old. However, the fragmented departmentalization of early childhood programming in Ohio – funding and programming provided through multiple agencies like the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services – as well as the absence of reliable third-party data or standardized early learning requirements, led to our decision to begin with a goal that we could measure.

As stated in Chapter III, changes in the system do not have to be initiated by the leadership at the top. However, in a context where desired changes come from within the system, in this case P-16 education, support and/or resources must be made available to advance the work.

The initiatives that can be developed through P-16 partnerships are innumerable. With cooperation, adequate space, information sharing, and financial resources much can be done to facilitate seamless transitions for students along the P-16 continuum. Meaningful P-16 work is a challenge. In states that lack a governing structure that supports or facilitates P-16 initiatives, the challenge is even greater. But, as education reform requires more accountability of both systems the incentive to collaborate becomes more visible.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In Chapter II of this study, I examined the importance of adopting a clear and comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ as a P-16 reform initiative. I offered a definition that builds on those that focus on academic readiness by proposing six non-academic factors – adaptability, multicultural competence, self knowledge, self-advocacy, relationship building and understanding the role of innovation in a global market – that I believe are critical to student success in postsecondary experiences. In Chapter III, I examined the promise that establishing a ‘college-going culture,’ as an organizational change strategy, offers to educational systems, particularly those seeking lasting change and in improving low student performance. In Chapter IV, I outlined the need for meaningful partnerships between the education systems (P-12 and higher education) toward increasing ‘college and career readiness’ among students. In brief, I, in this study, sought to provide a holistic reform strategy that addressed the roles of key education stakeholders (state education policymakers, K-12 and higher education systems, community partners, educators, and students).

Providing a comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ that includes academic and non-academic factors goes further to ensure that all students are prepared for postsecondary experiences. As Raley (2007) wrote,
smart students who lose track of time, fail to study or to study properly, and do not value academic success may be less likely to pass enough classes to graduate than are less gifted students, who, despite not earning As, study diligently and manage their time well. (p. 76)

Identifying the skills that help students persist in postsecondary experiences gives all education stakeholders a common goal and clearly outlines the expectations. A commonly held, comprehensive definition of ‘college and career readiness’ will also help connect the need for more ‘rigorous’ and ‘relevant’ curriculum that moves all students toward being prepared for college and careers. Opportunities to address learning gaps and misaligned academic expectations can be explored as curriculum reforms, like the Common Core, are incorporated into teaching and learning expectations. As Conley (2011) wrote, “As educators begin to translate the common core state standards into practice, they have a new opportunity to think about what is important” (p. 20). Learning standards that require higher-order thinking and result in a depth of knowledge will aid students in becoming active learners who are able to transfer their knowledge to other settings.

Complementing academic mastery with critical non-academic competencies elevates the goal of ‘college and career readiness.’ The importance of being able to adapt to changing environments should not be underestimated. When students are uncomfortable outside of their primary environments or do not recognize the need to modify their actions based on the setting, they can struggle. They risk offending others and/or limiting their own potential because of their discomfort in the environment. Providing students with opportunities to participate in activities that require them to
dress or act in accordance to the setting will instill valuable college and career skills. Further, preparing students to think and act in their own best interests will serve them well regardless of their postsecondary choices. As Freire (1970) asserted, “authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication” (p. 58). It is through learning to effectively communicate with others and actively participating in their own learning that students are empowered to partner in shaping their experiences. In addition, when using the examples provided by Martin (1992) and Etzioni (1993), in considering schools the “moral equivalent of home” to impart skills, previously taught in the home, we must help them identify their connection to others despite differences. And, in doing so, recognize the importance of establishing a foundation for their relationships based on their similarities to enable a respectful dialogue about differences. As I consider the concept of the “moral equivalent of home” in this context, creating a ‘college-going culture’ provides a fitting alternative when ‘college and career readiness’ is the goal.

When establishing a ‘college-going culture’ in schools where the expectation is that all students are prepared for college and careers, it is important that strategies are designed to benefit all students. Kirst & Venezia (2001) asserted, “The effort to provide this information (college requirements) must go beyond targeted outreach and fragmented categorical programs to universal programs for all students” (p. 96). As was detailed in Chapter III, staff engaged in contributing to a ‘college-going culture’ recognize that all students regardless of their postsecondary interests must be prepared
at the same high level to be ready for college or careers upon high school graduation.

Instituting a ‘college-going culture’ is not about limiting students’ choices, but rather creating the environment that supports the full range of potential interests.

As a college access professional, I have had opportunities to speak with stakeholders from different sectors that have a genuine interest in the success of our youth. On occasion, I have been presented with a concerned question immediately followed by an assumption (Why are we trying to get all students ready for college? It is not for everyone!). While there is value in the question, there is also an underlying assumption that concerns me because I cannot think of one object/circumstance/opportunity that is for everyone. Not everyone wants to be a doctor, not everyone likes sports, and so on. If we assume then that college isn’t for everyone, who determines what is the appropriate postsecondary placement for a student? As educators, I believe our role is to allow students to set their aspirations and to support them in doing their best to make that aspiration a reality. When students don’t have a clear understanding of a career or what is academically required to be accepted at particular university, they can develop idealized and misaligned expectations. However, that is a reflection of their preparation and exposure to information about colleges and careers, not of the aspirations or efforts of the students. Establishing a ‘college-going culture’ that begins the work with the youngest students and filling them with information and experiences along the way is a systems-thinking
approach that removes blame and focuses on grooming students to maximize their potential.

One way to provide experiences that strengthen ‘college-going culture’ and prepare students for ‘college and career readiness’ at all educational levels is through strategic P-16 partnerships. Current efforts, as evidenced by existing P-16 initiatives like *Dual Enrollment* and *Early College High School*, are directed at high school students that are closest to making the transition from high school to postsecondary opportunities. However, many of these initiatives do not go far enough to widen access for all students. The most successful of these partnerships, as explained by Hoffman et al. (2009) taking place in Florida, widens student access to college by offering all students the opportunity to earn college credits while in high school and use transition and persistence data to facilitate feedback loops that keep the two systems with clear goals in mind. However, the lack of coordinated P-16 partnerships in every state with the resources to develop strategies or advocate for change leaves many states/communities with well intended leaders that do not have the capacity to drive large-scale coordination.

Many P-12 systems are still working to ramp up academic rigor with the aim of graduates being college and career ready. Higher education institutions are using remedial courses in math and English, bridge programs, freshman seminars, and learning and living communities to assist first-year students in college persistence. The lack of a common vision, or expectations of what it means to be college and career
ready, along with a void in coordinated efforts to bridge expectations gaps continues to result in high remediation rates and lackluster college completion rates. I am hopeful that the convergence of changing academic standards that are aligned with academic readiness expectations and an expansion of the definition of college and career readiness will result in fewer students graduating unprepared for life beyond high school. However, I believe that P-16 partnerships are better served to initiate their work developing the knowledge and competencies, particularly those I have identified as key non-academic factors of readiness, in elementary and middle school students.

Recommendations for Future Research

A consideration for future research in the area of creating ‘college-going culture’ to support college and career readiness goals is to explore the need for Colleges of Education to redesign their degree programs so that pre-service teachers and school counselors are required to understand the range of postsecondary options and their role in assisting students in developing a postsecondary plan. To fully investigate the potential benefit of systems change, a next step would be to assess the system that trains educators. I focus on educator training (administrators, counselors, and teachers) as opposed to parent engagement because the P-12 education profession requires specific skills when the focus is preparing students for college and careers. As aforementioned in Chapter IV, if administrators, counselors, and teachers were versed in college access information such as programs like Dual Enrollment and StS and the college admissions and financial aid processes they could share responsibility for
providing the information to all students. Moreover, if the goal is to prepare students for college and careers upon high school graduation and educators are not being prepared to do so beginning in the primary grades, both the P-12 system and higher education will continue to work in response to challenges that arise related to student remediation, retention, or professional development needs for educators. This is a P-16 partnership that should be addressed respectfully in a separate study, but has significant implications on shaping lasting change within P-16 education systems.

A second consideration for future research is that of decoupling schooling and education. The writings of Martin (1992) and Etzioni (1993) detail the need for schools to assume responsibilities, like teaching values and social skills, which were previously held by nuclear families. While I do believe schools can use concepts like Martin’s “three Cs – care, concern, and connection” to manage classrooms and interpersonal interactions, I do not believe schools should take on absolute responsibility for imparting these values. Education and schooling are not one in the same. Learning can take place anywhere. Early childhood initiatives like Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) Ohio teach parents to be their child’s (ages 0-4) first teacher by using daily tasks like doing laundry to teach counting, colors, sorting, and shapes. Additionally, as was discussed in Chapter II, the adoption of the Common Core affords states the opportunity to focus on providing an education that prepares students for life beyond high school. Students must learn skills in the classroom and master them so that they are transferable to other relevant settings. For example, if students learn about
units of measure in the classroom they should be able to use appropriate units and the related tools (measuring cups and spoons) to cook. Families can offer ongoing opportunities and have ultimate responsibility for supporting the learning of their children. A research study of this type also has potentially significant implications for school districts, like those I work with in the Ready High School Network and college access programs like Destination College. Strategies that will help educators and/or program providers secure buy-in from parents will enhance their abilities to share information, reinforce key concepts and empower parents to augment the academic factors with practical experiences that their students will need in preparing for college and careers.
REFERENCES


