A Phenomenological Study Examining the Perceived Value of Co-Curricular Education within the Community College Completion Agenda

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
The Patton College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Patrick W. Gill
December 2016

© 2016 Patrick W. Gill. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled

A Phenomenological Study Examining the Perceived Value of Co-Curricular Education

within the Community College Completion Agenda

by

PATRICK W. GILL

has been approved for

the Department of Counseling and Higher Education

and The Patton College of Education by

Laura M. Harrison

Associate Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

Renée A. Middleton

Dean, The Patton College of Education
Abstract

GILL, PATRICK W., Ph.D., December 2016, Higher Education

A Phenomenological Study Examining the Perceived Value of Co-Curricular Education within the Community College Completion Agenda

Director of Dissertation: Laura M. Harrison

The purpose of this study was to examine what impact the community college Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education, which was defined as any learning that takes place outside of the classroom. The Completion Agenda followed in the wake of the Great Recession and became a national agenda around 2010-2011. The Completion Agenda’s primary goal has been to get more students to complete a degree or certificate with workforce value.

Considering the Completion Agenda’s widespread reach, this study began with the assumption that community college student affairs has been altered by the Completion Agenda in some way. Student affairs and co-curricular education, in particular, already occupied a tenuous place within community college due to the population it serves. This study used a neoliberal framework to better understand how the politics of higher education impact practice.

By using a phenomenological methodology, this study described common experiences of community college student affairs educators at the onset of the Completion Agenda and what circumstances brought those experience about. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, I was able to analyze how
external forces have impacted co-curricular education, as well as how co-curricular educators’ professional values aligned with institutional and cultural expectations.

Major themes included: (1) participants being on message for their institution and the Completion Agenda as a whole, (2) acute attention paid to the work of academic affairs as it relates to student affairs, (3) the growing lack of distinction between student affairs and student success, and (4) the fact that co-curricular education and student development occupies a minor place in each Campus Completion Plan. Conclusions from this research were: student affairs educators have accepted the Completion Agenda as a reality and have conformed to it; the Completion Agenda has affected the work of student affairs educators, and they have responded accordingly; and in the current context there is an even greater need for data informed decision-making and administrative support.
This work is dedicated to my wife, Casey, who provided unwavering support throughout this entire process, including helping manage major life changes that have taken place over the past few years. Without your love and the joy of our children, I would not have found the energy or interest to complete this lofty task.
Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to many people for the completion of this work. To my parents, Darrell and Terri, you have provided encouragement for the pursuit of higher education, which has been my passion and will continue to be my life’s work. It is only by the blessing of loving parents who provided such a strong foundation that this accomplishment has been made possible.

My wife, Casey, you have selflessly given your attention and made sacrifices that you know all too well. My interest in this program began in admiration of your success and witnessing your doctoral work. I will continue to look up to you, and I cannot thank you enough. My children, Emerson and Owen, although you do not know it yet, your presence has kept me grounded and allowed me to focus on what matters most.

My extended family members; in particular Aunt Kathie, Uncle Bart, Grandma Marge, the Gills, Glenn and Robin Stevens, and the Fromm and Hysinger families; you have been cheerleaders along the way. That support has remained constant and often kept me afloat. Reverend Denise Weaver, your guidance has helped me through some major life events since moving to the area; you have provided prayers and much-needed encouragement along this journey as well.

Thank you Dr. Laura Harrison for your support of my educational pursuits and for your direction, wisdom, and friendship. Being able to share this work with a like-minded individual has been rewarding, and I have come to rely on your constructive and honest feedback. My committee; Dr. Peter Mather, Dr. David Horton, and Dr. Gordon Brooks; thank you for your insight both inside and outside of the classroom. You made the
dissertation defense feel like a conversation amongst colleagues, as opposed to the life-changing event that it was.

Patton College of Education and the Department of Counseling and Higher Education, thank you for offering this cohort-based program that offered the opportunity for somebody like me, working full time and raising a family, to pursue a terminal degree. Thank you Jon Duraj for taking this journey with me. I value your camaraderie and will fondly reminisce on our time together, including our car rides, after-class revelry, and overnights at the Hampton Inn.

To my Sinclair Community College colleagues; in particular Michael Carter, Michelle Littlejohn, Dr. Annesa Cheek, and Dr. Michael Gaines; thank you for providing the support and resources to allow me to pursue this degree. I recognize that your encouragement has always been intertwined with your wish for me to improve personally and professionally. My dear friend and work confidant, Eric Henderson, thank you for feigning interest in my doctorate and for sacrificing lunch conversations to such trifling matters.

Finally, thank you to the participants in this study. I gained much from you and thoroughly enjoyed learning more about your positions and the institutions where you work. As a result of your valuable contributions, my belief is that this work will contribute to the field in some small way.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Theoretical Background</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical situation.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college purpose.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Completion Agenda</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-curricular student success models</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student affairs at community colleges</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Limitations</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Completion Context</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college history leading to the Completion Agenda</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The junior college</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The comprehensive community college</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift to completion</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Completion Agenda and community colleges</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The efficiency model</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Redesigning community colleges for completion ........................................ 50
Neoliberalism ............................................................................................... 58
Venture philanthropy. .................................................................................. 62
Neoliberalism within the Completion Agenda ............................................. 64
Community College Student Affairs ............................................................. 68
Student affairs. .............................................................................................. 68
Student affairs at community colleges. ......................................................... 71
  Initial challenges. ....................................................................................... 72
  Models of delivery. .................................................................................... 73
  Professional development. ........................................................................ 76
  Student affairs administration. .................................................................. 78
Student Success Theories ............................................................................ 79
  Theory of academic and social integration. .............................................. 80
  Theory of involvement ............................................................................ 81
  Theory of engagement. ........................................................................... 82
  Culturally engaging campus environments model. .................................. 83
Community college student engagement. .................................................... 83
  Philosophy and outcomes. ...................................................................... 84
  Real learning. ............................................................................................ 85
  Limitations. ............................................................................................... 86
Gaps in the Literature ................................................................................... 89
Chapter 3: Methodology ............................................................................. 91
Suitability of Qualitative Research ............................................................... 91
Research Method ......................................................................................... 94
Sample ......................................................................................................... 97
Data Collection ............................................................................................ 100
  Interviews ................................................................................................ 100
  Documents. .............................................................................................. 103
Data Analysis .............................................................................................. 106
  Coding ..................................................................................................... 107
  Categories and themes. .......................................................................... 108
Analysis process..............................................................................................108
Theoretical Sensitivity ..................................................................................110
Positionality. ................................................................................................111
Validity. .........................................................................................................112
Member checking ..........................................................................................113
Triangulation ................................................................................................115
Reflexivity......................................................................................................116
Peer debriefing ..............................................................................................116
Thick, rich description. ...............................................................................117
Summary .......................................................................................................118
Chapter 4: Findings .......................................................................................120
Portrait of Participants ..................................................................................121
Student affairs administrators .....................................................................121
  Erin ............................................................................................................121
  Dave. .........................................................................................................123
  Lynn. .........................................................................................................125
  Alicia. .........................................................................................................127
  Joseph. .......................................................................................................129
  Coline. .......................................................................................................131
Student life administrators ...........................................................................132
  Stacie. .........................................................................................................133
  Dario. .........................................................................................................134
  Henry .........................................................................................................135
Student success administrators .....................................................................137
  Debbie. .......................................................................................................137
  Aaron .........................................................................................................139
  Kip. .............................................................................................................141
Participant overview. ...................................................................................142
Findings Related to Research Questions .......................................................143
  Changes in co-curricular education experienced at the onset of the Completion
  Agenda. ......................................................................................................144
Connection to the classroom .......................................................... 144
Justifying the value of non-academic activities .................................. 147
Assessment .................................................................................. 148
Structure ..................................................................................... 150
Attention to funding ................................................................... 151
Focus on career .......................................................................... 153
Continued focus on student success .............................................. 154
Purpose of profession within the Completion Agenda ....................... 156
  Support academic affairs ......................................................... 156
  Student development ............................................................... 157
  Creating transformational opportunities .................................... 160
  Student success ........................................................................ 161
  Employment and soft skills ...................................................... 165
Value of work at institutions .......................................................... 166
  Lack of value ........................................................................... 166
  Need to make a case for value ............................................... 169
  Valued ..................................................................................... 171
Tensions related to values and institutional expectations .................. 173
  Access and equity ................................................................. 174
  Not acting in student’s best interest ....................................... 176
  Funding does not reflect student goals .................................... 177
  Technology over relationships ................................................. 178
  Initiative fatigue and communication .................................... 179
Implicit Tensions ........................................................................ 180
  Alicia .................................................................................... 181
  Lynn ..................................................................................... 182
  Erin ....................................................................................... 184
  Kip ....................................................................................... 185
Documents ................................................................................... 187
  Oakwood Community College ............................................... 189
  2014 completion plan ............................................................ 189
2016 completion plan .................................................. 190
Allen State College ..................................................... 190
2014 completion plan .................................................. 190
2016 completion plan .................................................. 191
Garfield Community College ......................................... 192
2014 completion plan .................................................. 192
2016 completion plan .................................................. 192
Thompson Community College ...................................... 193
2014 completion plan .................................................. 193
2016 completion plan .................................................. 194
Bennington State College .............................................. 194
2014 completion plan .................................................. 194
2014-2016 strategic plan .............................................. 195
2016 completion plan .................................................. 196
Trumbull Community College ........................................ 197
2014 completion plan .................................................. 197
2016 completion plan .................................................. 198
Lucas Community College ........................................... 198
2014 completion plan .................................................. 198
Student success and completion .................................... 199
2016 completion plan .................................................. 199
Highland Community College ....................................... 200
2014 completion plan .................................................. 200
2016 completion plan .................................................. 200
Putnam State Community College .................................. 201
2014 completion plan .................................................. 201
2016 completion plan .................................................. 202
Buck Creek Community College .................................... 203
2014 completion plan .................................................. 203
2016 completion plan .................................................. 204
Document analysis check ............................................. 204
Chapter 5: Analysis

Bracketing

No Common Meaning of Impact of Completion Agenda

Participant categories.

Inability to place.

Different understanding of student affairs and co-curricular education.

Common Themes

Being on message for the institution and Completion Agenda.

Few challenges with institutions.

Feel work is valued.

Prioritization of administrative concerns.

Acute attention to work of academic and student affairs.

Role working with academic affairs.

Connecting to the classroom.

Needing to validate work.

Growing lack of distinction between student affairs and student success.

Retention role.

Focus on onboarding.

Focus on career development.

Practices over research.

Occupying a minor place in campus completion plan.

Potential to feature co-curricular education and student development.

Places where co-curricular education and student development arose.

Co-curricular education and student development absence.

Connection to neoliberalism.

Summary

Chapter 6: Discussion

Purpose of Study

Research Questions

Methodology
The Researcher’s Experience........................................................................................................... 244
Limitations ........................................................................................................................................ 245
  Participant self-selection.................................................................................................................. 245
  Diversity of participants.................................................................................................................. 246
  Follow-up interview....................................................................................................................... 247
Conclusions ....................................................................................................................................... 248
  Range of understanding of the Completion Agenda........................................................................ 249
  Tacit acceptance of Completion Agenda......................................................................................... 250
  External forces affecting student affairs work................................................................................ 250
  Defined in relation to the Completion Agenda.............................................................................. 252
  More focus outside of student affairs............................................................................................ 253
  Needing to make a case for value.................................................................................................... 253
  Greater need for data informed decision-making and sharing....................................................... 254
  Institutions with top-level support function better......................................................................... 255
Neoliberalism at Work....................................................................................................................... 256
Implications for Practice .................................................................................................................. 258
  Strategic discussions on the Completion Agenda.......................................................................... 258
  Assessment tied to learning outcomes............................................................................................. 259
  Transparency amongst internal stakeholders................................................................................. 260
  Framing co-curricular education within the student experience................................................... 260
  Maintaining core of profession....................................................................................................... 261
Recommendations for Future Research............................................................................................ 262
  Revised sample............................................................................................................................... 263
  Study conclusions............................................................................................................................ 263
  Role of Completion Agenda over time............................................................................................ 263
Summary ......................................................................................................................................... 264
References ......................................................................................................................................... 267
Appendix A: Loss and Momentum Framework .............................................................................. 289
Appendix B: IRB Approval .............................................................................................................. 290
Appendix C: Participation Email ....................................................................................................... 292
Appendix D: Co-Curricular Education Survey................................................................................ 293
Appendix E: Participant Questionnaire .................................................................295
Appendix F: Informed Consent ..............................................................................297
Appendix G: Interview Protocol ...........................................................................300
Appendix H: Member Checking ..........................................................................302
Appendix I: Document Analysis Feedback ...........................................................304
List of Tables

Table

1. Research Study Participants .................................................................143
Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and theoretical background to the study, the statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study, methodology, study limitations, and definition of terms.

Introduction and Theoretical Background

In the following section, I provide an introduction to the study and present the theoretical background that has informed the research. Much of the information here is further expanded upon in Chapter 3 of the document.

Rhetorical situation.

My professional experience in higher education began shortly after the housing market crisis began in 2007. At that time, “college completion” was added to the student success lexicon, which had previously included concepts like retention and persistence. My first college student personnel role was working at a community college as a student success advisor, which was funded through a Title III grant intended to help at-risk students persist and ultimately complete. In 2011, I moved into a similar role at another community college, which had institutionalized similar efforts by the time I arrived.

This new institution was concerned with staying ahead of the curve in terms of completion and, through a lot of hard work, was rewarded with a Completion by Design (CbD) grant from the Gates Foundation. I was asked to take part on committees as part of CbD. Using the CbD “Loss-Momentum Framework” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016), we analyzed how different areas at our institution helped students on
the pathway to completion using indicators of student progress: *Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion* (Appendix A).

When applying this model, I found it curious that only one quarter of the institution’s efforts was devoted to Progress, when it accounted for upwards of 75% of the student experience. Working at an institution that was a national leader for student success, I was even more discouraged by the fact that the majority of programs and services offered were then focused on the Connection and Entry phases of the student experience, rather than supporting students throughout their entire journey.

Due to my success advisor experience, I was not surprised that resources were being devoted to helping students make early connections and find success within their first year. The more I learned about student development in my own studies, however, I was surprised by how little attention was being devoted to student involvement and engagement. Those renowned student success theories suggested that the more investment students make inside and outside of the classroom, the better they perform. I recognized that similar co-curricular educational opportunities had provided further enrichment and meaning to my own educational experience, along with helping me ultimately find success.

Despite a narrow approach to student development opportunities at most community colleges, the more I learned and worked, the more I realized that there seemed to be an even greater effort nationally to streamline the community college experience. At the onset of the Completion Agenda, the approach shifted on a national level to get students in, through, and out of college as quickly as possible. While the
objective seemed concerned with accelerating students’ momentum and eliminating barriers that might detract from a degree or certificate, I also wondered in what ways this redesign also had affected the outside-of-class—or co-curricular—experience. In addition, how had these changes affected the role of student affairs educators, whose work it was to provide student development opportunities? What attention, if any, had top-level administrators or nationally recognized scholars given to what was being lost as a result of tectonic shifts across the community college landscape?

My initial concerns about the role of co-curricular education at the community college have not dissipated over time. Rather, I have had similar experiences that have given rise to this research topic and, ultimately, the need to answer those questions in the study that follows.

**Overview.**

Until the Great Recession of 2007, Community colleges had undertaken the Access Agenda for over a century (O’Banion, 2010). The Access Agenda put community colleges within reach of a majority of the population and provided opportunity for those who otherwise might not have attended college (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Community colleges were increasingly asked to meet greater measures of accountability, especially regarding student success (Brint & Karabel, 1989). However, it was not until the Great Recession that such calls were heeded with and there became a targeted focus on completion, what we now regard as the Completion Agenda.

The Completion Agenda is the higher education plan that built upon the Access Agenda and called for increasing rates of college graduates (O’Banion, 2010). In
response to a failing economy, the Completion Agenda put a sharper focus on student success for colleges and universities; it also directly redefined the purpose of community colleges due to the historically underrepresented populations it served. Community colleges were now asked to redesign a community college education and lead with innovation over research to increase the number of graduates. By getting individuals back to work and by better serving underrepresented populations, community colleges were expected to take on a significant role in improving the economy.

In Chapter 1, I describe the historical purposes of the community college, the community college role in student development, and the potential consequences the shift from access to completion has had on co-curricular education, which I define as learning that takes place outside of the classroom. Within the Completion Agenda context, I posit that co-curricular education has come to be valued only to the extent that it relates to the larger goal of student success. Co-curricular education already occupied a tenuous place in the community college, and I ask to what extent the Completion Agenda has maintained or intensified this existing dynamic and what consequences have arisen as a result. In addition, I ask how external forces concerned with completion have affected the roles and responsibilities of student affairs educators, those professionals working directly with students outside of the classroom. No research has considered the impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education and how it has affected the work of student affairs educators.

I approached this research from a perspective that the community college Completion Agenda is surrounded by a discourse that is overwhelmingly positive.
Community college leaders have offered an uncritical view of the Completion Agenda. The widespread sentiment is that getting more students across the finish line is not only good for the students themselves but also for society at large. This research offers a balanced perspective about the Completion Agenda. It asks that we not blindly embrace the perceived benefits of the Completion Agenda in order to allow the possibility of other findings to emerge. Being mindful to the nature of research, this approach allowed for themes to emerge that otherwise would not had I approached this research from the perspective that the Completion Agenda is innately good or bad and had expected that participants hold those same beliefs.

**Community college purpose.**

In the late nineteenth century, junior colleges were envisioned as the first two years of a four-year education. The number of junior colleges increased as a growing high school population led to demands for more years of schooling, businesspeople needed workers to be trained on the public dollar, and community leaders saw these institutions as a way to build prestige (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). As a result of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act and the Truman Commission, among other societal factors, community colleges expanded to include growing numbers of students with wide-ranging goals. The community college mission also expanded. It eventually encompassed the various types of education it provided, indicated its role in job preparation and transfer, and reflected its larger purposes within the community and throughout the nation (Levin, 2000).
Partially in response to the tremendous growth of community colleges, the Access Agenda then shifted to student success toward the end of the twentieth century.

Community college leaders called for greater accountability, especially as it concerned the positive impact community colleges were expected to have on students (Garret, Bragg, & Makela, 2006; O’Banion, 2010).

Within Student Success Agenda literature, scholars sought to maintain access, community alignment, workforce training, and other tenets of a community college education that had existed since their inception (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Jenkins, 2011; O’Banion, 2010). At the same time, community college leaders have expressed the need to create an environment of student success and sustainability.

These calls for student success and sustainability reached a tipping point following the Great Recession. The Student Success Agenda has been given a more precise focus with what has now been designated the Completion Agenda. Community colleges have been asked to focus on college completion and redesign the work they do to align with the nationally recognized measures of effectiveness.

**The Completion Agenda.**

The “Student Success Agenda” emerged in the months that followed the Great Recession of 2007 (O’Banion, 2010, p. 44). As the agenda evolved, it morphed into what we now know as the Completion Agenda. President Obama set a national goal that by 2020 America would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). With new direction from the federal government, the mission of community colleges shifted almost overnight. Although the
Completion Agenda was not presented as a community college effort exclusively, experts believed completion efforts would need to focus on retooling unemployed workers (Mullin, 2010) and target historically underrepresented populations without a history of academic success (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Dassance, 2011). Each of these efforts would require significant community college investment and support.

In the years leading up to the Completion Agenda, other organizations had begun work on similar goals and now had a platform from which to display their efforts. Some of these initiatives included Achieving the Dream, College Board’s Commission on Access, and Lumina’s Goal 2025 (Hughes, 2013; Lumina, 2013). With the Completion Agenda, these initiatives were brought into the national spotlight, since they seemed to be working toward the same overall purpose. As a result of momentum that the Completion Agenda had gained, it became a centralized issue that was endorsed by other national organizations. These organizations took ownership of it individually and collectively, as was the case of “A Call to Action” (Humphreys, 2012).

Rapidly, the Completion Agenda became a point of emphasis for institutions of higher education and, in particular, community colleges. The national focus on completion continues to the present day; any and all community college institutions now place particular focus on completion.

Completion initiatives are all concerned with getting students to complete credentials with workforce value. The community college Completion Agenda, in particular, is focused on students completing a recognized and relevant college credential
to secure gainful employment. Such efforts are advanced by the federal government, states, non-profit organizations, colleges, and communities.

Built into the Completion Agenda is the need to move students through their education as quickly as possible to deliver the greatest return on investment. The “efficiency model” (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012, para. 2) described how students are funneled through the completion process. The focus on efficiency has brought with it new metrics for effectiveness that has changed the way we view the worth of our investments (Massy, 2011). Expedited completion is described as an investment for the betterment of student, the institution, taxpayers, and the economy.

Attempts to stimulate completion have come in the form of collecting better data (Johnson & Rochkind, 2009), altering practices (McPhail, 2011), implementing new policies (College Board, 2010; Courturier, 2012), providing prior learning assessment (OBR, 2014), creating structures and systems (O’Banion, 2011; Pennington & Milliron, 2010), and linking funding to completion (Fain, 2014; NCSL, 2015). Research from other highly effective organizations has helped inform practices that have been applied to higher education (Jenkins, 2011). The efficiency model has become the standard approach to delivering a community college education in the twenty-first century.

**Neoliberalism.**

Underlying the Completion Agenda’s sociopolitical drivers is neoliberalism’s omnipresent force. Within the framework of classical liberal economics, neoliberalism is the phenomenon that takes place when marketplace exchange is used as an ethic guiding all other human action (Harvey, 2005). When viewing contemporary American
democracy from a neoliberal lens, all other public entities are at risk of being understood solely in terms of their market value or ignored entirely. The values being threatened include justice, freedom, equality, health and wellbeing, and the rights of citizens (Giroux, 1999).

Higher education is also at risk of losing its traditional value, since it has become increasingly corporate in terms of how it is run (Bousquet, 2008), its connection to business and industry (Washburn, 2005), and the way in which it serves as a mechanism to both support business and serve as a path for personal gain (Giroux, 2007). Today, more than ever, higher education’s economic ties are in conflict with its formative role.

Colleges and universities were originally organized as institutions where individuals learned through liberal education, developed as individuals, and engaged in various forms of citizenship. Today, higher education is commonly framed as the means for individuals to earn more money, as opposed to engage in various forms of learning that have lifelong value.

The community college occupies a tenuous place within this neoliberal construct. The current zeitgeist dictates that practical education is more valued in society than liberal education. While scholars have argued that there exists a false dichotomy between practical and liberal education, as long as the end of a practical education is a prosperous career, individuals will receive a narrower experience (Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001).

According to Ayers (2005), the community college has taken on the role of job trainer, particularly for those without the ability or interest to attend a four-year institution. He argued how, traditionally, the mission of community colleges cultivated a discourse of
emancipation. Today, that purpose is threatened because students are viewed in terms of their economic productivity and not all human capacities.

Boyd (2011) described the spread of neoliberalism in community colleges as a direct result of the societal view of public education as commodity. As a consequence, community colleges have morphed into consumer colleges, and students have begun to be treated like consumers, despite clear differences between the two. Community colleges are particularly vulnerable to commodification because they can more easily adapt their purpose and curricula to the shifting sociopolitical landscape.

Higher education has also lost ground to the principles of the market in part due to the role of venture philanthropy (Letts, Ryan, & Grossman, 1997). Venture philanthropists rely on a close relationship with the funding recipient, provide a long-term commitment to the institution, attempt to strengthen the institution’s mission, and set benchmarks that demonstrate the impact of their investment (Boverini, 2006). Higher education has never been isolated from outside influence, but it has become increasingly hard to determine where the goals of philanthropy organizations end and those of higher education begin. In an era when higher education receives greater philanthropy support, the lines between public education and private interest run the risk of becoming blurred.

Megafoundations, like the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation, have taken on a more active role in the Completion Agenda. These organizations, which originated and have been sustained through private earnings, have had a considerable influence on public education, despite contributing only one percent to total educational funding (Hall & Thomas, 2012; Kumashiro, 2012). Within the Completion Agenda
context, large foundations’ efforts have had a bigger impact on educational policy than venture philanthropists before them. In addition, they have taken the approach to lead with innovation over research (Barkan, 2011). As community colleges experience the threat of less funding from states and other traditional sources of revenue, they have come to rely on the support of foundations. States, in turn, expect private foundations to take on more responsibility for funding non-profit higher education institutions.

**Co-curricular student success models.**


Tinto’s concept of integration has been used to describe the ways in which students share attitudes and beliefs of their institutional culture and how they act in accordance with those norms (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Astin defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (1984, p. 518). Kuh’s theory of engagement builds upon Astin’s theory of involvement. Engagement first attempts to understand how student involvement leads to student success and then determines how colleges and universities should invest in opportunities for students to benefit from such activities (Kuh, 2003). More recently, Museus’ Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model (2014) acknowledged limitations to all of these approaches from a cultural perspective and
called for a new model of college success among racially diverse populations. Despite criticism that has arisen around these student success theories, they have shaped and continue to shape how we understand student success, especially our understanding of how co-curricular education impacts the student experience.

**Student affairs at community colleges.**

Alongside the current Completion Agenda exists a history of student affairs that predates the development of community colleges. Student affairs was built upon a foundation of student development theory that has either excluded community colleges or has been applied as an afterthought (Helfgot, 2005). Tensions existed between the community college purpose and the original intent of student developmental theory, which focused on traditional, white, male, upper-class, residential students (Wimbish, Bumphus, & Helfgot, 1995). Community college student development theory has thus been at odds with traditional models of student involvement. Helfgot (1998) outlined problems with using traditional student involvement models for community college students. If one were to directly apply student involvement theory, it would imply that community college students cannot be successful in college as a result of their inability to spend time on campus due to the other commitments that require time and energy.

The community college mission of emancipation has called for greater attention to a seamless college-going transition for nontraditional and underrepresented students. Community college student affairs literature, likewise, has focused on student service functions, as opposed to the need to improve the psychosocial, cognitive, and moral development of students. Over the past sixty years, community college student services
literature has concentrated on the role of student services related to student success and providing the optimal delivery of services (Creamer, 1994).

Experts have also found that community college student affairs administrators’ experience is markedly different from that of their four-year counterparts (Hirt, 2006). Community college student affairs administrators are considered producers due to the number of responsibilities they oversee and the diverse populations they serve. As a result, they often feel marginalized in their role compared to others in the profession. However, like four-year student affairs administrators, they are committed to their work because they find it meaningful, suggesting a student development philosophy that is consistent with others in the profession.

Community college student development has been concerned with ways to engage community college students during the limited time they are on campus with the expectation these efforts will lead to better results. Due to a now common understanding of what makes community colleges different from four-year institutions, community college student affairs has taken student engagement as its defining purpose.

The Center for Student Engagement, through Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), set the standard for what out-of-class engagement should look like: “Colleges can strengthen student engagement by making outside-the-classroom engagement inescapable. Rather than minimizing out-of-class commitments from students, colleges can require students to participate in educational activities that are important to their student success” (2009, p. 15). With the proliferation of structured learning experiences, which includes new student orientation, accelerated developmental
education, student success courses, learning communities, and first-year experience programs, community colleges have been urged to take an active role in student engagement (McClenney, 2013). Community colleges are tasked with making learning meaningful when students are already engaged instead of merely providing opportunities for students to be involved.

Student engagement has been widely recognized as the solution to community college student success. Taking that logic a step further, certain scholars have argued that student engagement will help our nation make up ground and ultimately improve the economy. McClenney (2013) stated that the health of the economy and our democratic way of life rests upon gains we achieve in educational attainment, which is primarily achieved through student engagement. Within the Completion Agenda, community colleges have drifted further away from the original tenets of student affairs and gains in co-curricular education at four-year institutions. Furthermore, external entities, such as the federal government, states, higher education associations, and philanthropy organizations have potentially redefined the role of student affairs at community colleges.

Considering the Completion Agenda’s widespread reach and the influence of its proponents, this study begins with the assumption that community college student affairs has been altered by the Completion Agenda in some way. Student affairs educators would benefit from a deeper understanding of their role and how other practitioners view the function of co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda.
Statement of the Problem

Within the Completion Agenda, community colleges have developed completion strategies to help students move into college, through the curriculum, and out into the workforce as seamlessly as possible. Such efficiency strategies have become accepted practice in the call for more graduates. Many of these strategies are in place to create a smooth transition for students to postsecondary education, eliminate existing institutional barriers, provide academic and holistic support, and accelerate momentum through the curriculum. Due to scaling efforts, these strategies are generally consistent amongst institutions, states, and non-profits in their quest to see more students cross the finish line.

Community colleges have also been regarded as institutions that see students arrive in waves (Helfgot, 1998). As waves of new students attend campuses across the nation, they only skim the surface of their student experience. As opposed to community colleges prioritizing co-curricular education outside of the classroom, experts have recommended that they connect student engagement to the classroom and offer incentives for participation (McClenney 2013; O’Banion, 2011). In theory, these strategies encourage students to become more active. However, such forms of co-curricular education are largely shaped by utilitarian ends. They are driven by better student success rates for the institution and benefits to the individual, often in terms of better grades. Such opportunities are not deep and lasting (Humphreys, 2012), nor do they preserve the roles and responsibilities of student affairs educators.

Despite widespread changes in community college educational delivery, research has not been conducted on how national trends have shaped the work of student affairs
educators; those professional working directly with students in areas of student affairs, student development, or student life; or how student affairs educators view the purpose of co-curricular education within the current context. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand shared experiences amongst student affairs educators regarding co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda. In this research, shared experience was defined as how these individuals view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda, how they feel their work is valued at their respective institutions, and tensions that exist between their personal values and current cultural expectations.

**Research Questions**

Based upon the statement of the problem, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?
2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?
3. During the Completion Agenda, how do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at institutions where they have worked?
4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations?
Significance of the Study

Co-curricular education has been a focus of student affairs educators for over four decades. Community colleges have had a separate history from four-year institutions (Helfgot, 1998) and, as a result, a tenuous relationship with student development theories developed based upon the experience of four-year students. Leading community college scholars, such as Helfgot (1998; 2005) have rejected student involvement theory for this reason. Due to the types of students community colleges attract, top-level administrators and nationally recognized scholars have instead focused on models that do not consider the amount of physical and psychological energy students devote to their academic experience. In turn, community college top-level administrators and nationally recognized scholars have endorsed student engagement as the approach to community college students’ co-curricular experience.

Within the Completion Agenda, co-curricular education has potentially come to be valued only as it relates to the larger goal of student success. As the Completion Agenda’s underlying purpose is largely economic, co-curricular education has been deemed essential insofar as it aids in student retention and helps community colleges produce more graduates. As a result, the profession of community college student affairs educators has likely changed and will continue to be influenced by national objectives.

As all community college personnel have been asked to respond to directives for more graduates from various entities, community college student affairs educators have not been given adequate voice about what should be preserved within co-curricular education and their function as educators. Since co-curricular education is advanced by
student affairs educators’ expertise, this study provides an opportunity to learn from their shared beliefs and experiences. If work done by student affairs educators is considered non-essential or deemed beneficial only as it contributes to student completion, students could lose out on a considerable portion of their educational experience. Should we choose to ignore the Completion Agenda’s impact on co-curricular education, we run the risk of disregarding essential areas of students’ cognitive, social, and moral development. Benefits of student development and co-curricular education; such as critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, cooperation, citizenship, being a global citizen, and beyond; could ultimately be rendered obsolete within the current completion context.

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to learn how community college student affairs educators viewed the purpose of co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda and how their professional values aligned with institutional and cultural expectations. Since qualitative research is best applied in certain types of cases, Chapter 3 further describes the suitability of qualitative research in order to answer the research questions.

Phenomenology was chosen as the methodological framework for this study due to its focus on the *essence* of experience for individuals. This study applied an understanding of phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2013), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The role of phenomenology is to arrive at the essence or structure of an experience. Using key phenomenological concepts, such as epoche, phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation (Merriam &
Tisdell), the researcher can come as close as possible to understanding the phenomenon in question or circumstances that brought shared experiences about.

As qualitative research, this study took place where individuals work; as the researcher, I acted as key instrument; the study allowed for multiple forms of data; it applied inductive and deductive logic; the data depended upon participants’ meanings; it featured emergent design; and it will call for reflexivity on my part as the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Also, I approached this research from an interpretive/constructivist perspective, where the goal is to describe, understand, and interpret experiences within a particular context, knowing that multiple realities exist (Merriam, 2009).

In regard to the sample, relatively no scholarship within the Completion Agenda context has been written from or considered the perspective of a community college student affairs educators who are not also top-level administrators or nationally recognized scholars. As student affairs educators engage in work that is being discussed in the literature, they have certain expertise that cannot be found from those removed from day-to-day operations. Criterion sampling was used in order to identify participants for this study. 12 individuals participated. The criteria for participation included: community college affiliation, student affairs or college student personnel background, administrative responsibilities, and work duties focused on student involvement (with regular student interaction).

This study relied on data collected through interviews and document analysis. Qualitative research interviews involve the exchange of ideas between individuals in an attempt to make meaning of the participant’s lived experience (Brinkmann & Kvale,
The interviews were semi-structured and based upon recommended practice for phenomenological interviews. An interview protocol prompted questions related to themes but did not encourage opinions about those themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

For this study, document analysis was used for information gathering as well as for triangulation purposes. Documents can be used to provide background on the site, program, or population (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The type of documents I analyzed were public documents. They included “Right to Know” information about each participant’s institution and the corresponding Campus Completion Plan.

Data analysis is the process that takes place once the researcher has collected data and is ready to analyze and interpret it. In Chapter 3, I also describe the steps I used to determine categories. In the data analysis process, the primary focus was on the semi-structured, in-depth interviews with student affairs educators. Separate categories, however, emerged through the document analysis of each Campus Completion Plan.

This study also employed measures to establish validity. Validity is an attempt to determine how congruent one’s findings are with reality (Merriam, 1995). The researcher should take measures to demonstrate his or her integrity through strategies that check for accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1995; Patton, 2002). The validity strategies I employed were member checking; triangulation; reflexivity; peer debriefing; and thick, rich description.

**Study Limitations**

Some limitations to this study existed, which had to do with sampling and data collection. These factors were unforeseen due to factors that could not be known at the
outset of the study. Limitations, which are further described in Chapter 6, included participant self-selection, diversity of participants, and follow-up interview.

For participant self-selection, I used a thorough but simple methodological approach to select participants for this study. To the best of my ability, I located individuals at institutions based upon position and surveyed prospects who might fit the criteria. In a few instances, I had participants self-select who were outside of the area of student affairs or who had defined co-curricular education somewhat differently from how I had defined it. In addition, I had a few participants who were recommended by others who did not initially fit the criteria. Due to emergent design, with the hope of collecting more unique and nuanced data regarding the research topic, I expanded my sample to include participants who did not automatically qualify. While this decision provided rich data, it also may have impacted results related to phenomenology, since participants did not have a common experience but more aligned with others in a similar position at their respective institutions.

As it relates to the diversity of participants, based upon sampling measures, there was diversity in terms of gender (six female and seven male participants) and experience (eight years to 36 years in higher education) but not in terms of race. Only one of the 12 participants identified as African American, whereas the rest identified as White. A more diverse sample may have presented different insights and more fully represented the population of student affairs administrators at community colleges.

Pertaining to the follow-up interview, data were primarily collected through in-depth, in-person interviews. Conducting each interview in person was beneficial for a
variety of reasons; including being able to read body language; make sense of potentially confusing statements; and for being able to provide thick, rich description. My initial design also asked for a follow-up interview with each participant. However, after gathering rich data from the 12 study participants, I conducted member checking and asked that they participate in a brief follow-up phone interview at that point. Only three participants agreed. Time and funding, along with participants’ willingness to take part, were factors in being able to conduct additional interviews that may have yielded more substantial data.

**Definition of Terms**

For clarity and consistency, I have operationally defined the following terms with respect to available research and common use. In some instances, the differences between definitions may appear subtle but create significant difference in meaning when applied.

*Co-curricular education*: Structured out-of-class experiences that build upon or align with in-class, curricular learning (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

*Comprehensive community college*: Institutions derived from junior colleges of the early twentieth century that offer associate degrees, certificates, transfer programs, and community education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003).

*Completion Agenda*: The higher education focus in the years that followed the Great Recession that built upon the Access Agenda and called for more college graduates (O’Banion, 2010).
Efficiency model: The model applied to higher education to bolster the economy by moving students into college, through the curriculum, and out into the workforce in as little time and with as much relative ease as possible (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012).

Learning: The complex, holistic, multi-centric activity that takes places throughout and across the college experience (ACPA & NASPA, 2004).

Neoliberalism: The phenomenon that takes place when marketplace exchange is used as an ethic guiding all other human activity (Harvey, 2005).

Student affairs: The discipline practiced by those in higher education who work directly with and for students. This discipline includes the general field and the specialties that fall within (Helfgot, 2005).

Student affairs educator: Credentialed professionals working in student affairs who are dedicated to providing learning opportunities for students and who work to develop professional competencies (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Helfgot, 2005; Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Tyrell, 2014).

Student development: The theoretical and conceptual foundation for student affairs practice that is focused on the whole student. It is derived from psychosocial theory, cognitive development theory, and moral development theory and continues to evolve (Creamer, 1989; Helfgot, 2005; Strange, 1994; Wimbush, Bumphus, & Helfgot, 1995).

Student engagement: A shared responsibility between student and institution regarding opportunities inside and outside the classroom that lead to student success (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2003; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009).
*Student involvement:* The amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to his or her academic experience (Astin, 1993).

*Student services:* Services provided by an institution to assist with students’ needs outside of the classroom (e.g., disability services, financial aid, registration) (Creamer, 1994; Helfgot, 2005; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006).

*Venture philanthropy:* Term attributed to non-profit organizations dedicated to improving education (or some other human service) through monetary gifts, a close relationship with the funding recipient, and pre-defined measurements of success (Boverini, 2006).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review regarding the topics central to this research study, including the completion context, neoliberalism, community college student affairs, and student success theories. It also offers an overview of gaps in the literature.

The Completion Context

The following section describes the current completion context, including community college history leading up to the Completion Agenda, the Completion Agenda within community colleges, and “the efficiency model,” which has affected the design and delivery of services at community colleges.

Community college history leading to the Completion Agenda.

Community colleges have changed considerably since their inception as junior colleges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, their history has informed much of what continues to take place today.

The junior college.

Williams Rainey Harper, from the University of Chicago, along with contemporary leaders at the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, and Cornell University, helped develop the concept of a junior college. The junior college was intended to separate secondary education from university education. Harper believed the junior college might give individuals access to college who otherwise would not attend (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Harper’s vision came to fruition as a result of the socio-historical changes that took place during the early part of the twentieth century.
The junior college model was cemented by historical catalysts that gave individuals access to higher education, the most prominent of which included the Great Depression, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, and the Truman Commission. The junior college model continued due educational and workforce needs.

The junior college soon expanded beyond its design as a track from secondary education to the university. Many junior college students were not transferring as the founders had envisioned, and junior college leaders recognized the need to create terminal degrees and certificates (Brubacher & Rudy, 2003). Junior colleges were already accessible; however, the Carnegie Commission for Higher Education advocated an open door policy, which paved the way for the modern comprehensive community college. In its original form, the open door policy allowed for colleges to remain flexible and provide individualized learning opportunities (Brubacher & Rudy). Community colleges now offered different types of education and services, including transfer education, vocational education, developmental education, general education, and community service (Meier, 2013).

*The comprehensive community college.*

The comprehensive community college concept took hold in the latter half of the twentieth century and is the model that continues today. The great expansion of the community college took place in the 1960’s when 457 institutions were founded. These institutions represented more new community colleges in a decade than the total established before (AACC, 2015). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), this tremendous community college growth led to the
establishment of a national network. The decade of the 1960’s, which was defined by growth, was followed in the 1970’s and 1980’s with a new interest in student success. The student success focus brought with it the need for accountability through measurable outcomes in the 1990’s and the decades that followed (Garret, Bragg, & Makela, 2006). As a result of these more recent developments, community colleges today have become more standardized and structured in the way they operate.

**Mission.**

The community college mission also expanded to include the types of learning comprehensive community colleges encompassed. By the end of the twentieth century, the community college mission was focused on the various types of education it provided, it spoke to its role in job preparation and transfer, and it reflected its larger purposes within the community and throughout the nation (Levin, 2000). Community colleges had also responded to expectations from business and industry and from those students seeking to enter the workforce. Despite the ever-changing nature of community colleges, the mission has remained consistent in its responsiveness to community and societal needs as a result of social and economic change (Meier, 2013). Vaughan (1988) likened the mission of community colleges to that of a balloon, which changes shape according to societal pressures, with the core elements remaining the same.

Community colleges came under great scrutiny in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, largely due to their multifaceted purpose. Meier (2013) explained how the philosophical mission of community colleges has come into conflict with its formative mission. The philosophical mission hinges on values, such as student-
centeredness, community service, open access, and equity, whereas the formative mission describes its impact in the public sphere, such as creating a skilled workforce. The open door policy has also been a point of contention in regard to whether it serves as a gateway or gatekeeper (Bragg, 2001; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960; Dowd, 2007).

**Shift to completion.**

Despite the fact that community colleges maintain a history that encompasses a multivariate mission and numerous stakeholders, today they have become more singular in purpose. The comprehensive community college mission is now tied to completion. Most community college stakeholders agree that what matters most is whether or not students ultimately earn a credential with workforce value. Alongside this change, Dassance (2011) argued that community colleges will also be judged more on what they do to carry out their mission than on the actual mission itself. Underlying the near consensus belief in a community college credential exists the implicit message that the number of degrees and certificates awarded will also help secure our nation’s prosperity.

**The Completion Agenda and community colleges.**

The Completion Agenda arrived in direct response to the Great Recession that began in 2007. Although the Completion Agenda term was not coined until 2010, the process of establishing national goals began in the aftermath of the stock market crash. At that time, objectives were set by the White House, which set national goals and transformed the role of community colleges in light of the looming economic demands (Bernanke, 2008; Malcolm, 2009; Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).
President Obama delivered a call to action that would subsequently be packaged to the American people as the American Graduation Initiative. President Obama said, “By 2020, this nation will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (Office of the Press Secretary, para. 14). The American Graduation Initiative sought to build on community college strengths. As a result, President Obama set a complementary goal that community colleges would graduate five million individuals by the year 2020 (Office of the Press Secretary). The Community College Challenge Fund would aid in these efforts and help institutions reach specific targets. Strategies used included building business partnerships and pathways to the workforce, expanding course offerings to high schools and transfer credit to four-year institutions, improving remedial and adult education programs, and providing personalized support to students.

With direction from the federal government, the mission of community colleges shifted almost overnight. While the Completion Agenda was not presented as a community college effort exclusively, it would rely heavily on gains made in untapped markets. Groups that were targeted included displaced workers and individuals with a history of academic struggle, including racially and socioeconomically underrepresented populations. As a result, community colleges quickly became the driver of the nation's completion efforts.

Community colleges were not only tasked with getting people back to work but also with putting America back at the forefront of the conversation regarding college graduates (Mullin, 2010). Mullin, Program Director for Policy Analysis at the AACC, argued, “Because community colleges are, first and foremost, oriented toward their
communities, they may need to modify their traditional ways of fulfilling their individual missions in light of the completion imperative” (p. 4). The national conversation asked community colleges to shift from being inward focused on student success to meeting completion benchmarks on a national scale. Community colleges were asked to adjust to these new expectations.

The Completion Agenda gained momentum as a centralized issue in the national spotlight; however, certain organizations had begun focusing on college completion in the mid 2000’s. In the report Setting a Public Agenda for Higher Education in the States, Davies (2006) called for new public agendas for higher education in direct response to the competitiveness of the global economy. Non-profit organizations that had been working on similar completion goals independently now had a platform from which to display their efforts. College Board’s 2008 Commission on Access set a goal that by 2025, 55 percent of young adults, aged 25-34, should hold a two- or four-year degree (Hughes, 2013). Also, the Lumina Foundation released its first strategic plan in 2009 with a singular vision: to help “60% of Americans obtain a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential by 2025” (Lumina, 2013, p. 2). The Lumina Foundation now packages “Goal 2025” as an initiative that has been adopted by or has been a major influence on the federal government, states, higher education associations, colleges and universities, and communities throughout the United States.

The Completion Agenda was also endorsed by other national organizations, reframed, and marketed separately. Echoing the call from the White House, the AACC partnered with the Association for Community College Trustees, the Center for
Community College Student Engagement, the League for Innovation in the Community College, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society in its efforts to produce 50% more students with high-quality degrees and certificates by 2020 (McPhail, 2011, p. 2). These organizations called for community colleges across the country to sign a completion commitment statement. Such efforts following the economic downturn solidified the national completion movement. This widespread completion transformation has helped to redefine the purpose of the community college.

The major completion initiatives were so responsive to the needs of the day that they created a situation where the specific goals, stakeholders, and approaches became hard to untangle and often overlapped. The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) recognized that competing goals and independent analyses could confuse, rather than clarify, the issue (Kelly, 2010). NCHEMS partnered with key organizations and stakeholders to settle on a common methodology, which targeted adults aged 25-34, with the goal of 60% college completion by 2020. Educational leaders recognized that while national initiatives had succeeded in defining the problem, raising awareness, proposing solutions, and supporting efforts, their impact tended to be insignificant (Phillips & Horowitz, 2013). In response, greater focus has been placed on sharing specific approaches to accelerate completion rates and systematizing ways to eliminate barriers for community college students.
The efficiency model.

Completion approaches have been implemented to move students through college as quickly and with as few barriers as possible. Students can get lost in an institution’s vast array of courses and programs; find themselves caught in the developmental course sequence before ever reaching a major; run into institutional policies and procedures that halt progress; experience funding issues on federal, state, and institutional levels; and simply not understand how to get help or where to go due to a lack of college-going capital.

Institutional barriers do not affect all populations of students equally. According to Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005), although community colleges better represent proportions of students from all racial/ethnic and income categories; minorities, low-income, and first-generation students complete degrees and certificates at lower rates than those from privileged positions. It would stand that these populations disproportionately lack the college-going capital and often experience barriers that prevent their successful completion. Certain proponents of the Completion Agenda have targeted at-risk populations (the Gates Foundation focuses on low-income students, for instance), but most have applied a blanket approach when it comes to creating the ideal conditions for completion.

The “efficiency model” (Evenbeck & Johnson, 2012, para. 2) has been introduced by community college stakeholders to deliver greater return at reduced cost to the student, to the institution, to taxpayers, and to the economy. Jenkins (2011) acknowledged that community colleges would need to improve productivity, meaning
they would need to do more with less funding. Institutions are now expected to move
students through programs of study as efficiently as possible to meet benchmarks that, in
many cases, affect available resources. Stakeholders have implemented or overseen
strategies to stimulate completion in an attempt to directly impact efficiency. These
include: providing prior learning assessment (OBR, 2104), creating structures and
systems (Jenkins & Cho, 2013; O’Banion, 2011; Pennington & Milliron, 2010), and
linking funding to completion (Fain, 2014; NCSL, 2015).

As a result of the current focus on efficiency, certain aspects of student learning
traditionally provided by community colleges are no longer deemed essential. Recently,
the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) set postsecondary success advocacy
priorities in response to a convergence of economic, fiscal, and demographic forces. The
Gates Foundation acknowledged changes in the economic demand for credentials beyond
high school; fiscal constraints at the national, state, and institutional levels; and the trend
of campuses seeing more low-income, first generation, working adults, and students of
color. In response, they called for a transformation based upon four priorities (flexibility,
personalization, affordability, and clarity) and policy changes to reinforce those efforts.
The Gates Foundation is not alone in its approach to attempt to systematically solve the
issue. By focusing on key priorities, community colleges also are expected not to spend
as much time and resources to other aspects of the educational experience.

The efficiency model has brought with it strategies that top-level administrators
and nationally recognized scholars have termed best practices in an attempt to boost
completion rates. However, educational experts have not had time or ability to test best
practices through research. Rather, these strategies are based upon logic and what leaders believe might work due to timely nature of their implementation. While certain completion strategies have been more prevalent than others in the literature, common themes cut across all strategies. The most salient of these themes include redesigning community colleges for completion and creating policy change.

**Redesigning community colleges for completion.**

Community colleges have been built upon a foundation of access. Community colleges were designed to provide access, and they have been successful in providing opportunity for underrepresented students at low cost (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015a). Over time, social and political change created the need for community college leaders to better define access and how to provide it to new populations of students. More recently, the Completion Agenda demanded that community colleges shift from a discourse of emancipation (Ayers, 2005) to that of equal opportunity, where standards remain rigorous but every student has the opportunity to be successful.

According to Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins, community colleges were not designed for the completion of “high-quality programs of study” (p. 2). Although community colleges were not intentionally designed for degree and certificate completion, they have attempted to add structures and systems to help students reach those goals. Due to the shift from access to access and completion, community colleges have experienced challenges overlaying new strategies for completion onto the old structure.

The first attempt to create significant change in terms of completion did so within the existing community college structure. *Achieving the Dream* implemented a model
and theory of change in order to impact the way community colleges are conducted (Rutschow et al., 2011). Achieving the Dream was created to help colleges and universities gather data to implement informed strategies, which could then be scaled to improve student outcomes. Indicators of improved student outcomes were used to measure effectiveness. Achieving the Dream offered colleges flexibility in determining strategies, how many to undertake, which populations to target, and how and when to scale (Rutschow et al.). Types of initiatives were compiled and categorized into broad categories, from which Achieving the Dream could determine their prevalence and reference certain strategies as best practices. Achieving the Dream promoted meaningful change, but unlike efforts that would follow, it revealed limitations in terms of creating systemic change.

Experts knew that to promote lasting change, greater attention would need to be given to redesign the structure of the entire student experience. Completion by Design (CbD), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was the first attempt to create a comprehensive redesign for community colleges (Nodine, Venezia, & Bracco, 2011). CbD’s original concept was indebted to the work of Achieving the Dream; however, it set itself apart by asking participants to apply lessons learned simultaneously, as opposed to implementing isolated best practices (Pennington & Milliron, 2010). It also encouraged participants to address a full range of organizational and administrative factors that could impact the student experience.

CbD set the goal of increasing completion rates for large numbers of students, while also containing costs, maintaining open access, and ensuring quality (Nodine,
Venezia, & Bracco, 2011). CbD attempted to achieve these ends by developing strong completion pathways at each college that received the grant. “Changing Course” (Nodine, Venenzia, & Bracco) outlined the Loss and Momentum Framework, which is a system designed to ameliorate student completion. Participating institutions needed to be willing to redesign all aspects of their educational approach. The Loss and Momentum Framework served as a model for these efforts. The Loss and Momentum Framework is a pathway of student progression that participating institutions have used to prevent loss and create momentum for students. Although no single model is expected to fit the needs of all community colleges, this tool applied principles of effective redesign to aid in each institution’s efforts. Participating colleges were ultimately expected to learn about their own institutions, learn from each other, and influence the broader completion context.

Pathways.

The development of pathways was a focal point of CbD, but the concept did not originate with the Gates Foundation. O’Banion (2010) described the need for widespread and lasting reform in part through the creation and implementation of pathways. O’Banion (2011) laid forth a vision of successful student pathways, which would need to transform existing policies, programs, practices, and personnel in order to connect new students along a series of milestones with sufficient support for student success. Jenkins and Cho (2012) emphasized the need for students to expediently enter a career field in their pathways approach. Early research supported career commitment, as a CCRC study found strong correlation between early program entry and degree completion or transfer (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015b). Jenkins and Cho
recommended that institutions create clear roadmaps to student goals; provide on-ramps to programs of study; embed advising; and provide tracking, feedback, and support. Such conceptual designs reinforce research while limiting opportunities for students to make ill-advised choices. In theory, pathways also provide room to personalize the student’s unique situation.

Pathways have become accepted practice in completion reform. They are seen as the means to provide students necessary supports that will guide them to the expected goal of a meaningful credential. Jenkins and Cho (2012) argued that the low community college completion rate is systemic and that community colleges need to implement a “best process” approach to the student experience, as opposed to scaling “best practices” (p. 3-4). Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015a) similarly differentiated “guided pathways” from the “cafeteria model,” which is the outmoded approach of providing an array of offerings for the student to select and ultimately navigate alone. According to Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins, “The guided pathways approach to redesign starts with students’ end goals in mind, and then rethinks and redesigns programs and support services to enable students to achieve these goals” (p. 16). Accordingly, Redesigning America’s Community Colleges (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins) frames the student experience by using Loss-Momentum Framework terminology: specifically Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion. Reconfiguring the student experience from a pathways perspective has become commonplace at community college institutions seeking to provide direction for students to pursue and ultimately complete high-quality programs of study.
Strategies.

Alongside pathways, leading scholars have established strategies for the community college redesign, which complements the work of CbD. O’Banion (2011) established eight Guidelines for the Completion Agenda. These include (1) establish a core leadership team representing stakeholders; (2) develop the capacity to collect data and make evidence-based decisions; (3) create programs of study that provide students with opportunities for deeper learning; (4) prepare all employees through staff development on pathways to completion; (5) apply technological innovations for efficiency and effectiveness; (6) implement guidelines for rapid scaling-up of successful programs and practices; (7) realign current resources and identify potential new resources; and (8) create a transparent campus-wide communication system.

Similarly, Jenkins (2011) asked that leaders apply lessons learned from high-performance organizations for a successful redesign. Lessons learned include leadership, focus on the customer, functional alignment, process improvement, use of measurement, employee improvement/professional development, and external linkages. The thought behind these recommendations is that by heeding guidance from literature and bolstering areas that have historically been weak in community college organizations, institutional leaders can engage faculty and staff in the institutional redesign.

Non-academic student support.

Beyond community college redesign, more attention has been given to non-academic support activities in recent years. According to Karp (2011), “Non-academic support activities are presumed to encourage academic success but are not overtly
academic. They can occur within formally structured programs or informally, through in-class interactions” (p. 2). Karp’s work attempted to align current theories on student persistence with program evaluation literature to determine how non-academic supports lead to successful student outcomes. The four non-academic support mechanisms included: (1) creating social relationships; (2) clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment; (3) developing college know-how; and (4) making college life feasible (p. 6). Some of the ways in which these non-academic student supports are delivered at community colleges include enhanced advising, student success courses, and learning communities.

While non-academic supports have been encouraged by organizations like NACADA (2014) and the White House (Cooper, 2010), their impact is limited if only provided in the short term without helping students develop problem-solving capacity. The CCRC recommended pervasive supports, which they term SSIP: Sustained, Strategic, Intrusive and Integrated, and Personalized (2013). Such focus on nonacademic supports helps institutions develop the activities and interactions that take place within the pathways framework.

Policy change.

Alongside the proposed community college redesign, leaders have called for policy reform to reinforce innovation that is taking place at the institutional level. CbD partnered with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to tackle policy issues related to the Completion Agenda. JFF is an organization that provides support, resources, and guidance to help states scale efforts taking place at the institutional level. Through this partnership, CbD
and JFF identified high-leverage policy recommendations, which aligned with CbD principles (Couturier, 2012). States and postsecondary state systems have applied these recommendations at their discretion, but many of the challenges have remained.

Some of the lingering concerns include demographic and economic challenges, problems of scale, challenges in delivery, and the fact that state policy undermines quality implementation (Couturier, 2014). Through its subsequent DesignForScale initiative, JFF outlined a state policy agenda for transformational change. To do so, JFF provided two recommendations: (1) create state policy conditions that support colleges’ efforts to undertake comprehensive, integrated redesign; and (2) build state structures to set the conditions for scaled reform (2015). Within the first recommendation, JFF established steps and set policy priorities, and within the second recommendation, JFF described state structures that would be needed to develop the recommendations (Couturier, 2014). These efforts call for states and community colleges to be more systematic in their efforts due to the urgency of such reform.

Other policy guidance at the state level includes work done by the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center and the National Conference of State Legislators (2010). A joint-commission of these entities was convened to address achievement gaps in higher education with particular attention to low-income families and minority students. The recommendations called for improvements in areas that exist on a continuum and range from preschool to college. One of the recommendations directly speaks to college completion. It includes the need for improvements in research on academic and social engagement, high impact practices, first-year courses, articulation policies, and transfer
practices (College Board, 2010). To make progress in these areas, state policy approaches include requiring regular reporting, improving the transfer process between two- and four-year institutions, taking leadership on student success, ensuring state and federal funding for student support services, and considering performance-based funding.

The National Conference of State Legislatures has helped track performance-based funding, which has gained support in recent years. As of January 1, 2016, twenty-one states have performance-based funding in place at two- and four-year institutions, five states have performance-based funding in place at two year institutions only, and five states are in transition to moving to a performance-based model (NCSL, 2015).

Another policy group that has taken steps to improve postsecondary opportunities for underserved populations is the Pathways to College Network. In “Removing Roadblocks to Rigor”, the Pathways to College Network provided a unifying framework to link academic and social support policies and practices with increased academic rigor (Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, & Coles, 2009). Academic and social support is further classified as emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, appraisal support, and structural support. The authors encouraged educators and policymakers to integrate academic and social support into policies and practices. The Pathways to College work reinforces nonacademic student support research by Karp and others from a policy and practice perspective. The takeaway is that most completion work is not concerned with individual student success; most strategies are designed in terms of strategy, structure, and systems, which are measured based upon overall impact.
Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is presented here as a theoretical framework to describe the impact the marketplace has had on higher education. It is used to document a now inextricable link between the marketplace and a community college education. Neoliberalism further serves as a lens from which to view the Completion Agenda. This vantage point calls attention to the underlying impetus for completion reform in connection to larger economic goals. It draws a link between the marketplace and the efficiency model, which, considering its focus on degree productivity, has ultimately functioned as the Completion Agenda’s infrastructure.

Principles of classical liberal economics find their origins in Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), where the prices of goods are self-regulated through free trade by buyers and sellers. In such an economy, society is governed by the “invisible hand” of the market (Ayers, 2005, p. 530). Ayers (2005) explained how classical liberal economics once again gained popularity toward the end of the twentieth century through the work of Friedrich A. von Hayek, who took Smith’s theory a step further to advocate for government support of the free market. According to Chomsky (1999), the United States mobilized such recommendations by following certain basic rules: “liberalize trade and finance,” “let markets set the price,” “end inflation,” and “privatize” (p. 20). In this scenario, the government should stand aside and let commerce happen. Based upon Chomsky’s description of United States’ market-oriented principles, we can begin to see the link between capitalism and beliefs about what it means to be American.

Neoliberalism has been defined as the phenomenon that takes place when
marketplace exchange is used as an ethic guiding all other human activity (Harvey, 2005). Harvey (2005) explained that neoliberalism “emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (p. 3). One of the defining characteristics of neoliberalism is that these principles have been so embedded in society that its function becomes difficult to uncover. Giroux (1999) argued:

Within the language and images of corporate culture, citizenship is portrayed as an utterly privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain. Reformulating social issues as strictly individual or economic, corporate culture functions largely to cancel out the democratic impulses and practices of civil society by either devaluing them or absorbing such impulses within a market logic. (p. 30)

In America, an enduring result of neoliberalism’s proliferation is that democracy (often used synonymously with social good) has been coupled with marketplace exchange.

Under the sway of neoliberalism, public entities are viewed as secondary or at risk of being understood solely in terms of their market worth. Some of the values that are critical to democracy but have taken on secondary status include justice, freedom, equality, health, respect for children, political freedoms, and the rights of citizens (Giroux, 1999). On the other hand, education, an institution that is generally valued, is at risk of being reduced to its economic worth. This is especially true for higher education,
as more discussion has been made about its cost compared to an individual’s lifetime earnings.

From a societal perspective, higher education has been dissociated from its role as a public good. Underlying this shift is the fact that higher education is commonly framed as either a pursuit for individual gain or a corporate investment (Giroux, 1999; Giroux, 2007).

In United States society, individual interests take precedence over collective concerns (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). College is sold to individuals the means make more money and have a better quality of life. In one example, Boggs (2011) stated, “It is now commonly accepted that educational achievement is correlated with higher individual lifetime earnings and a better quality of life” (p. 2). More money and a better quality of life go hand in glove. In turn, wealth and the pursuit of happiness have become byproducts of higher education. For that reason, a higher education credential is often described as something that with the right dedication anyone can achieve.

Kevin Fleming’s *Success in the New Economy* (2013) is one example that reinforces the belief that the sole reason an individual will pursue higher education is to get a good job. Fleming encouraged individuals to apply informed decision-making and consider marketplace demands in order to position oneself for a solvent career. Fleming presented the ratio of 1:2:7, where for every occupation that requires a master’s degree or higher, two professional jobs require a bachelor’s degree, and seven jobs require a certificate or associate’s degree. Fleming’s goal, which echoes that of many Americans, is that an individual who is better informed about the labor market and the costs of
education, alongside the ranges of pay that middle-skill jobs offer, will be able to make an economical decision.

While neoliberalism has become inseparable from higher education for individual gain, it has also reframed the organization and delivery of higher education. According to Washburn (2005), colleges and universities have always had ties to the marketplace. Some of the tensions that have been existed include pure versus applied research, the humanities versus business-oriented culture, and preserving autonomy versus support from outside interests. However, today higher education is largely considered a training ground for the workforce (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). Giroux (2014) described colleges and universities as “adjuncts of corporate power” due to the corporatization of higher education and the commodification of knowledge (p. 58). He further argued that under this system, education only matters insofar as it “promotes national prosperity” and “drives economic growth” (p. 58).

As a consequence of the Great Recession, developing a strong workforce has taken precedence over other societal issues, as has the belief that a healthy economy is built on the backs of trained individuals. With America’s educational platform so explicitly connecting higher education to national prosperity, it has become increasingly hard for individuals to decipher the transaction that has taken place, let alone push back again such ideology. This challenge has become exacerbated by the emergence of venture philanthropists as the new proponents of education in America.
Venture philanthropy.

Venture philanthropy is a term that came about during the late 1990’s. “Virtuous Capital” (Letts, Ryan, & Grossman, 1997) provided a blueprint on how philanthropists could take a more active role in their investments to have a lasting impact. Venture philanthropy applies some of the theories that made venture capitalism so fruitful for investors. Some of the tenets of venture capitalism include its attention to risk management, a focus on the closeness of the relationship between investor and organization, the length of the relationship, and the investor’s exit.

Similar to venture capitalism, venture philanthropists can invest fewer dollars to more recipients without the same amount of risk, invest for an extended period of time help to build organizational strength for long-term goals, add noncash assistance in terms of the approach, and ensure sustainability before removing support. Bammi and Verma (2014) identified the two central aspects of venture philanthropy: (a) providing funding for social causes and (b) providing the necessary support and management skills to make them sustainable. The authors also discussed the need for efficient use of resources.

Venture philanthropy has extended to education. Educational venture philanthropy takes as its starting point the central aspects of venture philanthropy. Boverini (2006) identified four characteristics specific to educational venture philanthropy: the close relationship between investor and recipient, the long-term commitment by the donor to the institution, the underlying goal to strengthen the institution’s mission, and measurements of the impact of their investment. According to Boverini, venture philanthropy is an endeavor that is both pragmatic and idealistic for the
donor. While the donor seeks to achieve some altruistic good, he or she also is interested in results and sustainability.

Educational venture philanthropy is often framed in a positive light due to the benefits it provides institutions and students. However, the amount of power the donor holds in relation to his or her background is often disproportionate. The extent of the donor’s involvement in the investment can be frightening due to the lack of educational expertise. As Boverini explained, the venture philanthropist is the idea generator and the development officer is the idea processor. The investor-recipient relationship is such that as confidence builds investments increase. Accordingly, the institution must now assume the role of client and the venture philanthropist consultant, mirroring a for-profit enterprise.

In addition, donors can use intangible assets, such as prestige, power, and connections, to get things done. Kumashiro (2012) noted that donor influence has come to affect educational policy and practice more so today than at any other point in history, despite the fact that giving has never amounted to more than one percent of total educational funding. He argued, “Current reforms are allowing certain individuals with neither scholarly nor practical expertise in education to exert significant influence over educational policy for communities and children other than their own” (para. 2). Saltman (2009) and Barkan (2011) echoed such concerns.

Large philanthropy organizations create additional concerns due to the reach of their influence. Major philanthropic organizations can set educational agendas and impact public policy, in some cases for their own benefit. In a mixed-methods study,
Hall and Thomas (2012) found several trends in venture philanthropy over the past decade. Megafoundations, like the Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation, have caused the presence of smaller philanthropic organizations to dwindle; the foundations have shifted toward a focus on productivity, metrics, and efficiency; more grants are being awarded to higher education systems, states, and policy organizations due to a distrust that institutions are making significant progress; and strategies have increasingly been implemented to influence government policy and legislation. Philanthropy organizations like the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Lilly Foundation, among others, have clear ties to the marketplace.

A deeper understanding of the way in which venture philanthropists have continued to impact higher education does not discount the positive impact their dollars have had on the lives of students. It does, however, underscore higher education’s close ties to industry and the marketplace.

**Neoliberalism within the Completion Agenda.**

Since neoliberalism has been defined as an ethic guiding all other human activity related to marketplace exchange, it is both cloaked and omnipresent in higher education. In one sense, most people do not think critically about the hand of the market and its effects on education, so it remains invisible to the masses. On the other, capitalism is the driver of higher education in America, and messages are proliferated at all levels to reinforce its power in decisions that are made. Critics of this dynamic have come to understand higher education as another “business.” Many of them do not dwell on that fact because they understand higher education’s ties to the marketplace as an
insurmountable problem, something that cannot be otherwise due to the way society functions. The vast majority (those who remain uncritical) latch onto value-laden messages about the monetary good that is achieved through higher education for both individuals and society. Such unconscious obedience to the marketplace has served as the platform for the Completion Agenda.

The Completion Agenda is steeped in neoliberal propaganda that goes a long way to justify its existence. Proponents put forth the notion that community college attainment is the solution to economic prosperity, and, in the same breath, elevate it to guardian of democracy (O’Banion, 2010; McClenny, 2013). McClenny, a renowned community college leader, stated, “The future health of the economy and the democracy rests in significant part on achieving gains in educational attainment” (p. 4). O’Banion similarly tied the Completion Agenda to the preservation of democracy: “If these and other completion-agenda initiatives prove successful, the outcome will be significant for our students and society; the survival of our democracy might well depend on them” (p. 5). Democracy; which is built upon community, critical inquiry, and equality; becomes lost in such claims. And yet, when such messages are proliferated by other community college voices, they ultimately influence the collective conscious, reinforcing the logic that educational attainment is necessary for a better economy and, in turn, a better quality of life.

The overwhelming sentiment in society is that a better life is tied to one’s economic worth, and this message is reinforced through higher education. Dassance (2011) discussed societal support for higher education in general and community colleges
in particular: “much of the public support for higher education, and certainly for community colleges, comes from the perception that education is the vehicle to a better life—primarily a good job” (p. 37). In fact, messages about enrolling in college to get a better job are used in enrollment campaigns throughout the nation, and this is especially the case with community colleges.

The Completion Agenda also provides more opportunity for institutions to make unethical decisions for their own sustainability. This is especially true in a culture that supports state-led completion-based funding models, since states are typically community colleges’ biggest source of revenue. Evenbeck and Johnson (2012) spoke to how the Completion Agenda prioritizes the completion of credits through an efficiency model that has the potential to undermine deep learning through critical inquiry. Bragg and Durham (2012) also cautioned against lowering standards or limiting community college access in an attempt to produce more graduates. They called for equity; which is made up of access, readiness, and success; in the face of such initiatives to both hold colleges accountable and increase success rates. While there has not been evidence that institutions have taken advantages of such easy wins, there exists some concern that the quality of education will deteriorate due to external pressures.

The Completion Agenda more blatantly acts out its neoliberal approach in terms of how it is structured and delivered. Pathways, by their very nature, attempt to standardize the student experience in terms of moving students in, through, and out as quickly as possible. For the design to work, pathways must accelerate the learning process or remove aspects of the student experience that are deemed superfluous by
decision-makers concerned with the sheer number of graduates. Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins’ (2015a) pathway recommendation places the students and their career goals at the center of the educational design. They argued that “colleges need to create clear, educationally coherent program pathways that are aligned with students’ end goals, help student explore and select a pathway of interest, and track and support students’ progress along their chosen pathway” (p. 199). Such a model sounds good in theory, but the pathways are then limited to what is academic or career related.

Proponents argue that within pathways exist opportunities to engage students and individualize the college experience, but the pathway model suggests that there is a shortage of resources to do so. For advisors or counselors who oversee a caseload of students, there is no way to fully serve all students without determining need and focusing on students with whom greatest gains can be made. Data analytics can be used to determine the level of risk for students; however, college student personnel are often prompted to engage at-risk students in prescribed ways, whereas low-risk students must be proactive to seek out the support they need to enrich their college experience. Policy changes similarly exist to limit barriers and make the greatest impact on the largest number of students. Students become part of a system that values them as a number. As a result of pathway and policy changes, aspects of the student experience are at risk of being eliminated, despite evidence of their history and value.
Community College Student Affairs

The following section begins with an overview and history of student affairs. A more extensive discussion then builds upon that background information to describe how student affairs has been organized and delivered at community colleges.

Student affairs.

Student affairs is a discipline within the field of higher education with roots stemming back to colonial colleges and their need to provide services to students while not continuing to overburden professors. The common practice of assigning outside-of-class duties to college student personnel led to the unification of the profession and the development of professional standards through The Student Personnel Point of View of 1937 and 1949 (ACPA, 2014a/ACPA, 2014b). The 1937 document set forth a clear philosophy:

This philosophy imposes upon educational institutions the obligation to consider the student as a whole—his intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, his aesthetic appreciations. It puts emphasis, in brief, upon the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone. (p. 3)

The 1949 reexamination of the work added goals to the document, which were concerned with the individual’s growth in society and being a productive democratic citizen. The intentional design of those standards led to the growing awareness that learning also takes place outside of the classroom and should be treated with corresponding weight and
worth (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Within this study, out-of-class education is termed co-curricular education.

Student affairs refers to the discipline practiced by those in higher education who work directly with and/or for students (Helfgot, 2005). The discipline of student affairs includes the general field and specialties that fall within. Student development is the theoretical and conceptual foundation for student affairs practice that is focused on the whole student (Creamer, 1989; Helfgot, 2005; Strange, 1994; Wimbush, Bumphus, & Helfgot, 1995). As an area of inquiry and practice, student development was influenced by the field of developmental psychology because it was concerned with individual thought and behavior. Student affairs has further sought to address the needs of students at critical junctures in their cognitive, psychosocial, moral, physical, and spiritual growth. The term student affairs educators is used here to describe personnel whose work is dedicated to helping students develop at those critical junctures and providing them with meaningful learning opportunities (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Helfgot, 2005; Munsch & Cortez, 2014; Tyrell, 2014).

The discipline of student affairs has developed considerably since its inception. Student affairs experienced major growth in the 1950’s (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006) and gained official recognition during that time. According to Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh, some of the major themes that followed were socio-politically driven. The social and political unrest of the 1960’s broadened the spectrum of populations served (Evans et al., 2010) and asked that student affairs educators simultaneously keep order and preserve students’ rights. A period of adjustment and accountability followed, from
the 1970’s to 1990’s, with the passing of federal regulation (Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) and recurrent economic instability. During this time, there was also greater attention from professional associations to close the gap between theory and practice (Evans et al.). In the 1990’s and early 2000’s, student learning became the focus, especially as a result of seminal texts, such as *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996), *Powerful Partnerships* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004).

Over time, the accessibility of knowledge, where learning takes place, and who controls the learning process has shifted. According to Keeling, learning is widely accessible and is no longer a rare commodity. Also, scholars no longer consider students passive receptors of information in the classroom. Personal development and course content are intertwined in this new learning dynamic. Keeling argued:

Clearly, learning is far more rich and complicated than some of our predecessors realized when they distinguished and separated learning from student life. Seeing students as their component parts (body, mind, spirit), rather than as an integrated whole, supposed the emergence of fragmented systems and structures—academic affairs to cultivate the intellect, and student affairs to tend the mind, emotions, and spirit. (p. 3)

In response to a fragmented system, “A truly transformative education repeatedly exposes students to multiple opportunities for intentional learning through formal academic curriculum, student life, collaborative co-curricular programming, community-based, and global experiences” (Keeling, p. 3). We now understand that learning takes place outside
of the classroom as well as within. In accord, the work of student affairs and co-curricular education has taken on new meaning in the current educational context.

Due to the development of student affairs as a discipline, it also expanded in terms of the ways in which it was delivered. Early in student affairs development, experts provided direction in terms of the administrative organization and core functions of college student personnel. Mueller (1961) argued for both centralized and decentralized configuration of student affairs, to both be visible and to be able to deliver responsibilities to students. Today, institutions and their particular culture dictate the prominence of student affairs and the way in which it is structured to serve students. Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2006) described three different student affairs frameworks. These include student services: “a collection of services to students that are part of their experience”; student development: ensuring the “units of student affairs work together to provide a coherent, cohesive out-of-class learning experience for students”; and student learning: approaching “the student experience as an integrated, coordinated series of experiences that begins when a prospective student contacts the institution” (pp. 13, 14). The merits of one approach over the others can be debated, but each philosophy reflects what is valued at that particular institution.

**Student affairs at community colleges.**

Community college student affairs has lacked the direction and purpose that has been evident at four-year institutions since it began. Community college student affairs has had to overcome challenges, agree upon a model of delivery, and create professional development in order to legitimize its efforts. Out of necessity, it has continued to take
steps to justify its existence and set itself apart from that which takes place at four-year institutions. What follows is a history of major developments in community college student affairs.

**Initial challenges.**

Student affairs issues are often viewed as matters concerning four-year institutions. One obvious reason is that the development of student affairs as a discipline predates the growth and expansion of community colleges (Helfgot, 2005). Since community colleges boasted a separate history from four-year institutions, student affairs was not automatically integrated into the fabric of community colleges. In addition, while community colleges have taken steps to make student development fit their work, historically there exists a disconnect between its practice and existing scholarship. Most guiding student development theories were derived from student data at four-year institutions (Hirt & Frank, 2013). Although student development theory can be applied to community college students, research designs were not conceived with community college students in mind.

Student affairs is concerned with developing the whole student, and that philosophy has been consistent between two- and four-year institutions; the approaches to learning, however, have remained separate. The fundamental differences between institution type, and oftentimes a singular focus on those differences, has distanced community colleges from their four-year counterparts. Noteworthy developments in the community college student affairs model of delivery explain how community colleges responded to initial challenges faced when attempting to apply a student affairs
philosophy. In addition, the current composition of community college student affairs helps to describe its role today.

Models of delivery.

Community colleges have predominantly taken a student services approach to student affairs, whereas four-year institutions have trended toward student development or student learning models (Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh, 2006). Much of the original community college student affairs literature is focused on student services and the successful delivery of those services. In addition, community colleges developed a student affairs models throughout the twentieth century that fit their then-current needs.

Creamer (1994) synthesized a sixty year history of literature related to student services at community colleges. The literature described student services and its impact on student success, the optimal delivery of services, and program development and improvement; however, it rarely credited research to do so. According to Creamer, the role and functions of student services in the 1930’s were not initially well defined, but by the end of the decade, a comprehensive array of services was assembled. Student services offerings continued to be refined through the 1960’s and with greater attention to external forces. Forces that shaped student services functions were the institutional purpose, educational philosophies, historical events, and institutional issues.

Community college student affairs was not originally considered effective, and part of the reason was its inability to adapt to the community college setting. Creamer echoed Medsker’s (1960) sentiment that the quantity and quality of student personnel services at community colleges did not match its need. This belief was echoed in studies
and reports by the American Association of Junior Colleges (Humphreys, 1952), the Carnegie Corporation (Raines, 1966), the Esso Corporation (Matson, 1971), and by two leading educators, Elsner and Ames (1983). Matson (1972) discussed how community colleges too frequently followed the traditional pattern of activities and programs offered by four-year institutions. Elsner and Ames went so far as to call for an entire community college student services redesign. Despite best efforts, throughout much of its history, community college student affairs lacked direction and purpose.

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, community college student affairs was still discovering its identity. One of the first and most enduring calls for a new model came from O’Banion, Thurston, and Gulden (1970). In “An Emerging Model”, the authors described the shifting state of higher education, which was changing from instruction to learning. O’Banion, Thursten, and Gulden asked that educators move beyond existing models to a new model, which focused on helping students move toward self-fulfillment and responsible development. The new model asked student affairs educators to operate from a student development point of view as a change agent or what they termed human development facilitator. The human development facilitator was described as being committed to positive human development, having the skills and expertise to implement programs that would foster such development, and being able to understand and navigate systems within the academic community.

Although the Emerging Model guided the work of student affairs for over a decade, Dassance (1984) revisited the work to discuss to what extent the model was still emerging. Dassance explained how O’Banion, Thurston, and Gulden’s text brought the
Student Personnel Point of View and junior college point of view together, which was essential for the recognition of the profession. It was an appropriate “statement of philosophical direction” (p. 27). Dassance also believed that calling it a model was misleading because it implied that student development was a single concept and that it was well defined. The emerging model called for a shift from student services in order to focus on challenge and support to foster student development, but Dassance argued that student services was still needed to ground the profession. Here, student services remained essential to the community college philosophical mission and structure. 

Dassance determined that the two broad purposes of student development services were direct services to students and to promote students’ development.

The Student Success Systems Model (Keyser, 1989) is a separate model that has had a lasting impact on the way student affairs has been delivered at community colleges. Keyser described the Student Services Model and the Student Development Model and argued that both were too narrow in terms of their impact on students. He defined student success as “the discovery of, and commitment to, the pursuit of career and educational goals” (p. 70). Further, Keyser called for a new paradigm, which would apply systems thinking and focus on student success. Systems theory recognizes the interaction and interconnection between elements, any and all of which will impact the way the entire system operates. Systems thinking was used in this model because it speaks to the elements needed to accomplish student success in a complex environment.

The Student Success Systems Model influenced the student success initiatives that would follow to the extent that the work of student affairs and student success would
become one in the same. Student success could be understood independently, especially in terms of what takes place inside the classroom, but no longer could student affairs be discussed without also referring to student success. Furthermore, assumptions used to develop student success initiatives have aligned closely with concepts used in the Completion Agenda’s design.

**Professional development.**

Alongside continued debates about the role of student services at community colleges, one of the primary reasons why community college student affairs originally lacked direction and purpose was a result of not having an established professional network to discuss issues affecting community college student development. The Traverse City Statement of 1984 (Keyser, 1985) saw community college leaders come together in a national forum for the first time to set professional expectations. Other nationwide efforts had taken place before, but they were through studies on the progress of student affairs work. At the time, the most recent effort, the Carnegie Study, called for leaders to convene to discuss issues of the day. Accordingly, the colloquium set forth a philosophy and purpose as well as recognize major issues they were facing.

The monograph that followed the Traverse City Statement described the past and future of student development (O’Banion, 1985). O’Banion spoke to the necessary role of student services, the enduring debate over whether student affairs is essential, and the belief that student development is steeped in democratic and humanitarian principles concerned with individual opportunity. Leach’s contribution (1985) discussed student development from a consumerist perspective and framed student development services as
consistent with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Personal support (rent, food, daycare, safety, etc.) is needed for students to access educational support (assessment, advising, orientation, etc.), which is needed for students to access developmental support (personal counseling, career planning, leadership training, etc.). Leach put forth the idea that community colleges have perpetuated the myth that student affairs is non-revenue producing, when in reality direct gains in student success and retention make it one of the most important fiscal functions on a college campus from a fiscal perspective. Much was accomplished at this inaugural discussion, but it was not a national agenda and it still was not representative of all community college issues and perspectives (Floyd, 1991).

Following the Traverse City Statement of 1984, regular meetings were held to discuss the state of student affairs at community colleges and to identify important issues. A lasting effect of the Traverse City Statement was a centralized focus on student success. In a report of the Sixth Annual Leadership Colloquium in Traverse City, Keyser (1989) stated, “I doubt very much that any community college can be truly successful with today’s and tomorrow’s students without the critical input and contribution of student development services. What is important is that we not only describe those services but discern the impact of those contributions as they relate to improved student success” (p. 7-8). With this belief in mind, leaders determined that the role of the student affairs educator should, therefore, expand, as student success was now central to the work of the institution.

Continued and evolving conversations help to highlight the secured place of community college student affairs. After community college student affairs had
mobilized, the three major professional organizations; The National Council on Student Development, Commission XI, and the Community College Network; came together to establish a national agenda and set priorities for the 1990’s (ACT, 1990). The focus was to better integrate student affairs work within the institution and to take steps to become visible nationally. In 2005, the National Council on Student Development once again brought together leaders to discuss five key challenges they faced: the role of student development, learner’s expectations, enrollment management and student persistence, underprepared student success, and the future role of counseling (Garrett, Bragg & Makela, 2006). This ongoing professional development work helps to further solidify student affairs as a vital area within community colleges and to distinguish it from other areas that impact the student experience.

*Student affairs administration.*

When looking at community college student affairs administration, there exist qualities that are markedly different from other types of intuitions. Beyond the student services approach that community colleges frequently adopt (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006), student affairs administrators have a distinct experience at these types of institutions compared to others in the field. Through her research, Hirt (2006) determined that organizational culture has an impact on the work that student affairs administrators do.

Hirt (2006) described community college student affairs administrators as *producers* due to the amount of work they are asked to take on and the ways in which student success is measured. According to Hirt, “As evidence reveals, community
college practitioners are expected to sustain high-quality services that meet the demands of a broad array of learners. Moreover, they accomplish these ends through fewer offices and with fewer professional than other institutional types” (p. 136). In part, due to their multifaceted roles, community college student affairs administrators feel marginalized when compared to similar roles at other institution types (Hirt, 2006).

At the same time, student affairs administrators at community colleges embrace the work they do at their particular type of institution. They are aware of the institution’s mission, they place less emphasis on helping students find purpose in life than on achieving success in career and life, and they are willing to adapt quickly based upon changing circumstances (Hirt, 2006). Additional themes directly related to the work environment include a student-centered approach, collegiality with faculty, and a top-level of bureaucracy.

Despite differences between community college administrators and those who work at four-year institutions, what matters to all student affairs administrators is the fact that their work is meaningful (Hirt, 2006). Such an important similarity suggests that, while where individuals work matters, student affairs administrators hold professional and educational values that cut across each type of institution.

**Student Success Theories**

Around the time community college student affairs began to define itself separately from four-year institutions, much progress was being made regarding student success and the factors that contribute to student persistence. Tinto’s theory of academic and social integration (1975, 1986, 1993), Astin’s theory of student involvement (1984,
1993, 1999), and Kuh’s theory of student engagement (1991, 2001, 2005) were seminal theories that helped describe what takes place both inside and outside of the classroom at colleges and universities. More recently, the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model (CECE) (Museus, 2014) acknowledged limitations to all of these approaches. CECE notwithstanding, these theories have shaped and continue to shape how we understand co-curricular education and its connection to student success.

**Theory of academic and social integration.**

Tinto’s theory of integration has been used to describe the ways in which students share attitudes and beliefs about their institutional culture and how they act in accordance to those norms (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Tinto’s theory, is built upon Van Gennep’s (1960) stages of cultural transition, which described how individuals go through three stages of transition within a culture: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Tinto used these concepts as a foundation to help explain students’ voluntary student departure from undergraduate institutions (Tinto, 1993).

Although Tinto described his theory as interactionist (1986), which looks at both the individual and the institution, it has been widely criticized for the notion that students need to assimilate in order to thrive. Students from underrepresented backgrounds have the most to lose in terms of cultural heritage as a result of this phenomenon (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 1992; Tierney, 1999). Tinto has clarified that his theory is concerned with community membership, not that students need to assimilate into the dominate culture. Despite lingering criticism surrounding the theory of academic
and social integration, it has shaped the way educators view factors contributing to student success.

**Theory of involvement.**

Astin defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (1984, p. 518). Involvement relies on five postulates: (1) involvement relies on generalized or specific investment in physical and psychological energy; (2) students manifest involvement in varying degrees and, individually, in varying degrees toward different objects at different times; (3) involvement can be interpreted by both its quantitative and qualitative features; (4) the amount of learning and personal growth in any program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of involvement toward that program; and (5) the effectiveness of educational policy is directly related to its ability to increase student involvement.

Involvement is typically analyzed using the Input—Environment—Output (I—E—O) model (Astin, 1984). Astin’s research recognized that all entering students are exposed to the institution’s environmental characteristics, but their environmental experiences are vastly different based on the curricular and co-curricular choices they make (1993).

Astin’s original longitudinal questionnaire is based upon five different categories of involvement. Most of the research focused on time on task as opposed to energy expended (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009) because time is relatively easy to measure. This factor suggests that there are some limitations to the theory. However, Astin’s theory of involvement has shaped the way institutions have come to value co-
curricular education. Four-year institutions, where co-curricular education is convenient and students are typically accessible, have made student involvement a priority.

**Theory of engagement.**

Kuh’s theory of engagement builds upon Astin’s theory of involvement because it first attempts to understand how student involvement leads to student success and then determines how colleges and universities can invest in opportunities for student benefit (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). Kuh defined engagement as “the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities” (2003, p. 25). Kuh’s work has centered on institutional environments that promote student learning and personal development as opposed to how or how much students learn (Kuh et al., 1991; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Student engagement builds upon the thinking that educationally purposeful activities impact student learning and their overall experience, and such conditions are necessary for student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is an instrument that was created to assess the extent to which students are engaged. It is based upon five benchmarks of effective educational practice: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environments (Kuh, 2003). NSSE aligned with existing research in that it focused specifically on activities related to learning and personal development. It
was given to first-year and senior students at four year colleges and universities across the country.

The goals of student engagement have been explicitly defined. According to a study by Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009), “Engagement differs from involvement in that it links more directly to desired educational processes and outcomes and emphasizes action that the institution can take to increase student engagement” (p. 414). This central difference has helped distance the work of student engagement from its foundation in student involvement.

**Culturally engaging campus environments model.**

Scholarship incorporating these student success theories has called for the need to become increasingly inclusive in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, and ability. More recent research has argued for the need to not continue to revise old models, which have been flawed from the outset, but to create a new model of student success. Museus’ (2014) CECE model acknowledged that external influences shape individual influences and success among racially diverse students; that students begin college with precollege inputs that affect individual influences and success; and environmental and individual influences impact student success. Although it is relatively new, CECE continues to refine, build upon, and separate itself from social integration, student involvement, and student engagement.

**Community college student engagement.**

With awareness to previous student success theories, the Center for Community College Student Engagement’s work is more relevant when discussing the community
college student experience. Working in partnership with NSSE, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) was first administered in 2001 due to a need to focus on issues particular to community and technical college students. The original CCSSE report, based upon participation in a pilot by 13 colleges, explained that college today cannot be strictly understood from the lens of traditional colleges and through the eyes of traditional students (Center for Community College, 2002).

**Philosophy and outcomes.**

The Center for Community College Student Engagement approached its work from the perspective that in a context where college is notably important for economic and civic reasons, community and technical colleges fill in gaps and provide opportunity for new populations of students. In accord, CCSSE served as “a mechanism for assessing quality in community college education” in terms of good educational practice, the improvement of programs, and the need for accountability (Center for Community College, 2002, p. 3). The Center for Community College Student Engagement asked community colleges to build a culture of evidence and rely on “objective, relevant, indisputable, impossible-to-ignore, rock-solid data” (2006, p. 3). CCSSE was not created to be a ranking tool but to help institutions improve through data-driven decision making. This purpose and approach has guided the work of CCSSE until today.

In order to provide institutions insight into key areas for teaching and learning and student performance, CCSSE established benchmarks that would guide survey questions and reports (Center for Community College, 2003). The five benchmarks established were active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty
interaction, and support for learners. The Center for Community College Student Engagement explained that benchmarks can be used to help institutions interpret data, to compare their performance to similar institutions, to analyze performance across benchmarks, to continuously improve, and to reach goals.

Experts were aware that CCSSE research would need to lead to verifiable outcome measures, such as course completion, GPA, persistence, and graduation. In response, the Center for Community College Student Engagement conducted validation research by linking student-level data with three external sources to determine student performance over time (McClenney & Marti, 2006). McClenney and Marti found positive associations between engagement and the number of the credit hours completed and terms enrolled across all studies (McClenney, Marti, & Adkins, 2006). However, only the benchmark of student-faculty interaction was positively correlated with certificate and degree completion, despite other benchmarks being correlated with other academic success measures. Overall, the results from this study supported major theoretical perspectives, such as Astin’s theory of involvement, and suggested that greater engagement leads to increased levels of student success (McClenney & Marti, 2006).

**Real learning.**

The Center for Community College Student Engagement’s approach to community college improvement took on added importance as resources became increasingly limited and yet the need for student success remained essential. For his introduction to the 2007 survey results, Kuh spoke to the fact that community colleges
were in the spotlight and they would play a pivotal role in improving human capital and bettering America’s educational system (Center for Community College). With renewed focus on student success in the Completion Agenda context, progress came to be defined differently yet adhered to CCSSE’s original principles. The 2010 report stated, “Improving college completion is essential, but increased degree completion, in and of itself, is not a sufficient measure of improvement. Genuine progress depends on making sure that degree completion is a proxy for real learning” (Center for Community College, p. 3). Real learning, as defined here, entails thinking and reasoning abilities, content knowledge, and the skills needed for current jobs and citizenship.

Real learning has been less of a focus in recent Center for Community College Student Engagement research. CCSSE’s subsequent reports in 2012, 2013, and 2014 respectively focused on promising practices for student success, bringing high-impact practices to scale, and integrating effective practices into pathways, respectively (Center for Community College). Although none of the most recent reports discounted a philosophy of real learning and genuine progress, they collectively reinforced the need to improve success rates while also acknowledging that it needs to be done through effective and efficient means.

**Limitations.**

Now that CCSSE has been around for over a decade, the Center for Community College Student Engagement has learned that the work they have undertaken alongside community colleges has improved student engagement. The improvements are documented in the 2015 report, “Engagement Rising: A Decade of CCSSE Data Shows
Improvements Across the Board” (Center for Community College). Despite empirical evidence presented in this report, the initial way in which community college student engagement was defined limits our understanding of this concept.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement began with an understanding that community college students are different from four-year students; they have demands outside of class that prevent them from spending an equivalent amount of time on campus or for engagement to happen spontaneously (2004). For this reason, the Center for Community College Student Engagement suggested colleges find ways to make engagement inescapable. According to Tinto, the question community colleges should pose is not whether they should promote high expectations and provide academic and social support; it is whether or not they can they make them visible, accessible, and unavoidable (Center for Community College, 2008). The key strategies to promote learning CCSSE offered were to strengthen classroom engagement, integrate student support into learning experiences, expand professional development focused on engaging students, and focus institutional policies on creating the conditions for learning (Center for Community College, 2010). Since engagement often does not happen elsewhere, the underlying assumption has been that engagement needs to take place in the classroom or be connected to the classroom in some way.

Despite recent Center for Community College Student Engagement recommendations suggesting otherwise, out-of-class experiences are equally valuable to in-class experiences. The Center for Community College Student Engagement’s own research supports this belief.
The Center for Community College Student Engagement began administering the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) in 2007 because they learned that community colleges regularly lose half of their students in the first year. By focusing on new students as a cohort, they could better understand what helps students persist early on in the college experience. Looking behind the data, the original report stated that students who considered dropping out of college almost always persisted because of a relationship they built, whether it was with a faculty member, advisor, administrative assistant, or somebody else on campus (Center for Community College, 2008b). This fact runs contrary to the Center’s simultaneous belief that engagement needs to take place in the classroom. Also, promising practices that were outlined in the 2012 CCSSE report spoke to the first year experience, learning communities, and experiential learning beyond the classroom, among others (Center for Community College).

Engagement as defined by the Center for Community College Student Engagement ignores many co-curricular learning opportunities. The assumption that students cannot and will not voluntarily engage in outside of class activities runs the risk of dismissing a core element of Astin’s theory of involvement, which was foundational to student engagement work. It also ignores inherent benefits of co-curricular education for no other reason than it may not be convenient for students we hope find success and ultimately complete. The Center for Community College Student Engagement has never wavered from its purpose to help students be successful and become engaged citizens, but we should be cautious that the survey does not embrace a robust definition of student
engagement, one that is as focused on student development as it is on degree and certificate completion.

**Gaps in the Literature**

Due to the ways in which scholarship about community college student affairs has evolved, more attention was traditionally placed on the delivery of services than on student development for the populations it has served. To further distance community colleges from what was happening in student affairs as a discipline, community college literature ignored gains that were made by scholars focused primarily on four-year students, such as student involvement. The community college focus on student success allowed community college leaders to concentrate on what works for community college students, as opposed to students in general. The Completion Agenda has further disconnected the community college student experience from the overall college experience.

At the same time, underlying the Completion Agenda is the goal of individual and collective prosperity, which has shaped a community college education. Within this framework, community college students are asked to do what is essential for their education and for their future careers and not necessarily more. What it means to be a democratic citizen, to be culturally aware, or to be globally engaged have not been a priority of completion efforts.

Community college top-level administrators and nationally recognized scholars have been instrumental in the work of student completion, and, as a result, have had a considerable impact on the work of student affairs educators. At a time when community
college student affairs educators must pause and take heed of what has been lost or what should be preserved amidst the rallying cry of completion, little emphasis has been placed on the purpose of student involvement and co-curricular education. Student affairs educators demand to be heard because their voices are important, the work they do with students is vital, and the insight they can provide is essential to a robust, meaningful, and fulfilling educational experience for all students. The future vitality of a community college education could well depend on their unique perspective.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological choices for this study. It begins with a rationale for using qualitative research, followed by a description of the research methods that were applied to this phenomenological study. This chapter further describes the sample, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, it speaks to my position when conducting research and measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. For this study, I completed all IRB guidelines through Ohio University’s Office of Research Compliance (Appendix B).

Suitability of Qualitative Research

The goal of this study is to learn how community college student affairs educators view the purpose of student involvement and co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda and how their professional values align with institutional and cultural expectations. The research questions guiding the research were:

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?
2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?
3. How do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at their respective institutions?
4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and current institutional expectations?
The research questions lent themselves to qualitative research, since they are concerned with participants’ meanings and address multiple, complex variables.

This study was qualitative in nature, and, as a result, took on certain qualities associated with qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The study was conducted where participants work. I employed multiple methods and acted as the key instrument during the research process. I collected data through interviews and documents, then reviewed the data for meaning. Making meaning began with categories and themes from raw data, which required complex reasoning and inductive and deductive logic. In addition, as qualitative research cannot be inflexible in light of knowledge that emerges and contingencies that arise, emergent design allowed for alterations during the research process. Finally, through reflexivity, I positioned myself within the research and took into account my own background and experiences and how these factors may have influenced the findings.

I approached this research from an interpretive/constructivist perspective, where the goal is to describe, understand, and interpret experiences within a particular context, knowing that multiple realities exist (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2014) explained that social constructivists believe individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work. The subjective meanings of their experiences are varied and multiple, and the researcher, therefore, looks for the “complexity” of views as opposed to “narrowing meanings” into fewer categories (p. 8).

I also approached this research from a philosophical tradition that is concerned with lived experience and is indebted to Husserl and Heidegger. Van Manen’s work on
phenomenology (1990; 2014) informed this research approach in terms of the value it places on qualitative research. Van Manen (1990) argued that “to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). His research approach is phenomenological in that it is focused on how one orients to lived experience and hermeneutic in that it is shown through how one interprets the texts of life. By striving to locate a prereflective meaning, van Manen asks that qualitative research avoid fragmentation and to look at the whole. These philosophies informed the research that was conducted.

Qualitative research is best used for specific types of cases. According to Merriam (1995), qualitative research is recommended when the researcher attempts to understand phenomena when variables cannot be identified, in finding new approaches to common problems, in understanding how participants perceive their roles in an organization, to determine the history of a situation, and in building theory or generalizations. Merriam also acknowledged that qualitative research might investigate what impact social and political factors have on reality. Qualitative research is often appropriate when there is a lack of a theory or the existing theories fail to fully explain the phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Whereas quantitative research is concerned with cause and effect, qualitative research is focused on how people interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, qualitative research is interested in how individuals interpret that experience within a particular context (Merriam & Associates, 2002).
With attention to the goals of this study, qualitative research was best suited to answer the research questions. Nearly every recommendation for the appropriateness of qualitative research applied to this study. This study was concerned with how participants perceived their role in an organization, it was focused on a situation that is historically specific, and the topic was so complex that variables could not be easily isolated.

Little has been written about co-curricular education in the Completion Agenda context, unless it is tied to the classroom in some way. Voices from student affairs educators, who work directly with students to plan and deliver co-curricular education, have been drowned out by other, more prominent voices interested in moving students through their degree pathway as efficiently as possible. A qualitative research approach, therefore, allowed me to learn about the specific experiences of participants within the broader social context. As each individual brings his or her unique perspectives and experiences to the discussion, so, too, did they add to each other and help to generate certain concepts not widely discussed concerning co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda. These insights have largely been absent in community college student affairs literature, so this study has the potential to impact co-curricular education delivery at community colleges.

**Research Method**

Phenomenology was chosen as the methodological framework for this study due to its focus on the *essence* of experience for individuals. Van Manen (1990) defined phenomenology in the following way: “Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a
phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is—and without which it could not be what it is” (p. 10). “Phenomenology” has been used in different ways, including as a philosophy, a type of inquiry, an interpretive theory, a qualitative tradition, and a research methods framework (Patton, 2002). In light of the potential for confusion that the multifaceted use of this term can cause, Patton explained that each interpretation shares the objective to understand how humans make sense of their experiences individually and how those experiences are transformed into shared meaning. Along those same lines, Creswell (2013) put forth the idea that phenomenology “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 76). He argued that the product is a “composite description” (p. 82) that reflects this shared meaning. This study was concerned with both how individuals made sense of their experiences and how those combined accounts brought forth commonalities that were not immediately apparent.

This phenomenological approach built upon two traditions that are distinct but not opposed. Van Manen (1990; 2014) spoke about hermeneutic inquiry, which is focused on interpretation and the role of writing in making that interpretation emerge. The focus of hermeneutic inquiry is on the researcher and his or her ability to come as close to reality as possible. Paradoxes exist in this or any attempt to approach reality. Consequently, writing separates us from yet ultimately brings us closer to the life world. Those who approach qualitative research from a hermeneutic perspective acknowledge that they are constructing meaning based upon data in partnership with participants (Patton, 2002).
This study was also indebted to heuristic inquiry, which focuses on the researcher’s personal experience and insights as they relate to the topic at hand, an issue that is also of interest to the participant (Patton, 2002). The researcher brings his or her personal experiences to the fore and “brackets” them in order to better comprehend the participants’ experience. The researcher can then experience the phenomenon as the participant also reflects upon it (Patton, 2002). Both traditions acknowledge that meaning is constructed and informed by the participant’s perception of reality. By acknowledging each tradition, I both disclosed my interest in this topic and was prepared to be transformed by the findings as a result. At the same time, I was able to interpret data and construct meaning through writing, which came as close to the truth as possible.

This study applied an understanding of phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2013), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The role of the phenomenology is to arrive at the essence or structure of an experience. Key terms that inform the process are *epoche, phenomenological reduction, horizontalization*, and *imaginative variation*.

Moustakas (1994) asked that the researcher apply *epoche* to refrain from judgment or to avoid the ordinary way of perceiving the world. In other words, the researcher will bracket his or her experiences, or temporarily set them aside, to examine the consciousness that follows (Creswell; Merriam & Tisdell). Phenomenological reduction is “the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself” (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 27). Horizontalization is the process of looking at all the data side-by-side and applying the
same weight to each piece of data (Merriam & Tisdell; Moustakas). Finally, imaginative variation “involves viewing the data from various perspectives, as if one were walking around a modern sculpture, seeing different things from different angles” (Merriam & Tisdell, p.27). By applying these concepts during the research process, the researcher can come close to understanding the essence of the phenomenon or circumstances that brought the shared experiences about.

Sample

Relatively no scholarship within the context of the Completion Agenda has been written from or considered the perspective of a community college student affairs educator who is not also a top-level administrator or nationally recognized scholar in the field. As student affairs educators work directly with students in areas of co-curricular education, they have certain expertise that cannot be ascertained by those removed by the day-to-day functions of student affairs. The Completion Agenda is a social and political platform, both at the institutional level and at the national level. Student affairs educators who are not top-level administrators or nationally recognized scholars also may not be as influenced by information disseminated from powerful national organizations, such as the American Association of Community Colleges, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Community College Research Center, the Center for Community College Student Engagement, Jobs for the Future, the Lumina Foundation, the National Conference of State Legislators, and others. Thus, purposeful sampling was used in order to identify participants for this study.
Purposeful sampling is the sampling approach most commonly associated with qualitative research. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that it is not based on statistical probability theory, where the goal is to generalize something about the larger population from a sample. Rather, qualitative research focuses on in-depth interactions and information gathering from small samples (Patton, 2002). Patton explained, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth [understanding]. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230). The first step in purposeful sampling is to determine criteria that will be applied when choosing participants and/or sites to be studied (Merriam, 2009).

Purposeful sampling has several strategies that will yield different outcomes, so determining the correct strategy for the research questions is essential for a successful study. For this study, where non-nationally-recognized student affairs educators who work(ed) directly with students in areas of co-curricular learning were targeted, criterion sampling was applied to identify suitable participants.

Criterion sampling means choosing cases that meet some predetermined criterion or set of criteria (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). I identified the sample for this study by applying specific criteria for participation. The factors I looked for included: community college affiliation, student affairs or college student personnel background, mid-level administrative responsibilities, and work duties focused on student involvement (with regular student interaction) at the outset of the Completion Agenda. I also narrowed the sample by state, focusing on Ohio, which has a significant community college presence,
is performance-based funding state, has a strong community college organization (Ohio
Association of Community Colleges), and supports noteworthy completion initiatives
(Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design in particular).

To identify prospective participants, I reviewed institutions statewide and
analyzed each institution’s organization chart or other publicly available information
located on the school’s official website. Prospective participants were determined by title
and division or department; I focused primarily on student affairs and student life
professionals. Once I identified prospective participants, I sent an email to them
(Appendix C) and asked that they complete a brief survey (Appendix D) for the
opportunity to participate in this study. The criteria for the study was encapsulated in one
question: “In 2010-2011 (or any time within that period) were you employed at a
community college where you worked directly with students in support of their co-
curricular education?” Based upon responses to the survey, if an individual qualified and
was willing to participate, I sent a brief questionnaire on their educational and
professional experience (Appendix E) and/or asked them to share their current resume. I
also sent the Consent Form (Appendix F) for the participant to review before we met in
person.

Sample size of a qualitative study is not defined and depends upon the study
(Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). While there is some research that suggests how many
participants should be included in certain types of research, such as the recommendation
for three to 10 participants for phenomenological studies (Dukes, 1984), no standard
sample size exists or should be blindly followed because the nature of the research
suggests otherwise. Patton (2002) recommended that sample size should be reflective of the breadth and depth of the study. Patton further recommended that the researcher “specify minimum samples based on the expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interests” (p. 246). Based upon this rationale, and an understanding that phenomenological research relies on information rich cases, I included 12 participants in my sample, which provided sufficient data for this study.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative research data are organized into four data collection approaches, which include observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). This study relied on data collected through interviews and documents.

**Interviews.**

Data were primarily gathered through interviews with participants, which is encouraged as the principal source of data collection in a phenomenological study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I interviewed 13 participants for this study. Following the interview process, one participant withdrew from the study, leaving 12 total participants. The rationale for using interviews as the primary source of data collection is further described in what follows.

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) described the qualitative research interview as one that “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 3). Despite the researcher approaching a topic to understand particular
themes, the interview itself is interdependent. Brinkmann and Kvale recommended researchers return to the meaning of the term “interview” as a starting point: “An interview is literally an inter-view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 4). According to these authors, interviews are an exchange of views and rely on interaction between researcher and participant for knowledge production.

Interviews are also contextually bound, which means that they cannot seek to unearth objective data or be neutral (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Since interviews exist within a context, they are, by nature, historical and political. Empathetic interviewing, as defined by Fontana and Frey, suggests that the researcher has a purpose in interviewing, takes a stance, and is not neutral during the process. Empathetic interviewing aligns with the interdependent nature of the interview and further reinforces my belief that reality is socially constructed and contextually bound.

Merriam (2009) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that interviewing is important when we are interested in another’s feelings, interpretations of events, or vantage points about the world around them. This is especially true when we cannot observe behavior that would provide equivalent information. In some ways, observation is valued over self-reported data due to its inherent validity, but one can only learn about feelings, thoughts, intentions, past experiences, and how people make sense of the world through interviews (Patton, 2002). In addition, phenomenological research is fundamentally interested in an individual’s interpretation of reality and how those views align with that of others, as opposed to detailing facts about a series of events.
Certain recommendations for interviewing are provided for a researcher applying a phenomenological approach. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) provided twelve aspects of phenomenology as the mode of understanding: it pertains to the life world, it seeks to understand meaning of central themes, it is qualitative, it encourages description, it asks for specificity, it requires deliberate naiveté on the part of the researcher, it is focused on particular themes, it asks the participant to clarify ambiguities, it allows for changes to emerge, meaning-making depends on the sensitivity of the researcher, it is an interpersonal interaction, and the participant may have a positive experience as a result of the process. These qualities related to phenomenological interviewing informed my interview approach.

One of the ways to decide what type of interview to conduct is by determining the structure of the interview. Oftentimes the interview structure is determined by what data the researcher would like to gather and how much variation or direction the questions allow. Interviewing can range from being highly structured, with the same set of questions for all participants in the same order without variation, to unstructured, meaning no standard questions or order and the opportunity for maximum flexibility based upon conversation flow (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In general, qualitative interviews value less structured and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2014). A semi-structured interview approach is recommended for phenomenological interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of the interview, as described by Brinkmann and Kvale, suggests that the interviewer should lead the direction of the discussion but not encourage opinions about themes.
Beyond the structure of the interview, certain experts (Seidman, 2013) recommend an interview series approach for phenomenological interviewing. Due to the number of participants, which exceeded what is typical in a phenomenological study, and the depth of interviews conducted, I conducted one face-to-face interview with the opportunity for further follow-up by phone. The follow-up phone interview depended on participants’ willingness to share more information. Two participants took advantage of this opportunity, which marginally added to the depth of data.

Before the interview process, I bracketed my own experiences on the topic through narrative writing. I also applied an Interview Protocol for the in-person interview to be conducted (see Appendix G). The interview with each student affairs educator was in-depth; I devoted about 60 minutes to the participant at each location. This interview was focused on participants’ educational and professional background, as well as their current professional experience related to the topic. The discussion topics were informed by the research questions. The semi-structured interview approach, encouraged by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), also allowed for the opportunity to explore other, related topics.

**Documents.**

Data were gathered as a secondary measure through documents. Documents can be used to provide background information on the site, program, or population (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In addition, other types of firsthand data related to organizational activity can be useful. According to Marshall and Rossman, “analysis of documents is potentially quite rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting” (p.
160). Some of the benefits of documents are that it gives the researcher insight into the language and words of participants, it is an unobtrusive source of information, and it represents something that the creator has given time and attention (Creswell, 2014). Patton (2002) explained that the value of documents extend beyond their face value to paths of inquiry that can result. Marshall and Rossman similarly spoke about the value of documents when they are supplemented with observation or interviews.

For this study, document analysis was used to better understand the role of co-curricular education at each participant’s institution, as well as for triangulation purposes. Merriam (2009) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) differentiated between public records, personal documents, popular cultural documents, and visual documents. The type of documents I sought were public documents. Public documents are defined as the “official, ongoing records of society’s activities” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 164). Relevant to this study, these included “Right to Know” information about the institution and each institution’s Campus Completion Plan, both of which were found online. On the questionnaire and through e-mail, I also asked that participants share any documents they found relevant to the discussion as well. Two participants shared a relevant document from their institution, and these also became part of the data set.

The Campus Completion Plan served as the key document that provided insight into each institution’s focus on student development and co-curricular education related to the college’s overall goals related to completion. Every public institution within the state of Ohio is required to submit a Campus Completion Plan every two years, starting in 2014. Each institution connected to this research study submitted a Campus Completion
Plan by June 30, 2014 and June 30, 2016. These documents are readily available on the Ohio Department of Education Website. Also, student consumer information, or “Right to Know,” which an institution is required to report as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Skyes, 2011), was analyzed for background information and triangulation purposes. Right to Know data includes information on diversity, student activities, and student outcomes, among other areas.

Scholars have provided recommendations on the process for locating and making use of documents. Since these documents were available on the Internet, access to documents did not need to be negotiated at the outset of the research. The researcher is expected to use his or her judgment in locating documents, whether it is through inquiry, hunches, or emerging findings (Merriam, 2009), which I did here.

Regarding document analysis, the general steps Merriam (2009) outlined included finding relevant materials, assessing their authenticity, adopting some system for coding or cataloging, and analyzing content. Content analysis is the act of describing or interpreting the content of the document written by an individual or social group (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Content analysis took place both before and after interviews. Analysis took place before each interview in order to prepare for the interview, and it took place afterward to analyze my findings in relation to what was available through those key documents.

Ethical issues are also outlined in the literature because making use of documents could have unintended results. The researcher needs to consider potentially harmful consequences to the individual or to the organization, even if the document is public
record. The relative ease with which documents and records can be accessed, copied, and used can create an opportunity for the researcher to distance the artifact from the person behind it (Merriam, 2009). I considered these factors when making reference to documents I have used in this research.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process that takes place once the researcher has collected data and begins to analyze and interpret it. For this study, I adapted a data analysis process from Creswell (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Creswell outlined a linear, hierarchical approach to data analysis for qualitative research that is organized as follows:

1. Organize the raw data and prepare it for analysis.
2. Read through the data in its entirety.
3. Code the data with categories that are created.
4. Use the coding process to generate both description and themes.
5. Bring description and themes back together through narrative.
6. Interpret the meaning of description and themes.

Creswell explained that these steps are interactive in practice, meaning the steps are interconnected and not always performed in the order presented. The step-by-step process Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outlined follows the same general process but is more detailed in how the researcher approaches each set of data and undertakes the coding process.
Coding.

For Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the analysis process begins with reading the initial interview transcript and taking notes in the margins about elements that potentially connect to the study. After reading through the entire transcript, the notes, comments, or observations are then assigned *open codes*. Merriam and Tisdell defined coding as “assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p. 199). Creswell provided rationale for creating codes. He recommended codes that readers would expect to find based upon the topic, those that are surprising and were not anticipated at the outset of the study, and those that are unusual and would be of interest to readers. The researcher will keep a list of codes, chronologically, which will be fairly lengthy at the outset.

The coding process continues with each new set of data, which is treated with the same worth. The researcher will create a separate list with the second set of data, which can then be compared to the first. Comparing codes across cases is defined here as *axial coding*. As the two lists are merged, the master list serves as an “outline” or “classification system” denoting regular patterns in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 206). Smith and Osborn’s (2003) work on interpretive phenomenological analysis suggests a similar pattern of clustering and ordering. Smith and Osborn likened the process of clustering and ordering concepts to that of a magnet pulling in themes (p. 70).

Once the master list of categories has been developed, the categories should cut across the data and be abstractions of the data. The master list should be revised to reflect comparable levels of information based upon the classification system, which
might including making other, smaller categories subcategories. Evidence will then be sorted under the category scheme. Categories will be named and likely further reduced, so they are comprehensive but revelatory.

**Categories and themes.**

According to Creswell (2014), description and themes are generated in relation to codes that have been created. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) used the term *categories* to describe any grouping of similar concepts that fall within established codes. They defined categories as follows: categories are “conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples (or bits or units of the data you previously identified” (p. 206). Categories are often called themes in other research, but as Merriam and Tisdell apply it, the generic term is synonymous with findings and answers to research questions.

**Analysis process.**

The analysis process I used for this study incorporated Creswell (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and included the following eight steps:

1. Bracket my experience through written narrative.
2. Analyze each piece of raw data through close reading and annotation.
3. Preliminary code data through open coding.
4. Group and eliminate codes through axial coding until a master list has been established.
5. Develop a classification system that applies weight to categories that have emerged.
6. Compare the master list, including categories and subcategories, to research questions.

7. Provide categories and description under findings related to each research question.

8. Analyze categories established and describe larger themes that have emerged.

In what follows, I describe the process I applied for data analysis. For this study, I audio-recorded interviews. Audio files were then transcribed by an outside party. The transcriptions were sent to me in a document file, and I read through them to ensure accuracy (and edited as needed). I read through each transcription in the week or two after it had been sent to me. Reading the transcripts also allowed me to preliminarily code the data.

In addition, I used ATLAS.ti software for assistance with data analysis. This software application allowed me to upload transcriptions and documents for easy access, navigation, and categorization. I coded each transcription based upon notes I had created upon my initial reading. ATLAS.ti allowed me to highlight key statements and code appropriately, which then automatically categorized the raw data. By completing this process electronically, ATLAS.ti also kept a master list of codes. As I re-read transcripts, I was able to group codes and eliminate them through axial coding, which allowed me to solidify the master list.

Related to the process of axial coding, I developed a classification system that established categories and subcategories tied to the relative weight of each grouping. I then organized each category underneath the research questions to which it best applied.
These findings can be found in Chapter 4. Cross-case analysis was used to describe findings, but the data were largely presented as is, with less interpretation of participants’ meanings from me and lengthier statements that reflected what was said during the interviews. I followed a similar process with document analysis, but these data were presented separately, not in relation to the research questions. In addition, findings were summarizations of each document, as opposed to text from the actual document.

Analysis took place once I had established categories written findings. By looking at the findings, I was able to determine larger themes that had emerged. This cross-case analysis represented abstractions that cut across the data and reflected larger concepts in response to the research questions. The themes that were developed, which I differentiated from categories previously established, are described in detail in Chapter 5. As opposed to Chapter 4, Chapter 5 focused on my interpretation of the data, it incorporated fewer direct statements from participants, and it compared data across cases and categories. Similar to how documents were treated separately in Chapter 4, I presented an independent theme directly related to document analysis. Even while documents did not contribute to phenomenology directly, document analysis helped to establish context and indirectly answered the research questions.

**Theoretical Sensitivity**

The following section provides an explanation and overview of theoretical sensitivity, which is defined here as the personal quality of the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My positionality when conducting research, as well as steps taken to
establish validity are highlighted to demonstrate research quality and to account for decisions made during the research process.

**Positionality.**

Phenomenology, by its very nature, begins with an understanding that the researcher has a particular interest in the phenomenon in question. Van Manen (2014) stated, “Phenomenological method is driven by a pathos: being swept up in a spell of wonder about phenomena as they appear, show, present, or give themselves to us” (p. 26). Since the process begins with wonder, something that “seriously interests us and commits us to the world” (1990, p. 30), the researcher is driven to better understand it. In what follows, I provide a condensed version of my positionality, which is reflective of the rhetorical situation that began this study.

My interest in this research topic comes from the convergence of certain personal and professional experiences. As an undergraduate student at a four-year institution, I was somewhat involved outside of the classroom, and I lived and studied with others who took full advantage of co-curricular educational opportunities provided at the university. Now that I work in higher education, I have been employed at community colleges throughout my career. Here, I have witnessed a difference between student involvement and co-curricular education for those students when compared to my own experience. From a personal standpoint, I am married to a senior student affairs officer who works at a liberal arts university. My wife and I have had rich discussions about the differences between students at our respective institutions and how each institution approaches co-curricular education. In addition to personal and professional experiences, I have also
been exposed to student development theories through my doctoral program, which has deepened my interest and understanding of the differences between community colleges and four-year institutions.

Through my experiences, I have continued to return to the same question: why are the four-year and community college student experiences vastly different? Community college experts have taken great pains to explain the differences between the two types of institutions, especially as it concerns the role of student involvement; however, I cannot help but feel some aspects of the community college student experience has been lost in favor of what is most convenient. As top-level community administrators and nationally recognized scholars have turned their attention almost entirely to the Completion Agenda, the widespread concern is on getting students through the institution as efficiently as possible, so they can earn a living wage. With the near singular focus on completion, I worry that student involvement and co-curricular education are even less of a priority at community colleges since they are perceived as not directly increasing completion rates.

Validity.

While I may share an interest with participants regarding the phenomenon in question, I also recognize the need to not influence findings and to establish trustworthiness in the research. Merriam (1995) explained that validity and reliability need to be addressed in accordance with the paradigm from which the study has been conducted. For qualitative research, for instance, she explained that the researcher should try to build hypothesis as opposed to test them, try to understand a phenomenon as
opposed to treat it, and be concerned with participants’ views as opposed one’s own. A number of techniques were incorporated to strengthen the validity of the research.

Validity is an attempt to determine how congruent one’s findings are with reality (Merriam, 1995). Creswell (2014) explained, “Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of the account” (p. 201). Other terms, such as credibility and trustworthiness, have been used interchangeably with validity. Patton argued that the three elements that factor into credibility are rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in qualitative inquiry. The researcher should take steps to demonstrate his or her integrity through strategies to check for accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1995; Patton, 2002). The strategies I employed in this study are member checking; triangulation; reflexivity; peer debriefing; and thick, rich description.

**Member checking.**

Member checking takes place when the researcher takes data collected from the study back to participants to determine their accuracy. Merriam (1995) stated that the purpose of member checking is to determine if the interpretations are plausible and if they “ring true” (p. 54). Creswell (2014) clarified that the researcher will not bring back raw transcripts or the entire write-up but, rather, parts of the nearly-finished product, which may include major findings and themes. Patton (2002) used different terminology for member checking but to the same effect. Patton discussed a certain type of triangulation called *review by inquiry participants*. He said, “Researchers and evaluators
can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded” (p. 560). Such efforts are especially important in a phenomenological study, which relies heavily on interviews and the interpretation of those discussions.

I sent each participant a description of the member checking process (Appendix H), listed my research questions, and provided quotations taken directly from the findings of the study that pertained to the appropriate participant. This process allowed participants to take part in the research process and to provide feedback on whether or not my interpretations of their language rang true. Nine out of the 12 participants replied with feedback. Member checking in these cases provided opportunity for further insight and clarification, which was critical to the analysis process.

Document Analysis Feedback.

As part of emergent design, once I conducted document analysis of each Campus Completion Plan and went through the process of peer-debriefing, I recognized the need to learn from participants whether or not findings were accurate. Similar to member checking, this process included receiving feedback on document findings and a theme that arose directly related to the Campus Completion Plans. In the Document Analysis Feedback email (Appendix I) I sent to each participant, I provided an explanation of the Campus Completion Plan, how it was being used in my research, and the theme that arose. I also posed these questions: Were my findings in fact the case? What role did you have in developing either or both Completion Plans? How do the Completion Plans
What future developments do you envision concerning the role of co-curricular education and/or student development related to completion? These questions provided an opportunity for participants to discuss these matters by phone, in-person, or through email. I was able to connect with six participants following this request (two by phone, one in-person, and three through email).

**Triangulation.**

Triangulation is the technique used to bring together different sources of data to “illuminate an inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). Merriam (1995) explained that triangulation involves using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm findings. Creswell (2014) argued that this approach helps the researcher to build a coherent justification for themes in the research. As triangulation is one of the most common forms of validity, Patton (2002) cautioned against a common misunderstanding that different data sources or inquiry approaches will yield the same results. He suggested, “Different kinds of data may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances” (p. 248).

In this study, I was able to compare data collected through interviews and document analysis. Information made available on each institution’s website helped me prepare for interviews, but it also helped with analysis once interviews were conducted. In addition, each Campus Completion Plan provided further data to compare to each participant interview. For instance, when speaking with a participant about where student activities fit into the college’s overall approach to completion, she cited the college
strategic plan, which was available online. Her insight was also something I was able to confirm when looking at the Campus Completion Plan. There were no major discrepancies between information available online and participant testimony. Participants were, however, able to help clarify enrollment numbers, which in some cases had changed since they were published online. In this manner, triangulation was a recursive process that required pulling from multiple data sources and ensued with feedback from participants during member checking.

**Reflexivity.**

Part of establishing credibility in a qualitative study is to disclose the researcher’s potential personal bias. Patton (2002) established that reflexivity is especially important because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative study will include information throughout the write-up about how the interpretation of findings is partially shaped by where the researcher stands. Reflexivity should be documented at the outset of the study, in particular, because it will allow the reader to view the research and findings from that perspective throughout (Merriam, 1995). Self-reflection will also help the researcher connect with the reader, since the research is being open and honest (Creswell, 2014). Reflexivity has been established in this section, and I have continued to reference potential areas of bias based upon my vantage point.

**Peer debriefing.**

Peer debriefing takes place when the researcher has a colleague review the research to enhance the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2014). During the review
process, the peer provides comments and asks questions that will help guide the revision process and to increase the likelihood that the write-up will resonate with others. This person should be able to help determine whether the findings are plausible (Merriam, 1995). For the purposes of a study such as this one, it is beneficial to enlist somebody who is knowledgeable about the research process but not too close to the research questions. Accordingly, a fellow doctoral candidate or a methodologist can serve as a capable peer debriefer.

I was able to collaborate with a fellow doctoral candidate for peer-debriefing. I provided this individual an explanation of peer debriefing and shared my partially finished write-up. As opposed to asking the peer-debriefer to read the whole document, I encouraged this person to skip through and focus on key areas, such as Methodology and Findings, to ensure I had taken the proper approach. We met to discuss feedback and questions that arose after reading the document. The peer-debriefer offered questions and suggestions that I then applied. These included questions on how definitions of terms were negotiated between the participants and myself, asking that I clarify triangulation, and recommending that I follow up with participants on document findings (which I then did). This process provided another critical eye when reviewing my write-up and editing the final work.

**Thick, rich description.**

A final technique that will not only enhance reliability but allows for the possibility of transferability is thick, rich description (Merriam, 1995). According to Merriam, when the researcher provides enough information or description about the
phenomenon, it increases the likelihood that readers will also be able to determine how closely the research situation matches their own. According to Patton (2002), thick, rich description is necessary to provide the foundation for quality qualitative analysis and reporting. The hope is that the description will transport readers to the setting and provide more realistic depictions of what took place (Creswell, 2014).

This technique was especially important in Chapter 4, where I made efforts to best reflect the contexts in which data were found. Following each interview, once I read through each transcript and preliminarily organized data based upon categories, I began the writing process by describing participants and institutional settings. These drafts provided key details from the interviews, which were then used in Chapter 4. The description of participants and institutions, entitled “Portrait of Participants,” were taken largely from these write-ups. Engaging in the process of writing that considered my initial thoughts, feelings, and reactions before revising that work was time consuming, but it also enhanced thick, rich description in the finished product.

Summary

For this study, I used a phenomenological research approach to examine how community college student affairs educators viewed the purpose of student involvement and co-curricular education at the onset of the Completion Agenda until today and how they feel their work is valued at their respective institutions. Criterion sampling was employed to locate participants in Ohio who worked or continue working in co-curricular education. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were primarily used to gather data, and document analysis was used as a secondary measure. Data analysis steps were followed
to reduce data into categories that led to themes, which informed the discussion to follow. Finally, validity was checked to ensure accuracy through member checking; triangulation; reflexivity; peer-debriefing; and thick, rich description.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter introduces each of the 12 study participants and establishes a context for their lived experiences. Due to the phenomenological focus of this study and aim of presenting a narrative of the Completion Agenda; I provide rich, thick description for each participant; along with extensive quotations from the student affairs educator interviews. Following the portrait of participants, I present categories that had arisen during data analysis, which respond to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The research questions are as follows:

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?
2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?
3. During the Completion Agenda, how do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at institutions where they have worked?
4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations?

Finally, after I present interview findings, I provide an explanation of Campus Completion Plans and documents related to each participant’s institution (in corresponding order), along with relevant findings.
**Portrait of Participants**

The 12 study participants shared their personal and professional experiences regarding co-curricular education and how they have been impacted by the Completion Agenda. All participants’ names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and all institutions have been replaced with pseudopaces to honor confidentiality. Of the 12 participants, six were female and six were male, 11 identified as White and one African American, and their experiences ranged from eight years to 36 years in higher education.

Due to sampling measures, including the survey answered by prospective participants, individuals fell into three broad categories: *student affairs administrators*, *student life administrators*, and *student success administrators*. Participants are grouped accordingly.

**Student affairs administrators.**

Student affairs administrators serve as dean of students or work directly beneath that role. A portrait of each of these participants is included in the section that follows.

*Erin.*

Erin is an energetic and personable administrator. She completed her undergraduate degree at a small-to-midsize public university, where she was “involved in everything.” She did not have clear long-term career goals, so she worked in corporate America for a few years before returning to school for a graduate degree in higher education. Erin noted that many student affairs administrators have similar stories about discovering their vocation.
Erin’s path to a community college was fortuitous. She explained that she had never been to a community college and that working at a community college was not in her path. An instructor in her graduate program encouraged her to look at community colleges due to the opportunities they offered. Thanks to that advice she received, Erin worked at a community college as a student life administrator for four years and in new student programs for another three-and-a-half years before being hired at Oakwood Community College as associate dean of students. With eight years of experience as a professional, her entire experience has been in the community college setting.

Oakwood Community College is located in a rural setting and enrolls just under 3,000 students. Currently, Oakwood is a commuter campus, but, as a result of recent initiatives, the college is exploring the opportunity to become a residential campus. This development was brought about due to a push for more international students and the creation of athletic teams, both of which would require a place for students to live while attending the institution. Erin has been directly involved in these initiatives, and this is a new area in her professional career.

As associate dean of students at Oakwood, Erin’s role encompasses much of what often exists in a dean of students role, such as behavioral intervention, conduct, and advising student senate. Initiatives, which include student housing and overseeing the evolving campus community, also fall within her purview. Multiple times throughout our conversation, she mentioned her previous experience in student life as the “play side of the house” or “fun side” of student affairs, versus much of what her position now entails.
At her previous institution, Erin was involved in student life. As she reflected back on her work there, she said, “I was really fortunate to come from a community college that really had a very lively student activity and student life side of the house. Most of the community colleges that I worked with…struggle to get students involved.” Some of the strengths of that institution included its student life opportunities and space, which helped to draw participation. When the Completion Agenda came about, Erin was asked to step into the new student programs position, a role that had not yet been created. She explained how her administrators approached her with the opportunity: “The position has never existed before. We have all these things that you have to do and all these benchmarks that you have to meet. None of the research that goes into it yet, but we need you to do that too.” She accepted the challenge and described how the environment was ripe for her and colleagues to grow and take chances. Erin was able to make a lot of changes and her administrators had faith in her because of her previous work.

Erin was able to make substantial changes to the first year experience, which included orientation and the student success course. Erin was required to work in a world between academic affairs and student affairs, which she described as “walking a tightrope.” Of her ability to adapt to these new demands, she stated, “At the very bottom line, I’m a sales person. That’s what I think they saw.” This ability to take risks was a theme that arose during our conversation.

Dave.

Dave is an experienced administrator whose singular focus as a professional has been in the area of student affairs administration. He currently serves as vice president
for student affairs at Allen State College. Allen State College is co-located with the branch campus of a large research university and enrolls nearly 4,500 students. Prior to this experience, Dave briefly worked as vice president for student services at a community college in another state. Before that, he was at another co-located institution that was different in terms of administrative structure. There, he was dean of students and director of student affairs as well as vice president for enrollment management and student life. Dave has diverse experience in higher education and student affairs in particular.

Dave’s path to higher education was not immediate. After his master’s degree in education, Dave stepped away from education and worked in corporate and non-profit sectors. He said, “That was a good experience, because it gave me a well-rounded understanding of industry, in that kind of market. It also reinforces the fact that I didn’t want to be there.” He felt that he could make more of an impact in the higher education sector. When he decided to return to education, Dave made a commitment that he was going to do it whole-heartedly. In his doctoral program, he described himself as the “poster-boy for graduate assistantships,” where he gained experience that would lead to his goal of being a dean of students. His student development philosophy came through in our discussion and in the direction he is leading student affairs at Allen State.

Dave’s graduate work earned him an opportunity at a regional campus and technical center with a cost-shared relationship with the co-located university. As a result, he worked for both campuses simultaneously. He was in that role for nearly 14 years. After leaving the state to work in a different system, Dave returned to take on the
vice president role at Allen State. Although his current institution is also co-located with a regional campus of the same, large state university, he works exclusively for Allen State. Allen State’s campus, which houses several buildings on vast acreage, is organized so facilities and classrooms are predominately one institution or the other; only student activities and athletics are cost-shared.

Dave described how Completion Agenda affected his work. He said, “I would say at its very base, it is a shift from the access focus to the success focus and being rewarded for that.” He described a shift from access and getting individuals enrolled to keeping them enrolled and helping them persist to graduation. Dave also described the need to educate others, even at the state level, that students do not always have a degree or certificate mindset. Even though colleges are not currently rewarded for other outcomes, he believes it is important to keep track of those successes.

*Lynn.*

Lynn is a higher education administrator who has developed into her current role of dean of students at Garfield Community College Northshore Campus. Garfield Community College is a multi-campus institution that enrolls about 25,500 students. Northshore Campus is the institution’s smallest campus, enrolling around 3,000 students, and is co-located within a site that also provides corporate training. Garfield has a unique administrative structure due to its multi-campus system in that each campus has its own administration but the college has a President who oversees entire operations. The institution also has a dean’s council, which offers the opportunity for sharing and committee work that takes place between institutions.
Lynn earned her doctorate in higher education administration that placed a certain amount of emphasis on leadership and systems as well as statistical analysis and research methods. She worked in research and in development before becoming campus director of Garfield Northshore Campus and eventually dean of students. About the transition, Lynn explained, “They knew when they were getting ready to open the campus they needed somebody who had been here long enough to…have connections with different people and know how to get things done, so that ended up being me and, fortunately…got me into more of operations.” She explained how the campus started with a small team of people but how the college now employs over 100 full and part-time faculty and staff.

Co-curricular education at Garfield Community College Northshore includes workshops and events through student life, as well as student government and the honors program. Students also have the opportunity to earn a leadership certificate at the college. All of the clubs and organizations at Garfield Northshore are formed under student government. As a result, when the campus opened about five years ago, Lynn’s first charge was to get student government up and running. Also, most Garfield campuses have a director of student life and athletics. Northshore Campus does not have athletics, and due to the size of the campus, did not have a student life director. Lynn was able to repurpose two support staff positions to create a student life manager and project specialist. She said, “Although it’s nice to have support staff, it was clear to me we were never going to get Student Life anytime soon, and that was even more important to me.”
According to Lynn, her first experience with the Student Success Agenda began around 12-15 years ago. She referenced Achieving the Dream and her role in writing the grant years prior, which brought her attention to student success efforts. More recently, her work has connected to the Completion Agenda due to her institution’s collaborative efforts with the American Association of Community Colleges, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation. She said, “We’re pretty much a part of everything that’s out there.”

Alicia.

Alicia has advanced relatively quickly in her career. She currently services as assistant dean of students at Garfield Northshore Campus, where she works directly for Lynn. In this area, Alicia brings with her a unique set of professional experiences from which to draw.

Alicia found her way to the community college setting due to her initial experience after graduate school. At that time she worked at an open-enrollment branch campus of a mid-major public university. There, she worked as an academic advisor but was promoted after nearly two years to assistant director of the first year programs. Of working at an open enrollment institution, she said, “I really found…a challenge in the fact that you don’t get to pick who you get; you…get what you get.” Alicia explained how looking at student success rates at the main campus “lit a fire” in her due to the main campus’ selective admission process. She talked about how somebody in her role at an open-enrollment institution “has to help students persist and retain regardless of what the success or risk factors may be.”
Alicia moved from her role in first year programs to assistant director of advising and support at Franklin Community College, a large community college within the state. She planned to stay at Franklin for a long time, but circumstances and an opportunity to advance in her career brought her to Garfield Northshore. As assistant dean of students, Alicia is in charge of counseling (mental health, academic, and career), the behavior intervention team, the early alert system, and conduct. The ability to oversee all of these areas offers her an opportunity to focus on student development, which was a theme throughout our discussion.

Due to her educational and professional background, Alicia places considerable emphasis on student development when working with students. She explained that in areas such as counseling, advising, and conduct, there are a lot of learning opportunities for students. Alicia further described how these opportunities have the potential to be transformational: “I try to avoid things that are transactional. There’s a place for that, but everything is intended to be a part of the larger scheme of co-curricular education.” Along with her foundation in student development, Alicia expressed a desire to make co-curricular education meaningful.

Overall, Alicia appreciates the Completion Agenda. When asked about whether the Completion Agenda has impacted her work with students, Alicia recognized the fact that it likely has but also that she has always had a completion mindset. With her background in advising, she admitted that “you cannot but help to be focused on those things.”
Joseph.

Joseph is a gregarious individual who thrives on his connections with others. He works at Thompson Community College, which is one of the largest community colleges in the state at around 18,250 students. Located in an urban environment, Thompson has achieved a certain amount of notoriety nationally due to its innovation throughout the years.

Thompson has taken part in many completion initiatives, the largest of which are funded by grants through the federal government and non-profits. Some strategies that came out of these initiatives have been to “make a very large college feel small” and to develop a model of holistic student support. Other initiatives that are in progress or are being developed are to create completion incentives for students, increase dialogue meetings with key stakeholders on- and off-campus, transition from a transactional culture to transformational, maximize data analytics, and expand customer service and professionalism.

Joseph began at Thompson Community College a decade-and-a-half ago as an admissions officer, which included responsibilities as the campus visitations coordinator and student employee coordinator. He was then selected to serve as a resource center coordinator. The center primarily serves students in the surrounding area to help them build academic skills. After a year, he then transitioned to supervising one of the learning centers, a small campus that offers classes and student support in a nearby community. After some time, he took over responsibility for all three of the College’s learning centers before moving into student affairs full time.
In 2015, Joseph became student affairs director for Thompson. This position built upon skills and experiences he developed in his doctoral program and through his work at the learning centers. As director, Joseph oversees departments on campus, which include campus ministry, counseling, disability services, the ombudsman, student life, tutoring, veteran services, and a TRiO program. He also is responsible for judicial affairs and behavioral intervention, as well as serving as the Title IX co-lead.

Joseph’s work with student engagement began at the learning centers almost out of necessity, since the campus did not have the space or the opportunities that the main campus afforded. Joseph also explained that, since the students did not have many of the same amenities as students on the main campus, student engagement was really important at the learning centers. As a result, the learning centers began lunch and learn talks, which were unique to those sites. Throughout our conversation, Joseph described a distinct student development philosophy, which ties learning back to the classroom, values transformational over transactional opportunities, and places emphasis on mentoring.

Completion is a big push for the college. As a result, Joseph has made student completion the number one goal for student affairs. He also explained that his area’s goals are not developed in isolation. Joseph meets with an associate provost on a regular basis to ensure his area’s work within the division aligns with that of the college. He said, “I want to make sure that we are going in the direction that she’s wanting to go herself.” Joseph touched on the value he places on his work in a variety of ways, but he kept coming back to the belief that we all belong to one another. From his perspective,
what that means in a community college setting is doing what’s necessary to help students graduate.

*Coline.*

Coline is a fast-rising professional who has accomplished much in a relatively short amount of time. She earned her doctorate in higher education leadership, and, prior to that a master’s degree in education in adult learning and development. Coline currently serves as dean of students at Garfield Community College Downtown.

Garfield’s Downtown campus is located in an urban environment, enrolls around 5,000 students, and draws heavily from the nearby city school districts. Coline explained how, overall, Downtown students’ socioeconomic status is different from other campuses due to the campus location. Also, the campus has a greater proportion of students enrolling who need remediation. As a result, students at the Downtown campus are generally more at-risk than the general Garfield student population.

Regarding her path to the community college, Coline began working for a K-12 program but recognized that she enjoyed working with college students, and she had the opportunity to come to Garfield and serve in a variety of roles. Coline worked as a student success coordinator, where she oversaw a student ambassador program and a college-wide mentoring program, created engagement activities for new students, and worked closely with other student support offices. She then transitioned to the assistant dean of students, where she had less direct interaction with students outside of conduct. Eventually, she became dean of students, where she now oversees the bursar, enrollment,
advising, counseling, international students, veteran’s affairs, student life, recreation, and athletics (everything but direct academic support and financial aid).

Each Garfield campus offers different student life programs. Garfield Downtown employs a dedicated student activities coordinator, who oversees all activities, including serving as the advisor for Phi Theta Kappa and the student newspaper. Downtown also offers athletics, which includes men’s basketball and women’s track and cross-country. In addition, the campus has about 12 active clubs, most of which are attached to academic programs.

Regarding the Completion Agenda, Coline described it as a mandate under the Obama administration to increase the number of graduates by 50% by 2020. She recalls it being a topic of conversation at Garfield about three-to-four years ago. Previously, the focus was on enrollment and getting students in the door. Coline explained that, “All we looked at was the enrollment reports…What we never really paid attention to were the amount of students leaving out the back door…and we were losing half of our students every year.” She sees the Completion Agenda affecting the way people talk around campus. Conversations more regularly focus on the need to get more students to complete. At Garfield, this shift has had an impact on graduation rates.

**Student life administrators.**

Student life administrators oversee student life or student involvement. A portrait of each of these participants is included in the section that follows.
**Stacie.**

Stacie is the student life coordinator at Bennington State College and has been in this role since 2000. Prior to this position, she worked as an administrative assistant in admissions at Bennington State, which is when she earned her bachelor’s degree. Before working at Bennington State, which is going on 31 years, Stacie was a student at the college.

Bennington State College is an institution that is taking part in statewide Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation efforts. Stacie connected her initial experience with the Completion Agenda to Bennington State’s involvement in the Gates initiative, which started in 2011. In her student life role, Stacie reports to the dean of student success, which falls under the provost. Prior to the college’s work with the Gates Foundation, her reporting line was through student affairs. Bennington State offers 52 clubs and organizations, Phi Theta Kappa, Student Government, and a Student Leadership Academy, which is offered in conjunction with a nearby university branch campus. Bennington State does not have housing, athletics, or a dedicated recreation area.

Stacie takes ownership of the work that she has accomplished in student life. She explained that prior to her being hired, Bennington State had around 12 active clubs and organizations. Stacie was able to grow clubs related to majors and career fields and add those that were more social in nature. She has also developed a process as it relates to assessment, which is on a three-year-cycle. She showed me binders where she keeps historical information and explained how this process allows her see what works and what can continue to be improved.
Despite some of the challenges Stacie has experienced over her long tenure in this role, she said, “I wouldn’t be doing it as long as I have if I really didn’t like it.” One of the reasons she enjoys the work is due to the variety in her position. She also finds value in working with students and seeing their development.

**Dario.**

Dario is an experienced student activities administrator with a foundation in K-12 education and educational administration. After earning his bachelor’s degree, Dario completed his master’s degree at a private institution, where he served as an area coordinator and advised student clubs. This experience led to him being hired as the director of student engagement and leadership at Trumbull Community College.

In his position, Dario works with all of Trumbull’s 30 student clubs and organizations, provides leadership opportunities for students, oversees new student orientation, and leads any other types of initiatives related to diversity or “whatever the hot topics are for the month.” Trumbull has student government and a campus activities board. By participating in these opportunities, students can receive tuition reimbursement, which helps generate involvement. The college is also in the process of creating an emerging leaders program with a cohort of 15 students.

Trumbull Community College enrolls around 7,900 students. It is located just outside of one of the largest cities in the state in a rural, historical community. It has a large early-to-college population, which accounts for close to 1,500 students in enrollment. Early-to-college students at Trumbull are also actively involved in co-curricular education.
Dario recalled that the Completion Agenda became a topic of conversation around 2010-11. He said, “The whole college was tasked with providing evidence of how they’re supporting the Campus Completion Plan.” Within the Completion Agenda, the focus at Trumbull and for Dario has been, “Trying to get students in and out of college, completing their degree in the appropriate of time for that student and making their experiences positive, and making sure they’re hitting all the learning outcomes for their institution.”

Dario prides himself by staying current on higher education trends and has affected change at the college as a result. He also demonstrated an openness to ideas from others on his staff, which led to the creation of an opportunity like emerging leaders. Dario discussed how he feels like his area provides opportunities for students to gain experience interacting with one another, to take on leadership roles, to develop soft skills, and to become open to new opportunities. These are all educational opportunities students would not gain if they only experienced college in a classroom setting. Along with providing students an outlet for their interests and strengths, Dario hopes that his area is able to teach them something along the way as well.

**Henry.**

Henry is a contemplative student activities administrator with a background in elementary and middle school education. Henry taught for 12 years before transitioning to higher education. He has a master’s degrees in both career and technology education and educational policy. For the past eight years, Henry has been working at Lucas
Community College, first in direct student support and more recently as manager of career services and student activities at a branch campus.

Lucas Community College has a little over 9,500 students, with about 1,300 enrolled at the campus where Henry works. It was previously a much larger institution but has experienced declining enrollment. According to Henry, the current president came in at a difficult time, when the enrollment was dropping and the institution’s financial situation was taking a turn for the worse. Henry described a time finances were solvent, when employees were getting raises and full time faculty vacancies were filled. However, staff have not received raises in some time, and annually contracted faculty positions have begun to be eliminated. Lucas has a strong faculty union, and they recently issued a “vote of no confidence” for the entire administration. Of these developments, Henry said, “I purposely avoided a lot of those conversations because there was a lot of negativity from the faculty, and I just didn’t want to be pulled down by it, but you could definitely feel it around.”

The Completion Agenda is not widely discussed at Lucas, according to Henry. The individual who led Lucas’ completion efforts also was responsible for compliance, and he has since left the college. Much of the communication to faculty and staff has been through email. Henry said the president holds a college-wide teleconference semi-regularly to share information from the administration “to try and at least create a little more transparency.”

The completion shift has begun to affect Henry’s programming in student activities. The student activities director asked that Henry’s programs better align with
what is happening on the main campus. This includes bringing in a national speaker on
diversity and holding career panels that highlight different majors or degree fields.

Beyond some of the new student life initiatives, Lucas also has clubs, organizations,
student government, and large-scale events in fall and spring semesters. However, some
of those opportunities have faded away as a result of the decline in enrollment. Henry
said, “At community colleges, the population’s so transient that it’s hard to keep
momentum.”

Henry has a clear student development philosophy that places emphasis on co-
curricular education. He said that even when teaching elementary and middle school
students, he saw value in what was taking place outside of the classroom. He said,
“Certainly, I’ve always felt that education outside of the classroom can be as significant
as in the classroom.” Part of Henry’s master’s degree included adult learning theory,
which involved helping adults to connect educational content to life, which is where he
feels co-curricular activities can have a big impact. He believes making connections with
students is important to their success and makes it a priority to do so every day.

**Student success administrators.**

Student success administrators work in the areas of student success and
completion. A portrait of each of these participants is included in the section that
follows.

**Debbie.**

Debbie is a seasoned higher education administrator with 36 years of experience
and who has aspirations to continue for many more. Debbie serves in multiple roles at
Highland Community College in student success and articulation and transfer. Prior to her current position, she was the director at one Highland’s campuses. As a result of her experience, Debbie identifies as a student affairs administrator, but she has also worked in academic affairs and has taught at various points in her career. She also worked at four-year institutions, prior to working in a community college setting. Debbie has her master’s degree in counselor education and her doctorate in counseling and development.

Highland has just under 2,500 students located at four campuses in an Appalachian region of the state. Debbie is located at the main campus of the institution. The county and surrounding areas are affected by high drug traffic, in particular drugs such as methamphetamines, prescription drugs, and heroin. Throughout our conversation, Debbie spoke about the surrounding community, which has had a significant impact on the campus community. She spoke about herself as an outsider, despite the fact that her family has owned a nearby farm property for decades and her children went through the local school system.

While Debbie has felt like an outsider, she also described the insular culture of Highland, which includes people knowing each other and the tendency to not look externally when hiring for positions. Students also are unwilling leave the community, even if that means better job prospects. Debbie displayed exasperation in describing the fact that students could be earning more money but choose not to due to those self-imposed limitations.

Debbie works directly with the Completion Agenda in her role, including overseeing the services that are housed in the student success center. She explained that
she did similar work previously at a four-year institution, where the focus was on helping students transition from high school to the first year experience and beyond: “A lot of what we did was all about that transition…Everything that got students engaged, connected, and moving forward.” In the center, she has worked with her staff from providing services beyond tutoring and advising to “looking at engagement, retention efforts, and everything else along [those lines].”

Aaron.

Aaron works at Putnam State Community College, which is one of the smallest institutions in the state with just over 1,200 students enrolled. He began nearly a decade ago as the retention coordinator, and his role now encompasses retention, completion, and overseeing the center for student success.

Aaron’s work has centered on grants and other initiatives the college has received. His responsibilities have shifted as those opportunities have evolved over time. Aaron initially oversaw a TRiO program, but due to external forces, in 2009 the grant was not renewed. Around that time, the college began declining in enrollment, and by virtue of his position, Aaron started gathering more services around him. He also began expanding some of those services. That meant working with others who were funded by the college, along continuing his grant responsibilities. As a result, the center for student success now houses tutoring and disability services.

In terms his position, Aaron said he always liked experimenting with new initiatives. Throughout our conversation, he gave numerous examples of curricular and co-curricular programs to improve placement scores, to increase tutoring use, and to
enhance classroom performance. Of his ability to try out learning opportunities, Aaron said, “I’m really proud of what we’ve been doing around here. I’ve got almost a carte blanche if I find an idea.”

Aaron’s co-curricular education responsibilities primarily consist of tutoring and other direct academic student support within the center for student success. Putnam State lacks a formal area of student affairs. At Putnam State, the director of admissions oversees student life. Student life consists of a club system, of which there about a dozen operating; student government, which has had a hard time getting students involved; and Phi Theta Kappa, whose officers are primarily nontraditional students and have a presence on campus. Aaron believes that somebody would take over the student life responsibilities from the director of admissions should they be able to improve enrollment.

Aaron explained that Putnam State has been involved in completion efforts for a long time, even back when he was initially hired. Related to completion, an area where he showed particular interest is in assessment, something that he was able to learn and explore in his graduate program in higher education. Institutional research at the college has been able to help Aaron in this area; in turn, he has taken on responsibilities related to analysis and reporting.

Due to the nature of his work, Aaron is involved in much of what is going on at Putnam State and feels like he should be based upon his role. Due to his position, he feels like he needs to be involved in decisions that impact retention at the college. Aaron said, “I feel—I think it would be agreed—that I’ve got a spot all over campus. My
fingers are in a little bit of everything.” Aaron dropped out of an academic program as a student himself, so he knows the value of working with students who experience challenges or who are at-risk. Due to his longevity at Putnam State, Aaron expressed that he has a lot personally invested in the institution.

**Kip.**

Kip is a self-described “open book” with an academic foundation informing his work in student success. Buck Creek Community College enrolls about 5,100 students at two campuses. The main campus, where Kip works, is located in a largely working-class, urban environment, which used to be a hub of industry. Buck Creek’s other campus is located in the suburbs and is growing rapidly. At Buck Creek, Kip serves as the director of access and retention.

Kip did not initially intend to go into student services or work at a community college. Kip’s background is in history, where he holds a master’s degree, and was on the path to becoming a professor. He said, “I never would have thought of working at a two-year. When you’re [in a graduate] program, unless you’re already working at a two-year…that’s not what they encourage you to do.” He was born with a physical disability and said that he had an epiphany when he was in graduate school. He said, “For most of my life, I didn’t like to acknowledge my disability. I pretended I didn’t have a disability.” Thanks to some guidance from a professor, he started reading more about his disability and learned that he was trying to conform to able-bodied standards. That realization led to a calling to help people with disabilities. As a result, he decided to go into cultural studies in education, in which he earned a master’s degree and doctorate.
Kip was not initially looking at community colleges for employment, but circumstances led him to look at available positions in the area. As luck would have it, Buck Creek had a manager of disability services position open, for which he was qualified. He applied and ultimately accepted the position. Kip said, “It was a really good starting place for me because they wanted somebody who could put a professional face on the office. They wanted somebody to build the office from the ground up.” As a result, he was given the opportunity to take on those responsibilities. In 2014, he was promoted to his current director role, where he now oversees most of the services in the academic support center. These include the office of accessibility, supplemental instruction, tutoring, and completion coaches.

When Kip moved into the role of manager of disability services, he noted that the Completion Agenda was also becoming part of the conversation. He worked to not only accommodate students but to make them more successful in the classroom. Kip felt that his attitude about helping people with disabilities aligned with the Completion Agenda and eventually helped him get promoted. Ultimately, Kip feels his experience at Buck Creek has been transformative, and the reason is his work with individual students.

**Participant overview.**

A participant overview table is presented on the following page, which can be referenced throughout the study. The table includes each participant’s name, gender, race, number of years in higher education, current institution, and the administrator type as defined by this study. The name is a pseudonym, and the institution is a pseudoplace, but all other demographic information accurately reflect each individual.
Table 1

Research Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Administrator Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Putnam State</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Garfield Northshore</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coline</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Garfield Downtown</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Trumbull</td>
<td>Student Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Allen State</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>36 years</td>
<td>Highland</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>Student Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kip</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Buck Creek</td>
<td>Student Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>Garfield Northshore</td>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>Bennington State</td>
<td>Student Life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings Related to Research Questions

Findings related to the research questions are presented in the section that follows. Each sub-section is titled according to the appropriate research question. An additional sub-section was added to account for implicit tensions. Implicit tensions related to the fourth research question but did not fit entirely. Categories that emerged are further developed beneath each research question and provide relevant data from participants.
Changes in co-curricular education experienced at the onset of the Completion Agenda.

Participants described changes in co-curricular education that they experienced at the onset of the completion agenda until the present. These included ensuring co-curricular education connects to what is taking place in the classroom, justifying the value of events not connected to the classroom, placing a sharper focus on assessment, building more structure around student affairs efforts, devoting attention to funding and being good stewards of financial resources, approaching career development as a subset of student development, and maintaining a focus on student success.

Connection to the classroom.

According to participants, one of the ways to maximize co-curricular opportunities is by connecting content to what is taking place in the classroom. One of the challenges is the fact that community college students have many demands and all but one institution within the state are commuter campuses. Debbie described the reality: “Student life, it varies on each campus. For the most part, it’s let’s run in, grab my glass and go.”

Connecting co-curricular programs to academics both generates support from faculty and has the potential to capture students’ interest. Alicia said, “The programs we’ve done that have had partnership with faculty, and directly relate to the curriculum, are the most successful.” Coline said, “We found that when we partnered with faculty and created programming that complemented their curriculum, then they would send
students our way.” She further explained how they have adapted their programs since the outset of the Completion Agenda:

The activities that take place, we’ve become far more focused over the years to, again, try to align them with academic programs. With commuter students it’s very hard to keep their attention outside of class or hold them on campus beyond class for a social activity. We’ve tried to combine the social and the academic and partner with faculty to put on some programming they would find attractive.

Stacie described how faculty support provides a certain level of authenticity for her events: “If I [can get buy in from faculty] to help me with making announcements and encouraging folks to become involved in student activities...A lot of the times if the faculty member says it, well then it must be good.” Alicia echoed this sentiment: “We know that even if we put out a program, and unless faculty are the ones encouraging the students to go, it just looks to students like we are just doing some other ridiculous program that we want them to go to.”

Making co-curricular education meaningful is another expectation when connecting programming back to the classroom. Joseph believes using language that describes how these opportunities are only happening outside of the classroom “demeans it.” Lynn described the inherent value of co-curricular education and the need to get students understand it, whether they initially realize it or not. She said:

You really struggle to get people to attend anything that’s extra, so if there’s a way to link it back to [the course]...I’m not saying give out extra credit to go to some event that has nothing to do with the course, but if there’s a way to tie those
events back in. If we believe Tinto’s theory of engagement and Astin’s work on involvement, if it helps to have students involved with each other and interacting in events, then you’ve got to have a way to tie that back to the outcomes that they came for and then also look at the benefits that they can derive, that maybe they didn’t come for, but they need.

With co-curricular events at Thompson, Joseph described the student success focus in terms of planning: “making sure that we’re making connections to not just warm and fuzzy, but making connections to graduation and things of that nature.”

Part of the push for co-curricular education to connect to academics is to be good stewards of financial resources. Alicia argued:

It is no longer acceptable to spend five thousand dollars to bring in a bounce house and throw it out on the campus center and say, “Our students loved it.” When we are focused on completion and money is tight, you’re going to have to show how that somehow had an impact on the student experience…I just don’t think that stuff is going to fly anymore, like it did ten years ago.

Coline stated that fun events, like game show night, are being replaced by common reads and inviting authors to campus. She said:

I think that we’re doing a lot less warm and fuzzy things. With our dollars being so precious right now, we are really focusing on things that have a direct correction with what’s happening in the classroom. I think that trend will continue, especially because students weren’t coming out for the fluffy stuff anyway.
Henry echoed these sentiments saying that “most of [Lucas Community College’s large-scale events] have gone by the wayside. I don’t think that will change just because of funds and understanding what’s really beneficial to students.”

In some cases, students have paid directly for these opportunities through student activity fees, which adds an additional later of responsibility. Lynn spoke about student fees directly:

I’m sounding like an old prude, but I sometimes think we shoot ourselves in the foot by having events that would seem to be childish or useless. While it might be fun…I think when we’re working as professionals in a department that is budgeted through student fees, we have an obligation to use those fees to advance the mission of the organization and goals of the students.

She also recognized that not spending wisely could cause others to question the value of the work they are doing.

*Justifying the value of non-academic activities.*

Not all participants believed that co-curricular opportunities increasingly needed to connect to the classroom. Dave spoke about striking a balance between traditional forms of student life, like having a casino night, and activities that would appeal to nontraditional students. One of the ways to support non-traditional students through events is to invite families. He said:

Where we’ve had success in my former institutions was recognizing how many family based units we have and the family support is so important for them to be, again, connected to the environment, but have that support at home. Make it a
blended experience because so many of your support network people may have no higher education affiliation.

He described a Build-a-Bear event, where a student was able to also celebrate her daughter’s birthday. Dave explained: “That was able to do two things for that student. She felt a very strong connection and warmth to the college post that.” Dario talked about an annual Halloween event that is family oriented but also costs the college a considerable amount of money. He said, “Not only is it open to the community…I really think it affects some of the morale of our faculty and staff because everyone can bring their children.” When asked if there was any backlash due to the nature of the event, he said, “Once they see how much it impacts, not just the community, but our own staff, faculty, and students, you usually don’t get too many rolled eyes.” These participants attributed the value of these large-scale out-of-class activities to something meaningful in connecting to campus or the greater community.

Assessment.

Assessment is one of the ways that student affairs educators have been able to show the impact of their work within the Completion Agenda. Lynn posed this question: “If we can’t measure it, if it’s really not something that’s helping students in a tangible way, then…why are we doing it?” Alicia explained how assessment has been a topic of conversation for some time:

I finished my masters ten years ago, and that was the hot topic. I was taught in my program, that you just don’t throw programs out there. They need to have a
plan to them, they need to have objectives, and then you need to report out, and show how it was effective.

Even though assessment has been a focus in student affairs for some time, it has arguably received added emphasis in the Completion Agenda context. Dario said, “Not that we didn’t do any assessment, any evaluation, before, but a lot of things revolve around assessment and evaluation now.” He further stated:

In addition to looking at students when they come in and how far they’re progressing and how long it’s taking them, all those numbers, we’re trying to see what’s impacting the students’ graduation and retention rates. We’re also, in turn, looking at and evaluating our programs. I’m…providing assessment numbers to see if those items helps with impacting those grades.

At Garfield Northshore, Lynn is working with Blackboard Learn to measure student development outcomes. Blackboard’s consultant is not aware of other colleges using the system in the same way. Lynn said:

I think it would be nice, not only to know that the money that’s coming in from student fees [and] are being given to us in our college budget is going towards something that has a measurable outcome, [but] that the students can put artifacts into the system, and a third-party group of evaluators can say, “Yeah, but this actually did enhance communication,” or it’s obvious from these activities the students completed that they are better advocates for themselves or are able to self-navigate systems.
Multiple participants, including Lynn, discussed challenges with actually creating appropriate measures and aligning them with outcomes, but most were aware of the need to prove their work is beneficial beyond student satisfaction.

**Structure.**

With greater attention to accountability, divisions of student affairs and even colleges as a whole have become more structured, which can be seen as a byproduct of the Completion Agenda. At Highland, Debbie described how, due to the nature of the campus community, completion strategies were happening informally between students, faculty, and staff. She said that as a result of the Completion Agenda, “We can’t just take care of things; there are other measures.” As a result, Debbie stated, “We’re starting to look like a normal 2-year institution.” Divisions of student affairs are trying new things to get students to better understand their function. Joseph launched a campaign called [Thompson] Cares. He said:

> There’s just some things that we’re not marketing…We cover conduct, student judicial affairs, honor code, expectations of students. As students come to these conduct cases, we’re like, “Do you know about your student code of conduct?” There’s not a lot that do. They have rights and responsibilities. They have the honor code, academic integrity.

Student activities departments have also undergone transformations. As it pertains to better representing their actual function, Trumbull changed the name of its student activities to something more in line with the leadership and engagement it offers. Dario said that it was not a direct reaction to the Completion Agenda, but they “wanted
something more formal.” He said, “It seemed liked a lot of the four-year colleges were going that route, and during my research, it just seemed like that was the right way to move.” Others have been asked to make adjustments due to administrative decisions. Henry, who works at a branch campus, is now expected to have his co-curricular programming mirror that of the main campus. Even though they’ve unsuccessfully tried to align certain programs in the past, his response was, “We’re trying that and I think it might work out okay.” In various ways, community colleges have added structure to align with outcomes of the Completion Agenda.

Attention to funding.

Funding, and, in particular, state-based performance funding, has seeped into the conversation regarding student development and co-curricular education. Erin stated, “All of a sudden there was this huge shift. You know, all of a sudden in our orientation it was, ‘Do not tell students that it’s okay just to get their generals.’ That all of a sudden became very taboo.” Dave described the Completion Agenda in the following manner: “I would say at its very base, it is a shift from the access focus to the success focus and being rewarded for that. When I say rewarded, at an institutional level, financially and fundamentally.” Regarding the impact of the Completion Agenda, Coline said:

In terms of, indirectly, you know that Ohio’s funding formula has changed. That, I think, is the lingo that pervades our conversations. It’s funding formula, funding formula, funding formula. Success benchmarks and access points and all of these things that go into how we’re funded have become primary topics of conversation.
Alicia, who is taking part in the state’s Student Success Leadership Institute, described how the focus is on maximizing the State Share of Instruction. She put forth the notion that funding directly impacts institutions: “When it’s completion of certificates and degrees, and grades earned in courses, if that’s how you are getting your state funding, then that pretty much defines what the institution is going to do over the next five years.” She added, “It’s not going to really be in an institution’s best interest to say, ‘Yeah, that’s how the state’s going to give us our money, but let’s go ahead and focus over here instead’.”

Funding has affected how institutions prioritize student engagement or how it is delivered. At Thompson, Joseph said, “Our number one goal is the overall success challenge, completion challenge. Move [Thompson’s] performance-based funding ranking to the top of urban schools in Ohio, and then provide programs and services that foster student engagement.”

Certain institutions, like Garfield, Allen State, and Highland have put more resources at the front end to help students be more successful. Regarding changes to new student orientation and the first year experience at Allen State, Dave said, “Having that level of more in-depth reflection and opportunity took longer. You have to build that process in as well. It was ultimately advantageous, I think, to everyone.” Reflecting on Garfield’ attention to students’ transition to college, or “onboarding,” Lynn said:

A lot of that I think has to do with the state budget, at least the new attention on the progress piece and the need to start documenting some of these things that
we’re doing to engage students and try to keep them in the pipeline and moving through the pipeline as efficiently as possible.

With the shift from access to completion, Dave said, “That’s a significant shift here, from the student affairs implement. Much more heavy emphasis on the co-curricular, on the student development, on understanding how that first year experience and design has to happen from our vantage point.” Henry has felt the effects of funding in his work at Lucas:

Our numbers are down, but we’re graduating more, which is a big plus. With Ohio basing funding on Completion and benchmarks, that was the other piece that came in with a push about student engagement was now we’re going to be judged on do students complete ‘X’ number of hours and another ‘X’ number of hours and then graduate or transfer.

Student engagement has taken on new meaning in the Completion Agenda context in that the work that is taking place can ultimately impact college sustainability.

**Focus on career.**

Although most community colleges have a career services department, many colleges have begun approaching career development as directly connected to student development. Since community colleges are placing considerable emphasis in this area, it has affected the work of student affairs. Dave explained that a shift for the college is increased attention to helping every student recognize his or her goals: “What is your goal set? How are you going to achieve that goal set? What are your obstacles to
achieving that goal set?” He admitted that this is something they should have been doing all along. Kip explained that the Completion Agenda has shifted the focus:

Now it’s get them in, get them through, get them out of here. Oftentimes we don’t think about all three pieces of that. What happens when they get out? Are they ready for jobs? Are they in the right job? It’s more of a cradle-to-career approach.

Debbie sees career development as a focus at Highland as well:

I think definitely more of an emphasis on that whole career goal, career planning process. Helping students to see…the relevance of everything. How it affects not only what goes on in the classroom as a basic theory, but how does that apply [in the workforce].

Dario, who is also taking part in the Student Success Leadership Institute, said the college’s efforts will be “continuing to improve and develop ways to get students in and out of here with degrees and jobs.” According to Lynn, “We need to give them what they came for, which is that degree or certificate.” Henry has been asked to adjust programming to be more geared toward careers, including bringing in a national speaker and having panels on career fields. Career development has become part of the student development conversation if not a focus of the work that is being done.

Continued focus on student success.

Although nationally increased attention has been placed on student completion, student affairs has already been focused on helping students find success. Dave described the phenomenon: “From a student affairs and a student development
perspective...we’ve always been retention offices. Even though we might not be classified in that manner, or seen in that way, retention needs completion, [and] if students aren’t retained, they don’t complete.” As a result, some of the participants had trouble identifying how their role has changed as a result of the Completion Agenda, even if they saw larger changes in the institution as a whole. For instance, Henry said, “It hasn’t impacted my role; it’s more impacted my way of thinking when I’m planning events and what will work.”

Faculty and other staff have had to adapt to new expectations related to student success, which, in some cases, has caused concern. Garfield Community College has begun an initiative called One Door, where anybody on campus will ask a student key questions to help them get started. Coline described its potential impact, including “people getting out of the mindset that this information is mine, and job security, and only I can know this so that students will have to come to me, to realizing that if everybody can help, then it makes for a better student experience.” She also mentioned some of the challenges they face: “I think...our faculty will get more involved with the more services side of the house, which I think they're very apprehensive about right now because they don’t want to give out the wrong information.” Similarly, with Lucas Community College’s push to more actively engage students, Henry said, “What I found was faculty wanted to be more engaged, but they just didn’t know how to do it,” which he did not mean as a criticism. He further stated, “They’re a different breed, for lack of a better word. Whereas for me, that’s part of my job all the time, interacting with students.” The Completion efforts may not have impacted all areas equally, and Student
Affairs educators may have actually had an easier time adjusting to new expectations due to a tradition of being student focused.

**Purpose of profession within the Completion Agenda.**

Participants described the purpose of their profession within the context of the Completion Agenda. The purpose of their profession included supporting academic affairs, student development, creating transformational opportunities, student success, and employment and soft skills.

**Support academic affairs.**

A category that arose throughout the conversations was the notion that student affairs exists to support the work of academic affairs or the work that takes place within the classroom. Debbie described her work alongside that of academic affairs in the following way:

> If you were to look at the rules at a college level, your faculty are the sages on a stage…They are the ones providing the product to the student, or the content…I would say everybody else becomes that guide on the side, helping them get through, jump the hurdles, navigate through in any way that we can so they can be successful and realize what they’re doing and accomplishing.

Coline described student affairs by saying, “We’re supporting cast.” Regarding her role as Dean of Students in particular, she said:

> As far as how I explain my role to faculty, I tell them my job is to make sure that you can do yours, so that you can focus on your discipline. You can focus on giving students what they need to master that content. My role is to make sure
that all of the other things that, the soup in the background, is taken care of so you can focus there.

Similarly, Joseph said, “Maybe we’re not center stage, but we are definitely the strong guide on the side to complement the academic setting.” Alicia had given considerable thought to where student affairs fits into the overall makeup of the institution. Lynn taught her that student affairs serves as a support role to academic affairs, and she recognized how her feelings about this sentiment had evolved:

That used to frustrate me, honestly, early on in my career, because I was like,

“No. We’re equals. No. We are all important.” But, really, when you think of it that way, that kind of defines the type of work that you do, because we are here to basically ensure that faculty can teach, and then we handle everything else.

At the present, she views the faculty-staff dynamic in the following way: “Clearly, academic affairs needs to be the primary focus, but when you start thinking of us doing everything else so that can happen, then you start to see, maybe we aren’t equals, but maybe we have an equally important part.” The status of faculty and staff is something that has been an ongoing debate in higher education, and some of the participants in the study believed student affairs occupies a supporting role.

**Student development.**

Student development is an area that many participants believed ties into the purpose of their profession. Lynn said:

I firmly believe, based upon my own experience working with students, being a student in the past, raising two college-age kids…, and talking with employers
and four-year partner schools that skill sets including resiliency, self-efficacy, communication (verbal, non-verbal, and written), personal brand (including appearance, attitude, social media, etc.) are essential for success in college as well as in the workforce and in society.

In many ways, this student development philosophy is encapsulated in the work of student affairs. Joseph showed me a placard he received as a gift, which summed up his personal and professional philosophy: *We are called student affairs, not staff affairs, not faculty affairs, not university affairs. Never lose sight of what’s important.* He echoed this philosophy, saying, “It’s about the students.” He further explained how his student-centered philosophy plays out in his interaction with students:

I say this, and I really do mean this in humility…I’ve heard a certain person say if there was this many [Joseph’s], we’d have this many more graduates…That means a lot to me, but I don’t feel like I’m doing anything special. I feel like I’m trying to do a good job. Sometimes the people at [Thompson]…get very busy. I think it is hard to fit students in that need to see you immediately, but I think that’s why we’re here.

The ability to prioritize students is something that has a direct impact on their development, according to Joseph and others.

One of the ways that participants showed their student development philosophy was by connecting with students. Kip said, “I tell students, the first time they meet me, I have an open-door policy, which means if you’re not in here enough to bug me, you’re not in here enough.” Other student affairs educators explained how they make a point to
go where students are. Dario visits the cafeteria and speaks to students about co-
curricular opportunities. Of this, he said, “It’s really just getting yourself out there as an
administrator and trying to bring yourself down to the level of the students. They’re not
going to just come up by themselves.” Henry said something similar: “I see part of my
mission to individually connect with students to make a difference in individuals’ lives,
as opposed to the broader programming.” He spoke about how he walks around the
atrium on campus to chat with students that he does not know. He explained, “I want
them to feel a contact, and, actually, it’s fun and it’s interesting, and I enjoy it.”

Some student affairs educators described the pleasure they take in seeing students
develop. As it relates to working with students, many of whom have had conduct issues,
Lynn said:

Just watching them move from kind of not having a clue to looking down and not
getting eye contact, not interacting, and having a few pointed conversations along
the way, and seeing that turnaround and seeing them succeed and move on,
there’s just nothing like it.

Stacie also expressed her feelings about getting to see students develop, which also
connects to the value she places on her work:

I get to work directly with the students. It’s just one of those things that I always
talk about—my proud mama moments. Whenever you see somebody coming
in…and how quiet they are. Then when they graduate and how they’ve really
grown into a great person.

That development is a result of intentional efforts to focus on areas of student growth.
Many of the participants talked about their student development mindset and how that approach affects their work. Alicia said, “My perspective has always been that in all of these different areas within student services, specifically in counseling, advising, conduct...there is a lot of learning to be had, there.” Dario described the work of student affairs, and student engagement in particular: “Basically, I feel like we provide opportunities for students outside the academic classroom to gain experience interacting with one another, being able to take on leadership roles.” Coline said:

I think the purpose is to help develop students outside of the academic knowledge that they need to get a credential. I think our role is to help students find out who they are [and] help develop them: develop leadership skills, help them find out their talents, help them feel comfortable with themselves, comfortable in the college community, help teach life skills.

Henry similarly described a learning environment that would bring about such long term benefits: “To provide an engaging environment for students where they can meet people, expand their knowledge, and get involved in things that can benefit them in their life and in their future.” This student development philosophy was prominent in the philosophy that many of these student affairs educators bring to their work.

Creating transformational opportunities.

Beyond student development, some participants emphasized the need to create transformational opportunities. Alicia said, “I try to avoid things that are transactional. There’s a place for that, but everything is intended to be a part of the larger scheme of co-
curricular education.” Regarding her work with students on conduct issues, she explained:

My mindset going into that is that I would rather a student mess up here, I would rather that they maybe fail here, I would rather that they get into trouble here, and then, we kind of clean it all up, and they graduate and are this wonderful self-sufficient contributing citizen of our community.

Joseph also kept coming back to the idea of taking advantage of transformational opportunities. One of the best examples from his career had to do with an event at one of the learning centers, where they were able to provide a student with a Special Wish, when initially they were merely planning to invite a representative from Special Wish to the event. Joseph explained that his role is to help students in-and out-of-the-classroom and make it toward graduation, but to do so “not just mechanically, but hopefully [as] a dynamic experience.” In the larger scheme, Kip said, “For me, I’m a big proponent of community colleges because it changes students’ lives who otherwise wouldn’t be transformed. That’s our role.” Even for students who ultimately do not find success, Kip believes “there’s value in the intent.” Overall, this focus on transformation is one of the ways that student affairs educators regard the value of their work.

**Student success.**

Many of the participants attributed the value they place on their work to student success. A number of participants described how the Completion Agenda marked a shift from the access funnel to student success. Some explained how the focus on completion is something they probably should have been doing previously. Coline drew attention to
the completion rate at Garfield prior to the Completion Agenda, which was poor, and how it has improved considerably. She said, “We’re just paying attention to stuff that we really should have paid attention a long time ago.” Speaking about the funding formula in particular, she argued, “I think that the biggest resource that we have been able to apply in terms of the completion agenda and our funding formula, is just paying attention.” Coline was not alone in this sentiment. Dave said:

How do I put this? It’s something we should probably have been doing all along.

When it was the butts in seats and the access funnel, you spent all your time continuing to find the people. Not to help them manage the process. It was find them and get them into the opening of the funnel.

Now, Dave explained how his institution’s role has shifted to providing the right information at the outset of the experience and “shutting the back doors as tightly as possible” afterward.

Along with the insight some educators have achieved during the Completion Agenda, certain individuals had a very distinct student success philosophy. Alicia adheres to the philosophy that “We should never bring a student in and have them leave us worse off than they were when they walked through the door.” An example she gave is, “If you’re leaving with a lot of credits that you cannot use, or you’re leaving with a lot of debt, that you are not going to be able to pay back…we may have left you in the worse position.” Dave connected his student success philosophy with being forthright with students:
The last thing I want is a student come in and believe, “Well, this is either going to be an easy process or one that I can put really low on my priority totem pole and still be okay.” You’re about to make a financial, a personal, a resource investment into all of this. We need something positive to come out of that with and for you.

These beliefs connect to the fact that many student affairs educators now believe their role is related to, if not interwoven with, student success.

Student affairs educators oftentimes directly attribute the value they place on their work with student success. Alicia said, “I think, in higher education, for a long time we were throwing a lot of things at the wall, and hoping that they work. I think, this is forcing us into more of an area of focus on completion, which really should be our job.” Dave said, “It sounds so crass, but to us, your success is our success. It’s even more important for you to be successful than us institutionally.” In terms of helping student reach completion goals, Stacie said, “I guess it’s always been there. That’s always been a goal of ours, [of the] college and for me…to get the students to actually reach…whatever that end result is.”

Sometimes this is an individual aim, where the person attempts to influence the institution as much as possible in that direction, such as is the case with Aaron. Aaron said:

I joke around sometimes [that] I’m the only nonessential member of this staff because I don't have a specific job, but I manage the AmeriCorps grant, and then
all these other programs ultimately come to me. I try to influence the administration as much as I can towards success.

Similarly, Erin discussed how she enjoyed sharing successes from her area. She said:

Having me go to meetings and present on the data and the statistics, because I’m not a data statistic type of person…that’s not where I get my energy and my passion, but I love to present on [student success] because I like to show you what’s going on.

Other times, the individual’s work directly aligns with the direction of the institution, such as the case with Joseph. Joseph’s division of Student Affairs recently went on a retreat and set goals for the year. He said, “Literally, goal number one for us for every office is the overall success challenge, and that overall completion challenge.”

Participants also shared instances where they felt good because of the impact they had on a student’s overall success. Lynn said that the best part of her job is being able to tell students, “I’m really proud that you made it this far and that you’re moving on.” Kip, who said his goal was to “create a place where students with disabilities could be successful,” gave specific examples of students who had overcome obstacles and found success. He talked about a Nursing student who was experiencing challenges, so he referred her to another program, and she now has a great internship overseas; he talked about another student with a low IQ but who has been on the Dean’s List two terms in a row; and he talked about a student with severe autism, who improved his quality of life due to his educational experience. Kip said, “In the community college is it’s very easy
on the administrative side to focus on the students who aren’t succeeding, but when you focus on the ones that are, it’s moving. It’s powerful. It’s life changing.”

*Employment and soft skills.*

Beyond student success, participants addressed outcomes beyond completion, such as employment and soft skills. Career development and emotional intelligence are areas that student affairs educators also contribute to the value of their work. Lynn talked about how the access model can be viewed as “warehousing students.” She said, “We need to give them what they came for, which is that degree or certificate.” Kip described the Completion Agenda as a “cradle-to-career approach” that he believes “starts with picking the right major.” As part of his professional philosophy, Kip has direct conversations with students at the outset and explains what the limitations are to a certain degree they might want to pursue.

Student affairs educators talked about the benefits of co-curricular education in these areas, especially as it helps students develop soft skills. Lynn made the case that colleges can offer students opportunities to learn about and develop in areas of “communication, soft skills, showing up to work on time, [and] professional dress” through co-curricular education. She believes those outcomes put Garfield on par with other baccalaureate institutions in the state. Dave also praised co-curricular education as a way individuals develop skills that are not fostered elsewhere:

In so many institutions, including our own, when you hear from the advisory committees in those specific disciplines, we’re getting a hoard of surveys that say, “You’re putting out a good technical product. I need a good professional and
person to also supplement that”…For that level of engagement, typically that’s
going to be designed from a co-curricular standpoint, infused with their curricular.
Dario echoed these sentiments: “Everyone’s talking about soft skills, learning those soft
skills or being open to them in ways that they wouldn’t be just stuck in a classroom
setting.” At Trumbull, his department offers students the opportunity to become
orientation leaders, which gives them work experience and is a great way to develop
those skills. While employment does not encapsulate the value of student affairs work, it
does contribute to the value some student affairs educators place on their work.

**Value of work at institutions.**

Participants discussed how they feel their work is valued by others at the
institution, which ranged from lacking value to generally feeling valued to mixed feelings
on whether or not their work is valued.

**Lack of value.**

Value people place on co-curricular education is something that is lacking within
the Completion Agenda, according to certain participants. Joseph described the reality of
student affairs from his perspective: “Sometimes [the work we do] doesn’t grab the
headline. Student satisfaction is not going to trump if you’re up or down in enrollment,
to be honest; it’s just not going to.” Erin described a continued divide between student
affairs and academic affairs:

You have that chasm, right? Between the academic and student affairs. I know
people are always trying to bridge that, but it’s there. It's not easy to address it and
say, “Hey, hey elephant in the room. You’re still there.”
When asked if the Completion Agenda has impacted co-curricular education or the value of it, Lynn responded:

Not as much as I’d like to see, if I want to be honest. Here at [Garfield], there’s just not a lot being done in student development, which I would say the co-curriculars would fall under student development. There’s lots of things being done in pockets, but I don't think they’re always tied back to the classroom learning, which in my mind is essential.

Lynn believes that this situation is not unique to Garfield: “I think it’s a community college thing; I really do.”

One of the reasons student affairs educators do not feel valued has to do with their roles and responsibilities, which can be multifaceted. Multiple participants described the many roles they take on. Aaron said that he, along with everyone else at the college, “wears at least three hats.” Aaron wasn’t the only person to use this metaphor. Dario said, “You wear a lot of hats at a community college, which I know you know.” He said, “At a four-year, I’d probably just be doing student clubs, but here you’re doing student clubs; I also do student conduct, orientation, the list goes on.” Beyond these observations, Aaron explained how, at Putnam State, the Director of Admissions is in charge of the areas that traditionally fall within student life. He explained how that role has stayed with that individual by saying, “It’s just one of those things that kind of caught on to her, latched on like a remora, those little fish that hang to sharks.”

Beyond having multiple roles and responsibilities, student affairs educators are often asked to do more with less. This is especially true of those in lower-level
administrative positions, such as those in student life. Stacie described herself as a “one-man show.” She said:

I do what I can. I try to make as many classroom presentations as I can to talk about student activities. I’ll go to the satellites and visit the classrooms there, too.

It’s difficult because if I’m not here, then I’m not here for the students. That in itself is a big challenge for me.

In terms of the lack of resources that Putnam State could devote to assessment, Aaron expressed his desire to have more available at his fingertips: “I wish we had more resources to put in to it so that I had to gather less and it would be out there.” In each case, these individuals have adapted to their situation but still understand that they are taking on more responsibilities in their role than they would prefer.

Related to doing more with less, budgets have not grown over time. At Bennington State, Stacie said, “I pretty much have had the same budget. It hasn’t grown at all. I’m limited, because there’s some great things that we could do; it’s just I can’t—the funds aren’t there.” At Trumbull, Dario said, “Budget-wise, we have not grown,” even though he described the ways in which he expanded student life since coming on board. At certain institutions, like Lucas Community College, the student activities budget is generated through student fees. Henry explained, “It’s definitely gone down over the past couple years, partly because most of our budget is based on student fees.” Even though Lucas voted to raise student fees this year, Henry explained that doing so has helped maintain the budget more than anything. Even with that being the case, he
said, “Part of our budget, like for student workers, that comes from the operating budget of the college, has gone down significantly.”

Budgets remaining stagnant is not necessarily a student affairs phenomenon, but some participants also expressed a need for space. Stacie has been asking for space for 15 years. She said, “I’ve offered options of revenue for helping to sustain a recreation area, like a student activity fee. We can probably get things donated, as far as pool tables and Ping-Pong. Then it comes back to, ‘Okay, now we don’t have the space for it’.”

Dario also echoed concerns about a lack of space for students and student programming on campus.

*Need to make a case for value.*

A salient theme in student affairs literature is the need for student affairs to make a case for its value. This trope surfaced in my conversations with student affairs administrators in particular. Lynn explained that most people do not know what student affairs is, something she has experienced when she talks to new students during orientation. Also, there is the need for faculty to better understand the role of student affairs. Lynn said, “I think it’s constantly trying to retell that story to the academic side of the house.” This is especially true for her when behavioral issues come to the fore.

She gave a scenario when faculty come to them when there’s a “meltdown”:

It’s the first time that we’ve heard, so they’ve never really asked us if there’s a way that we might be able to think through it with them and an approach that they might be able to take in the classroom, so continuing to put that out there so that people understand what is the role of student affairs.
Joseph said, “I think we do have to fight to remind people of the importance of why we’re here.” One of the ways he has done this at Thompson is by creating a campaign to help others on campus better understand student affairs, especially as it pertains to mandates on Title IX and suicide prevention. Dave believes that, considering the work on retention and student success, the timing is ripe to get others to understand the work of student affairs: “I think this is a time for student affairs to stand up…It’s a time to fully flex the muscle in terms of, ‘This is what we do.’”

One of the ways to make a case for the value of student affairs is to show it through data or in meaningful ways. Coline recognized the value of assessment in validating the work of student affairs. She said, “I think that’s another one of the criticisms about student affairs. It’s kind of hard to quantify the effects of warm and fuzzy and things like that.” However, Garfield and other institutions are beginning to incorporate CAS standards into their assessment. Dario explained that they are able to show the good work they do at Board Meetings at Trumbull. He explained:

We’re able to show the Board and the President and all the other administration that’s at those board meetings some neat things that are happening in the co-curricular world, whether it’s through our clubs and organizations, whether it’s through athletics or any, again, special program or issue that’s happening. An important aspect of presenting these updates is “just making sure that you’re taking advantage of those opportunities to be visible.”
Valued.

Participants also expressed a range of reasons for why they feel their areas are valued. When it comes to faculty valuing the work they do, Coline explained:

A lot of it has to do with just educating faculty on the implications of what happens in the classroom, and how it affects student services, and vice versa. I think in my role, because I sit at a more strategic place, it’s just more about making sure that the systems align so that things are seamless for students. I have a great relationship with our faculty. A lot of times it’s just about educating them on how we affect one another.

She also explained that, when she first arrived at Garfield, division between the two areas was “palpable.” Over time, there have been deliberate attempts to bring the two sides together (“two sides” being terminology they no longer even use). Other participants described the importance of each area taking the time to understand the value of the other. Dave said:

It’s very, very important, critical, that you basically get in bed with academic affairs at the very beginning. They have a standing seat at our SALT meeting, Student Affairs Leadership Team. They come once a month, every month, where they bring current issues, concerns, opportunities…In turn, I work with them on the Dean’s Council…Then I talk to the Chairs…I’ve started to have more dialogue with Faculty Association. That’s their stand-alone leadership entity. Without that dialogue, student affairs’ value is primarily recognized when something goes wrong, like a classroom issues, which Lynn stated during our conversation.
Faculty buy into the work of student affairs for other reasons that align with teaching and their content area. Certain general education learning outcomes have been eliminated at Garfield Community College, due to changes in curriculum, in order to address what can reasonably be accomplished in the classroom. As a result, Alicia explained how some of that content has become infused into co-curricular education:

Some of those things have kind of fallen through the cracks, we’re trying to address those, so we are partnering with our academic affairs counterparts, at least at this campus, to kind of say, “Okay. What were the ones that were not identified, but were part of the list?”

At Bennington State, Stacie has many faculty involved as advisors for clubs and organizations. She said, “They’re in it all together. They do get a stipend. It’s a little teeny, tiny stipend. They’re not doing it for the money. They’re doing it for the student. That’s where…I get the support.”

Another noteworthy reason for why student affairs educators feel valued in their work is support from upper-level administration. Dave said:

I do also believe that [valuing student affairs] comes top down, oftentimes, because, if your president and your senior executive group don’t have that philosophy, it’s hard to do that as an island. As a Vice President of Student Affairs, [if] I didn’t get that support across the line, it would be very difficult to do our best.

Allen State has taken an innovate approach to external mandates from the Completion Agenda, including the Higher Learning Assessment and the Campus Completion Plan.
Dave discussed how everything that has been designed at Allen State has been done so collaboratively, where planning teams took people outside of their day-to-day work to provide critical feedback for another area. Coline also described how collaboration is intentional at Garfield, and how that culture begins with the President:

> We do a lot of professional development activities and college wide meetings where we can kind of adopt the same lingo. We do a college wide convocation twice a year. We do President’s Cabinet and that meets every month. That’s like Assistant Dean and up. We do President’s Retreat which will happen next week. There are all these opportunities where we come together and talk about these things.

Of the administration’s role in creating this culture, Coline suggested, “I think that they do a fairly good job of keeping us all focused on the same thing and making sure we’re all running in the same direction.” At Trumbull, Dario explained, “I was lucky enough to come in where administration already support our co-curriculars.” He said that it started with the President and Board of Trustees, who, during the Board of Trustees Meeting, had a section devoted to students, where they could share the work they were doing. Student affairs educators at institutions with support from the President and other top-level administrators feel valued compared to those that do not.

**Tensions related to values and institutional expectations.**

Certain tensions exist between student affairs educators’ values and current institutional expectations. Participants described specific tensions that are evident in their work. These are issues that they face based upon values they hold, which run contrary to
that of the institution or other external forces. These include: access and equity, acting in the student’s best interest, funding not reflecting student goals, technology over relationships, and initiative fatigue and communication.

**Access and equity.**

One concern that was discussed as a result of the Completion Agenda is how community colleges are being evaluated on new measures of performance that do not always align with its open access mission. Regarding the recent push for more early-to-college students, Alicia said:

One of the challenges that I’ve experienced in the last year is around the balance between [high school students being on campus] and being an open access institutions…Trying to balance the fact that we’re open enrollment, which means that we have people with felony backgrounds, we have sex offenders, that this is their only access point to education, but then we are also enrolling students that are in the sixth grade. How do we rectify those two? How do we make sure that everybody is getting the education that they are coming here for? She further stated, “That’s been one of the things where I think an institutional goal is maybe not as aligned with maybe the philosophy of student affairs.”

Multiple participants; including Erin, Coline, Debbie, Aaron, and Kip; discussed the renewed push for enrollment alongside the focus on completion. Kip described what he believes has caused this dynamic: “I think what’s happened is you get administrators that are still caught in these two worlds. It’s still based on raw numbers and so there’s still that push…Then there’s the freak out when we see our success rates.” These two
objectives can create challenges for educators. Erin described how, at the outset of the Completion Agenda, those at the college were being pushed to increase enrollment while simultaneously getting pressure to increase completion. She said, “Sometimes those are not perfectly aligned.” Oakwood has also undertaken initiatives that will improve enrollment and, in turn, revenue. She quoted Tinto, saying, “Access without support is not opportunity’,” and explained, “That’s great if we can admit 5,500 students. Can we support 5,500 students, and, if we can’t, what are we doing?”

Of a different concern, Garfield Community College is making a push for more students and is trying to attract different populations, some of which are not directly benefiting its open access mission, such as “Blue Chip” students (high-performing recent high school graduates). Coline admitted, “Yes, yes, we’ve been trying to go after everybody.” Doing so can run contrary to an access and equity philosophy. In a follow-up interview, Coline elucidated on how the push for different populations of students is driven by the Completion Agenda and by performance-based funding:

On one hand, you want the most prepared students because those student are likely to graduate on time and boost your graduation rate, which you also get credit for…You want to maintain your mission, of course, of access, but you also want to make sure that the non-blue chip students are also successful because you get [performance-based funding credit] there too.

Her overall response to these new demands for enrollment was, “It does spread us thin.”


*Not acting in student’s best interest.*

Direct challenges to student affairs educators’ values have arisen when completion initiatives require they push students to take on more, when they know that doing so is not really in the student’s best interest. Lynn described the importance of having candid conversations with students at the outset:

> Trying to sit down with a student at the onboarding to really say, “What is your plan?” Because while getting there full time and being out in two or three years is admirable, it’s not for everybody. If your life is such that you cannot attend full time and you know that’s true, why would you set yourself up for failure from day one?

Running contrary to this philosophy is the push to have students be full time, when they cannot really handle the workload due to life responsibilities. In response to the national push that “15 is full-time,” Erin said:

> Are you kidding me? This student is working 40 hours, has a family outside and is a single mom. No, six. Max six. Just to get her financial aid because I know she really needs it. I think that sometimes the two sides of the heads were not always talking together and looking at the student holistically.

Striking a balance is sometimes a challenge, as Debbie described. She said, “Many of them [take a full course load], and they…stop in and stop out. Sometimes they take on more than they can manage. Everybody’s trying to help them see that if you’re working full-time, you can’t be a full-time student.” There is often a disparity between the
institution’s need for students to take on more to achieve specific outcomes than what is manageable for the student.

Funding does not reflect student goals.

When working with students in a community college setting, there is often an expectation that students are attending college to earn a degree or certificate, whether or not that is their goal. Part of that assumption comes from funding models that reward institutions for those measures of success. Advising at Highland Community College has begun to incorporate career advising, and Debbie described that transition: “Ideally, as we do that shift, making sure everything has that career pathway, which is related to that guided pathway. Not only getting through the programs, but that purpose on the other end.” Using this pathway framework, she explained, “With the Completion Plan, that’s where we start so students can start seeing the relevance.” Lynn also explained how a student’s job is to earn a degree and transfer:

I also think…when you talk about being a student as your job and the professionalism required to be a dedicated student and earn the degree required to graduate and hopefully transfer, those are the things that could and should play into the Completion Agenda.

Dave, on the other hand, described some challenges with assuming students are there to meet the goals of the institution. He said:

It’s been important, I think, to educate the larger populous and certainly our government structures. In terms of, “Hey, many people who come into the two-
year college system in particular, don’t have the goal set of a diploma in mind.”

They’re not here necessarily to achieve that. That isn’t their goal set.

In the current system, colleges will be out money if they are not directing students toward a degree or certificate. Dave described a student who needs three classes to get a job payment increase or a promotion opportunity, saying “That’s not necessarily recognized in the Completion Agenda.” There exist tensions between what is being pushed at a national and state level, and, in turn, at the institution, and what really aligns with student goals.

**Technology over relationships.**

There were clear differences of opinion regarding the role of technology and its effectiveness when working with students and helping them be successful. Putnam State began using technology for early alerts, and Aaron said this has helped them aggregate responses and pull reports to see who had not responded. In addition, it provided greater opportunity to connect with students: “We’ll find those students and be able to put a little extra effort maybe in to trying to get a hold of them; go to their classroom and say, ‘Look, okay let’s talk.’” Garfield Community College, with the One Door initiative, is attempting to create a situation where a student can get basic information from anybody, whether it be somebody in administration or maintenance. They have partnered with a technology company to be able to create this system, and Coline said, “There’s the technology piece of it which is expensive, but I think it’s the easier part.” She expanded on the fact that it’s causing a lot of angst for individuals:
What does that mean for me? People getting out of the mindset that this information is mine, and job security, and only I can know this so that students will have to come to me. To realizing that if everybody can help, then it makes for a better student experience.

Kip, too, stressed the value of relationships over technology, even though technology is often marketed as the easy answer. He believes:

Retention happens in the classroom. You can have wonderful new shiny programs, new shiny pieces of software where red dashes and all that, but it ultimately comes down to can you build relationships with faculty to get them to buy in. If you can’t, none of this stuff is going to work.

Kip further stated, “What I find funny is upper-administration’s answer in colleges…is to buy a new piece of software that will track and have funny little dashes and dashboards, and be red, green, and yellow,” implying that the student’s level of risk is secondary to the relationships they have developed with people on campus. Clearly, technology without relationships is largely ineffective, according to these participants.

**Initiative fatigue and communication.**

A challenge that exists between student affairs educators’ values and institutional expectations has to do with the sheer amount of initiatives a college has taken on at any given time. Related is the college’s inability to effectively communicate information with internal stakeholders. Coline said:

I think the one thing that I’ve struggled with in this role, as well as a couple other roles that I’ve been in at the institution, is I think that sometimes we seem focused
but we really lack focus. Maybe not focus, more discipline. I think we tend to take on too much. There’s no initiative out there that we haven’t liked.

She further stated, “We adopt everything. I think we don’t give ourselves enough time to digest things and figure out how they work and how they fit.” Joseph, who works at Thompson Community College, expressed concerns about size. He said, “I think [Thompson] is just a large organization. It’s never been anyone’s ill intent to make it harder for students. I think when you’re large, when you don’t go to scale, things become complicated.” He described a time when the institution held customer service training, more for internal stakeholders to better other areas, and said, “It not being here is noticeable.” Coline, when asked if faculty and staff at her institution understand all the initiatives taking place, said:

> We could do a better job with that. We’re getting there, but it’s a big, unwieldy institution. I think that trying to find a way to efficiently and effectively educate everybody as to what’s going on is really, really hard to do. Even from where I sit, I have a hard time processing it all and taking it all in and keeping up with the trends and everything that we’re doing.

Initiative fatigue and communication issues may be symptomatic of larger community colleges, but ensuring faculty and staff are knowledgeable so as to not adversely impact the student experience remains an ongoing challenge at every community college.

**Implicit Tensions.**

Related to the research question “What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or
current institutional expectations?” were implicit tensions that were not outright stated but that surfaced at various points within interviews.

The Completion Agenda is a complex idea that does not typically elicit a simple viewpoint of whether it is good or bad. Even if student affairs educators view the Completion Agenda as something that is largely positive or negative, they are quickly led to understand certain benefits and drawbacks that were not immediately apparent. Accordingly, participants spoke about the Completion Agenda as a complex matter and balanced multiple perspectives, something they likely have to do on a daily basis.

What follows are detailed discussion threads that help to demonstrate how complex these issues can be. These were not contradictions per se but rather testaments to the fact that the Completion Agenda has changed the way we think about community college co-curricular education.

*Alicia.*

Alicia believes that the Completion Agenda is overwhelmingly positive because of its attempt to ensure students leave the college in a better position but recognized the downsides as well. She said:

Really, I actually kind of appreciate the Completion Agenda, because I think that—and I’ll get to why there are some negative implications for that—but I think, in higher education, for a long time we were throwing a lot of things at the wall, and hoping that they work. I think, this is forcing us into more of an area of focus on completion, which really should be our job.
She spoke further about low-income and first-generation students and how it is imperative that we leave them in a better position when they leave our institutions than when they entered. She Alicia stated:

If you’re leaving with a lot of credits that you cannot use, or you’re leaving with a lot of debt that you are not going to be able to pay back, and an associate’s degree salary, then we may have left you in the worse position. Yes, maybe you are more academically prepared. Yes, maybe you are more socially prepared, but we have left you in a situation where now you have to work ten times harder to make up for all of these things that you accumulated when you were here. I think the Completion Agenda helps us kind of narrow what’s really important and getting students done.

She, however, acknowledged:

Now, the negative implication to that, and probably what your researching, is that I think that a lot of things that have probably fallen by the wayside because of that. Because it becomes more difficult to find the correlations between co-curricular programming, student life, student government, and completion. For her, the benefits of the Completion Agenda are worth any negative effects that have transpired as a result.

_Lynn._

Lynn discussed how the student affairs educator, due to education and experience, has a responsibility to impart the benefits of co-curricular education to students, even if the students does not immediately see the value. She took this stance:
If we’re educators and we feel like we know a little bit more than a student who’s brand new, then I think we owe it to those students to kind of get them into the place where it's inevitable that they're going to have to participate in these because it’s tied back to the course, and they’re going to get direct benefit and maybe some indirect benefit that they didn't see coming.

She also spoke about Astin’s work on involvement and other benefits, like soft skills, that can be gained from co-curricular education. Related to the population community colleges serve, Lynn further stated:

My beliefs are, particularly for the community college, we have so many first generation students, and students who don’t always have the same support system at home as what a traditional four-year college student. You look at the history of community colleges and how they came about, it’s supposed to be leading to equity, and yet how do you have equity if we only educate people to the subject and don't educate them to the ethics and communication and self-advocacy and grit and other things that they’re going to need to get by in life if they’ve never had that in their home life?

The answer for her is co-curricular education. She spoke about students, in particular, who feel that college is not for them, and it is the responsibility of student affairs educators to be cognizant of the work they are doing and provide some value added.

At the same time, in the context of the Completion Agenda, educators need to be helping students reach their goals and doing so as quickly as possible. She said:
When I think about the Completion Agenda, there’s all kinds of different studies and work being done and pathways and, you name it, but at the end of the day, for me, it just means why did the student come here? If…they're degree seeking, then we’d best be getting them out of here as quickly as possible with that degree. This balance between getting students to see the benefit of taking part in co-curricular education, and believing it as a professional, and also wanting to be mindful of student’s time and get them out of college as quickly as possible is a conflict that many student affairs educators now face.

**Erin.**

Erin discussed a shift that took place when the Completion Agenda came to the fore and some of the tensions that she experienced as a result. She said that when she moved from student life to first year programs, she experienced more pressure to have students get their degrees as opposed to doing their general education and transferring and to push them to take more credit hours. She said:

> All of a sudden there was this huge shift. You know, all of a sudden in our orientation it was, “Do not tell students that it’s okay just to get their generals.” That all of a sudden became very taboo. It was how to get them on the path to complete a degree. All of a sudden everything’s being tied in [to] what’s our completion rate?

The push for students to take more credits ran contrary to her student development philosophy:
It was, “Really push them to take 12 credits,” when they really should only be taking six or nine. You know, we need to get students to complete and in a timely manner. You need to be…encouraging them to take 15 credits. Are you kidding me? This student is working 40 hours, has a family outside, and is a single mom. No, 6, max 6, just to get her financial aid because I know she really needs it.

Erin said she really tried to prevent this push from causing her to go against her values, which were based on how much a student can reasonably take on.

At the same time, when it comes to the value of her work and job satisfaction, Erin explained that it is directly tied to student success: “For me, the job satisfaction was something as simple as looking at the numbers, the straight numbers, that after my program started and got launched, our retention rate went up.” She further described how she enjoyed going to meetings to present on what was going on in terms of student success, even if she is not a data person or that is not where she gets her energy. Erin strikes a balance between her philosophy, which is “Access without support is not opportunity” (Tinto) and aligning her work with what is happening at her institution and within the Completion Agenda as a whole. These ideas are not necessarily opposed, but, as she stated during our interview, they did cause tension at specific times.

**Kip.**

Kip shared his thoughts on the complexities of student success, how his role lends to that goal, and why it is important for students to get a community college education. He attempts to create a “sense of belonging” in his office, where students feel welcomed. Retention rates for his population have increased as a result. He said, “I think people
don’t come back to college for the school. They could care less about [the institution]. They come back because there’s a professor or a staff member that’s turned a light on for them or given them a place to fall.” He said, “What I try to do is create a customer service model that understands that people come for people, not services. If the people that you encounter at the service are good, then they’ll come back.”

Along those lines, Kip talked about retention literature at community colleges in particular and how people talk about community college students in ways that he finds “appalling.” One of the ways that he sees this is in saying community college students “don’t do optional.” For those students he referenced previously that don’t come back, “they don’t see value in the option.” He understands that many of the students that come through their doors do not have cultural capital needed to automatically be successful in college. He described the situation in this way:

They’re not coming from households where that kind of cultural capital is instilled in you from a very early age, from public school systems where you’re a college prep system, where that's instilled in you. They’re coming from backgrounds that aren’t that.

The focus then becomes “How do you give them the cultural capital to succeed in a middle-class institution?” Kip also has challenges with people believing that community college students are trouble-makers and feels that such a mentality seeps into the institution. He stated, “It’s a very dangerous place to walk.” Kip was particularly critical of administration and the focus on programs that will help students, such as those that determine the level of risk and allow the student support person to focus appropriately.
With such clear beliefs, Kip also had trouble reconciling the Completion Agenda’s push and his role within that system. He described the Completion Agenda as “an attempt to move colleges to getting them in the door to getting them through and getting them out of here.” He further connected this to career decision-making:

Student success starts with picking the right major. Having that conversation with students very early, it’s that cradle-to-career approach…I think it’s much more of how do we get students to be in the right major, to pick the right careers earlier on. To pick the right classes, so that they’re successful, instead of letting them come here and flounder.

Alongside Kip’s philosophy of creating the right environment and helping students develop a sense of belonging, he also acknowledged that the Completion Agenda is about making more intrusive interventions: “It’s all about trying to get into the students’ lives.” This runs contrary to his belief that he is a “democratic educator” and students should be empowered make their own decisions. Also, for students who are not ultimately successful, he attributed it to resiliency and because life gets into the way. Factors that influence persistence may well be these things, but this viewpoint may also cause us to temper the idea that sense of belonging will lead to student success.

Educators, like Kip, struggle with how their professional philosophies align with widespread approaches to student success.

**Documents**

Documents were gathered for data analysis in this study. The primary documents were each Campus Completion Plan. Every public institution within the state of Ohio is
required to submit a Campus Completion Plan every two years, starting with 2014. The Department of Higher Education website (OhioHigherEd, 2016) provided an explanation of the Campus Completion Plan:

House Bill 59 called for each public college and university to submit a campus completion plan that was approved by their board of trustees to the Chancellor by June 30, 2014. The legislation further states that these plans are to be updated every two years. Completion plans provide a continuous improvement framework that can allow campuses to identify and implement strategies to increase the number and percentage of students earning meaningful postsecondary credentials.

As required by the state, each institution in this study submitted a Campus Completion Plan by June 30, 2014 and June 30, 2016. These documents are readily available on the Ohio Department of Education Website.

Campus Completion Plans apply the Completion by Design Loss-Momentum Framework, focusing on Connection, Entry, Progress, and Completion. The state asked each institution to answer certain questions related to these completion phases:

“Connection to the Institution,” “Successful First-Year Entry,” “Student Progress,” “Student Completion,” “Other Aspects of Completion Success,” and “Workforce.”

These standard questions were meant to generate discussion and move them toward areas of focus, which would be encapsulated in strategies the institution would undertake. These strategies were typically presented using the framework and headings: “Focus,”
“Strategy,” “Leadership,” “Outcome,” “Measures,” and “Timeline.” This framework was encouraged and generally consistent in the Campus Completion Plans.

Document findings from participants’ institutions are provided in the following section, but none are cited in order to help maintain confidentiality of participants. In a few cases, participants provided relevant information from other institutional documents. These are noted and further described between the specific institution’s 2014 and 2016 Campus Completion Plans.

**Oakwood Community College.**

Findings from Oakwood Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Oakwood Community College’s 2014 Campus Completion Plan described how committees (the College Completion Plan Working Groups and the State Share of Instruction Task Force) were created to investigate barriers related to student success. The barriers identified included academic advising, student transportation, understanding and preparing for college readiness, and the scheduling of courses. In response to these barriers, the college established desired outcomes (or strategies).

Co-curricular education was only mentioned in one strategy. Within the “Other Areas of Success and Completion” completion phase, the college addressed a need to reinforce work/life balance in the first-year experience course and co-curricular education. Out of 32 strategies, this was the only one that included co-curricular education or student development and partially fell within the responsibility of the
associate dean of students. Oakwood’s progress in this area was 50%, with acceptable performance being at 75% and aspirational performance at 100%.

2016 completion plan.

Oakwood Community College provided new and continued strategies for 2016. It also revisited previous strategies in order to highlight progress. For the strategy related to co-curricular education from 2014, each year’s performance remained at the established 50%. That strategy, however, did not remain on new and continued strategies for the 2016 Campus Completion Plan. No other new strategies connected to co-curricular education and student development were added for 2016.

Allen State College.

Findings from Allen State College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

2014 completion plan.

Allen State College provided context for the Campus Completion Plan by describing the state agenda, the national agenda, and how the college strategic plan outlined strategies in order to implement and sustain the Campus Completion Plan. The President charged a 26 member steering committee with developing the Campus Completion Plan. Five sub-committees, focused on the defined phases of student completion, were then formed. From an initial discussion, two themes emerged that would help guide the ensuring discussions; these included Student Engagement for Persistence and College Readiness. As a next step, the steering committee and sub-
committee members identified 16 primary strategies (related to the dominant themes) and 111 secondary strategies to be researched in relation to each sub-committee area.

Following the planning stages, the Campus Completion Plan presented 10 strategies related to all phases of completion. Of the 10, six were at least partially driven by the leadership from the vice president for student affairs. These included: Orientation Redesign and Delivery, Student Centered Scheduling, Learning Communities, Early Alert System, Prior Learning Assessment, and Stackable Credentials/Pathways.

Orientation Redesign and Delivery creates opportunities for engagement during the first year. The Learning Communities initiative most closely related to the work of student affairs in that it says: “Students’ confidence in their abilities to learn, as well as their motivation to succeed, increases by creating a safe supportive learning space. Due to this ‘engagement’ and ‘involvement’ students persist, are retained, and complete at higher rates.” Co-curricular education or student development, however, were not mentioned in the Campus Completion Plan at any point.

2016 completion plan.

Allen State’s 2016 Campus Completion Plan provided an update on the 2014 report, including an outcomes summary from each sub-committee, along with tracking and assessment. Some outcomes were the Orientation Redesign developed new assignments for students and the Learning Communities demonstrated academic improvements for those taking learning community courses. In addition, the 2016 Campus Completion Plan set five initiatives, which included: Virtual Advising, Orientation Redesign, Comprehensive Early Alert System, Prior Learning Assessment,
and Guided Pathways. The comprehensive early alert system specifically mentioned “creating a culture of engagement” and “promoting student engagement.” However, again, there was no mention of co-curricular education or student development.

**Garfield Community College.**

Findings from Garfield Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

The Garfield Community College Campus Completion Plan described the eight student success metrics the college uses to measure success and examples of programs, initiatives, and interventions underway to improve these measures. Whereas most Campus Completion Plans use a grid to describe the strategies it has undertaken and will pursue within the next two years, Garfield described work being done in each completion phase and highlighted certain programs in depth, further detailing the metrics required by the state. Entry was primarily concerned with onboarding. The college highlighted “One Door, Many Opportunities for Success,” which is an attempt to make services inescapable for students. Progress was focused on risk factors and how to address them. Other Aspects of Completion Success spoke generally about “access, equity, success, and completion” under the leadership of the current President. Nowhere did the plan discuss co-curricular education or student development.

**2016 completion plan.**

Garfield Community College’s 2016 Campus Completion Plan adopted a format similar to what was used in 2014. The introduction stated, “Support for student
recruitment, progression, and most importantly, completion is supported by every department and division of the college.” This report again highlighted certain programs that fall within each completion phase. It provided updated information from the 2014 plan and introduced new initiatives for 2016.

For 2016, the First Year Experience initiative had been updated and outlined major goals: connect, engage, plan, and succeed. Under “engage,” it read, “Students will be active in the College community and be responsible for their own learning and development.” A new initiative that was presented was the Scholars Programs, which is an umbrella term used to describe internal initiatives and those developed through grants for high-achieving students. The focus of this is to “engage students as active learners utilizing an enriched curriculum, faculty and staff mentoring and co-curricular activities.” In addition, “One Door, Many Opportunities for Success” discussed the creation of “Care Teams,” which is a new model of support services that works with each student’s individualized needs. Co-curricular education was not a focus, but student development was highlighted in these key areas.

**Thompson Community College.**

Findings from Thompson Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Thompson Community College’s 2014 Completion Plan introduced the Campus Completion Plan by using language that the state had provided. It then listed strategies, which were organized underneath each completion phase. Create Clearer Academic
Pathways, Mandatory Advising with Regular Check-ins, Early and Continuous Career Advising, and Intrusive Holistic Advising were strategies that figured prominently and recurred along the completion phases. Of the 42 strategies, none of them included co-curricular education or student development, and no initiative was overseen by leadership from the director of student affairs.

2016 completion plan.

The 2016 Campus Completion Plan provided similar language from the state, then went into the phases of completion and corresponding strategies. No updates on progress from 2014 were described within the report, but metrics for each strategy had been updated within the completion plan grid in specific cases. As was the case with the 2014 Campus Completion Plan, of the 37 strategies, none of them included co-curricular education or student development, and no initiative was overseen by leadership from the director of student affairs.

Bennington State College.

Findings from Bennington State College’s Campus Completion Plans, along with the college’s current Strategic Plan, are further described in the following section.

2014 completion plan.

The 2014 Campus Completion Plan provided an explanation of Bennington State College’s approach, which was developed with input from faculty, staff, administration, and the Board of Trustees. In an attempt to streamline multiple efforts, the Campus Completion Plan also aligned with: the 2014-16 Strategic Plan, Completion by Design initiatives, Higher Learning Commission Criteria for Accreditation, AQIP Systems
Portfolio, Action Projects, the Academic Affairs Operational Plan, and the Enrollment Management Plan (and is coded accordingly).

Student services was included in strategies to Implement the Enrollment Management Plan, Enrollment Management One-Stop Strategies, and strategies focused on academic and career advising. Student Services did not factor prominently in the 58 strategies that were presented. One strategy, however, did focus on student activities. This was to Continue to Promote Student Life Experience, which includes student clubs and organizations and supporting student engagement, all of which fall under the coordinator of student life. Co-curricular education or student development is not mentioned elsewhere in the Campus Completion Plan, but it does directly connect here.

2014-2016 strategic plan.

Stacie provided me a copy of Bennington State College’s Strategic Plan for 2014-16. Within the Strategic Plan, the college provided goals that relate to six value statements. The goal of Student Success was to: “Improve student persistence, retention, and goal attainment.” Similar to the 2014 Campus Completion Plan, a strategy under the student success goal was to “Continue to enhance student life experience.” Strategic measures of effectiveness included: Completion by Design success measures, Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Completion Plan metrics, developmental course success measures, completion rates (course completion, retention, graduation, and transfer rates), and Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory.
2016 completion plan.

Bennington State College’s 2016 Completion Plan took an approach similar to the 2014 plan, but it outlined projects completed during the 2014-16 cycle before outlining the current plan. Of note, the college had implemented the Enrollment Management Plan and One-Stop Strategies, which involved student services.

The 2016 Campus Completion Plan also provided new and continued strategies for 2016, which comprised 56 total. New to this plan was the leadership from the area of Student Success, which was now responsible for new and continued student services strategies. Some of the strategies that had been inherited included a Focus on Academic and Career Advising and requiring Mandatory Advising for Students Not on Track. Student life was also included and remained within the responsibility of the coordinator of student life.

New strategies for 2016 that fell within student success included Increase Enrollment in Honors Program and Explore Options for a Student Recreational Area; Identify Additional Ways of Onboarding Students; Design and Implement Success Coaching Strategies; Promote Retention and Completion through a Focus on the Finish Event; Increase the Number of Employees Trained to Use the Ohio Benefits Bank; and Provide Emergency Funds to students to Assist with Retention. New strategies focused on the honors program and recreational space, and the continued focus on student life, connect to co-curricular education and student development in some way.
Trumbull Community College.

Findings from Trumbull Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

2014 completion plan.

Trumbull Community College’s Completion Plan provided an extensive narrative overview, which detailed how the college’s Strategic Plan aligns with this state mandate. It also described the support services that are offered at Trumbull, which include counseling; accommodation services; psychological services; and the Men’s, Women’s, Veteran’s, and Hispanic Centers. The two major initiatives that were underway were Mandatory New Student Orientation and a required First Year Experience Course. Strategies were then outlined in response to these and other efforts at the college.

Mandatory New Student Orientation began in 2014, and the program features representatives from admissions, counseling, financial aid, and student activities. The First Year Experience course places particular emphasis on students leaving class with an “individualized plan,” which targets achieving success in college and how the academic plan leads to career readiness. The Campus Completion Plan strategies that fell under leadership from the associate vice president for student development and dean of students included Mandatory New Student Orientation and Strengthen Efforts to Welcome and Integrate Students of Diverse Backgrounds. Aside from ensuring students are aware of student activities at New Student Orientation, co-curricular education and student development were not a part of the 2014 Campus Completion Plan.
**2016 completion plan.**

Trumbull Community College’s 2016 Completion Plan made minor updates to the 2014 Campus Completion Plan and added a section highlighting progress made since the original plan. It also provided data that had been generated since 2014 to describe progress on initiatives. No new strategies included in the 2016 plan fell under the associate vice president for student development and dean of students or focused on co-curricular education or student development. However, updates were provided on Mandatory New Student Orientation, which is now fully implemented, and efforts to Welcome Students of Diverse Backgrounds, which has seen steady numbers of students seeking services from specialized support services (Men’s, Women’s, Veteran’s, and Hispanic Centers) despite declining enrollment.

**Lucas Community College.**

Findings from Lucas Community College’s Campus Completion Plans, along with a student success and completion document, are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Lucas Community College provided no context for the Campus Completion Plan, merely the grid that outlines key areas of each strategy grouped by completion phase. One strategy outlined was Map the Student Experience for Various Types of Students (Developmental Education/Low Income/Program of Study). It used theoretical loss and momentum language to describe how this could take place. This was the only initiative
that fell under the dean of student life, but it made no specific reference to co-curricular education or student development.

**Student success and completion.**

Henry provided me with a document disseminated to Lucas Community College faculty and staff, entitled “Student Success and Completion.” This document outlined Lucas’ push for student success and completion, what initiatives were underway, and what could be done to aid in these efforts. The document stated that student success has always been important at Lucas Community College, that state funding will now be 50% student success based, and that everyone at the institution needs to care now more than ever about these efforts. In regard to what faculty, staff, and administration can do to support these efforts, the document stated that they can use the early alert system and they could foster engagement. The engagement efforts were further detailed and recognized student activities: “Promote student activities in the classroom. If there is something that pertains to class, use it as an assignment.” The document also described areas to help students, guidelines on communication, and expectations to uphold standards. Finally, the document asked for other ideas from stakeholders to help support these efforts and emphasized the need to embark upon this work now.

**2016 completion plan.**

Lucas Community College’s 2016 Completion Plan took a similar approach to the previous Campus Completion Plan in that it did not give an introduction to the efforts. Also, it did not provide an explanation or overview of progress made since 2014. The Campus Completion Plan did describe what it termed a performance gap: the
“diminishing number of high school graduates in our service area.” The only strategy that connected to student services was Increase the Non-Cognitive Skills of Students, which focused on students’ ability to navigate the college system and future career systems. This strategy did not directly connect to co-curricular education or student development outside of career development.

**Highland Community College.**

Findings from Highland Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Highland Community College’s 2014 Completion Plan described the purpose of the plan and highlighted this goal: “One of the goals is to limit the focus to examine possible factors in student success (or failure) and determine the weightiest factor, implementing research-based ideas.” Using the framework provided by the state, Highland offered a number of strategies that at least partially fell within the direction of the chief student affairs officer. These included Mandatory Orientation and an Intervention Process, but they also included Refresher Courses for Developmental Education, Requiring Students to Immediately Enroll in Developmental Education, and Prior Learning Assessment. At no point in the Campus Completion Plan was co-curricular education or student development mentioned.

**2016 completion plan.**

The 2016 Campus Completion Plan did not provide an overview of progress since 2014. It did, however, include a color key to describe whether or not the strategy was
“Completed,” “Satisfactory Progress,” “Unsatisfactory Progress,” or “Undetermined.” In addition, it included new strategies under each completion phase. In terms of updates to the areas germane to student affairs, Highland was making satisfactory progress on New Student Orientation and the Intervention Process. New strategies that fell under the leadership of the chief student affairs officer were to Increase College Credit Plus Population, to Identify Students within 15 Credit Hours of Completion and Guide Them, to Identify Students who have Completed Requirements but have not Applied for Graduation, and to Retain College Credit Plus Students Beyond High School Graduation. None of these efforts connect to co-curricular education or student development.

**Putnam State Community College.**

Findings from Putnam State Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Putnam State Community College’s Completion Plan provided an introduction regarding the purpose, guiding principles, and framework of the document. The guiding principles outlined were that the college will not compromise academic standards, the desire for each student to be successful, and that faculty and staff must strive for continuous quality improvement. The president created a completion taskforce to gather data and establish action items. The components of the plan included to evaluate strengths and opportunities using the Completion by Design framework, identify action items, gather data, and undergo process mapping to assist with continuous quality
improvements. In addition, the Campus Completion Plan was described as a living
document that would be revisited over time.

The report visually listed strengths and opportunities in each phase of the
Completion by Design framework, which led to action items (similar to strategies
provided by other institutions). The two strategies that could connect with student affairs
were to Establish an Honors Program and Communicate College Expectations to
Students During Orientation. This plan did not use the same framework as other Campus
Completion Plans, so there was no indication of what area of leadership area each
initiative would fall under. In addition, none of the action items connected to co-
curricular education or student development.

2016 completion plan.

The 2016 Campus Completion Plan provided an overview of the work completed
in 2014, including an update on initiatives outlined in that plan. By this point, Putnam
State had established an Honors Program and had Communicated College Expectations
to Students During Orientation, which the college had assessed through focus groups and
Survey of Entering Student Engagement data.

Looking ahead, the college enlisted the help of a consultant, who brought the
college’s attention to certain factors influencing student completion. As a result of this
and other new data, the 2016 Campus Completion Plan primarily focused on Guided
Pathways. Guided Pathways were described as “highly structured student experiences
which encourage completion by: clear roadmap to student goals, intake redesigned as an
onramp, learning outcomes/assessments aligned across programs, and students’ progress
closely tracked.” Action items were then aligned with AQIP categories but not along completion phases. One of the relevant action items was to Implement a Rubric for Emphasizing Soft Skills Developments Across the Curriculum; however, this strategy would take place in the classroom, according to the document. None of the other action items directly related to co-curricular education or student development outside of academic progress and career development.

**Buck Creek Community College.**

Findings from Buck Creek Community College’s Campus Completion Plans are further described in the following section.

**2014 completion plan.**

Buck Creek Community College’s 2014 Completion Plan began with a message from the president, who explained that these efforts would guide the student success initiatives at the institution in the following years. It also established two major goals that aligned with multiple completion phases: Creating a First Year Experience (Connection, First-Year Entry, and Workforce) and Improving opportunities for Teaching and Learning (Progress, Completion). The team who developed the plan consisted of 11 total faculty, staff, and administrators.

The plan included new and in-process action items that aligned with the Strategic Plan. The plan did not use the common rubric but, rather, described the initiative along with each corresponding strategy, impact, and measures of effectiveness. For the First Year Experience, the college outlined a strategy to Integrate Student Services Functions (Admission, Placement, Advising and Career Services). This strategy, however, was
more focused on educational plans relating to goals of transfer, graduation, or gainful employment. The other teaching and learning initiative was curricular in nature and pertained primarily to faculty and academic support services. Within the Campus Completion Plan, there was no mention of co-curricular education or student development.

*2016 completion plan.*

For the 2016 Campus Completion Plan, the president once again introduced the document and described how it provided an update of existing efforts and new initiatives that have resulted from recommendations from the Ohio Department of Higher Education. The new initiatives included: Align Common Courses in Academic Programs; Create Policies, Procedures, and Marketing for Prior Learning Assessment; and Explore and Create as Appropriate, New Programs Based on Ohio’s In-Demand Job Report. Once again, none of these efforts focused on co-curricular education or student development.

*Document analysis check.*

As part of my research process, once I conducted document analysis, I followed up with participants by phone and email. Similar to member checking, I provided a copy of document findings for each participant to provide feedback. Participants who responded believed the findings to be sound and provided insight into why co-curricular education and student development did not appear to be a focus of the Campus Completion Plan.
A few participants agreed that co-curricular education and student development were not priorities in the Campus Completion Plan but needed to be. At Bennington State, Stacie was actually part of a focus group for the Campus Completion Plan for her division. She, however, admitted, “Over the years, [Bennington State] did not view co-curricular education and student development as a main focus/top priority and did not receive any additional monetary and/or space assistance, so, generally, these areas got pushed to the back burner.” That will hopefully change with new leadership, according to her. Joseph also recognized that co-curricular education and student development were not part of the Campus Completion Plan, but he was not involved in discussions about the Campus Completion Plan, even in 2016. He said, “I receive things when they’re finished.” He remembers getting information on a new strategy, and his response was, “I should probably start working on that, since that’s a goal.” He explained how newly formed student senate needs to be a part of the strategies moving forward. For instance, the fact that students were not included in some big decisions on campus, like making the entire campus non-smoking, may have some major implications. Of the decision-making that takes place at the institution, he stressed that he continues to insert his division into the conversation. However, he noted, “There’s a difference between being forgotten and left out versus included.”

Another participant, Aaron, was part of conversations about the Campus Completion Plan for his Putnam State but admitted that co-curricular education was not an area of focus for the college. Aaron said that within guided pathways some areas of focus are on career decision-making and software. With career decision-making, in
particular, the push is to include this piece with new student orientation; however, they have run up against barriers to reduce orientation time. In addition, with requirements to reduce credit hours for degree programs, the ability to offer an academic foundations or first-year-experience class has also gone away. Aaron confirmed that co-curricular education is on the periphery of the Campus Completion Plan and strategies that are underway at Putnam State.

Most participants believed that their institution is moving in the right direction as it relates to making co-curricular education and student development a part of overall completion. Lynn and Coline, who are counterparts at different Garfield campuses, each described how they have pushed for co-curricular education and student development to be more a part of the college’s strategies. Lynn said:

I’m continuing to push the co-curricular link here at [Northshore] Campus and when possible College-wide (we have a Dean’s council liaison team devoted to student services and development and this is helping the college-wide effort). I have offered to be part of the college-wide outcomes assessment committee to representing the importance of assessing co-curricular involvement/student development.

Coline focused more on how strategies at the institution actually align with her work in student affairs. She talked about the First Year Experience, Care Teams, and One Door in particulars. Coline said, “I think we’re starting to buy into all the research that talked about how non-cognitive are just as, if not more important, than cognitive skills. We have been doing a lot of research in that area.” Similarly, at Bennington State, Stacie had
not seen student development and co-curricular education being a focus in the past, but she was hopeful:

I envision with the new leadership in the Student Success Division that these areas will be viewed as a main focus/top priority as we continue to enhance student life experiences (recreation area, intramural sports, on- and off-campus programming, additional clubs/organizations). The college is really taking a hard look at how we attract the younger student…With visible activities/areas, this could work in favor of recruiting the population of students the college is striving for.

Despite some of the challenges Joseph expressed at Thompson Community College, he was excited about new initiatives in his division that would hopefully make others at the institution more aware of the work they were undertaking. He has made Service Standards and Enhancing the Student Experience priorities and was able to receive funding from another organization on campus for professional development workshops. In addition, his Student Affairs team has launched a “[Thompson] Cares” campaign, which will hopefully bring understanding and attention to areas that he described have been “fragmented at best.” Even though these efforts have not been captured in even the most recent Campus Completion Plan, Joseph was encouraged that they were working on initiatives that could gain some “major momentum.”

**Summary**

This chapter introduced each of the 12 study participants and established a context for their lived experiences. Due to the phenomenological focus of this study and aim of
presenting a narrative of the Completion Agenda; I provided rich, thick description for each participant; along with extensive quotations from the student affairs educator interviews. Following the portrait of participants, I presented categories that had arisen during data analysis, which respond to the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

Beyond findings from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews, I provided an explanation of Campus Completion Plans and documents related to each participant’s institution (in corresponding order), along with relevant findings. Participant follow-up took place following document analysis, which provided a further opportunity to connect with participants and learn about their connection to and beliefs about their institution’s Campus Completion Plan.
Chapter 5: Analysis

In the following analysis, study findings were examined and offered larger themes that correspond to the following research questions:

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?
2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?
3. During the Completion Agenda, how do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at institutions where they have worked?
4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations?

A phenomenological approach to this research was used in an attempt to understand the essence of experience for individuals. Furthermore, the research method that was used applied Creswell’s (2013) definition of phenomenology: it “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 76). In other words, this study was concerned with how individuals made sense of their experiences and how those combined accounts brought forth commonalities that were not inherently apparent.

As stated in Chapter 3, this study applied an understanding of phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2013), and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The purpose of the phenomenology is to arrive at the essence or structure of an experience,
and this study applies each of the following: *epoche, phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation.*

*Epoche* (Moustakas, 1994), or “bracketing,” is to refrain from judgment or to avoid the ordinary way of perceiving the world. In the following section, I bracket my experiences in order to temporarily set them aside to analyze findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenological reduction is “the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself” (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 27). Horizontalization is the process of looking at all the data side-by-side and applying the same weight to each piece of data (Merriam & Tisdell; Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation “involves viewing the data from various perspectives, as if one were walking around a modern sculpture, seeing different things from different angles” (Merriam & Tisdell, p.27). These processes were used in order to identify salient themes that brought me, as the researcher, as close as possible to understanding the essence of the phenomenon or conditions that brought these shared experiences about.

**Bracketing**

Going into this research study, I anticipated participants would generally understand the Completion Agenda and have experienced it in a similar manner. Related to the research questions, I expected participants to have clear values connected to their work with co-curricular education, have experienced negative implications directly or indirectly related to the Completion Agenda, and be able to readily describe tensions between their values and current institutional expectations. I felt the influence of the
efficiency model, in particular, would make student affairs educators feel less valued in terms of the work they do. I also believed student affairs educators would describe ways in which their work had changed or concessions they had to make as a result of external demands. Although I do not occupy a similar position as any of these participants, as an outside observer at my own institution, I see co-curricular education being overlooked, curtailed, or reframed to better align with the Completion Agenda. Along those lines, I anticipated individuals who work in this area would feel the same way if not more impassioned about changes to their vocation.

In addition, I set out to find participants with a very specific background in terms of education and work experience. I envisioned enlisting participants who had completed a graduate program in higher education or college student personnel, had worked in student life in some capacity, and who had worked at the same institution since the outset of the Completion Agenda until the present. I also expected participants would have documents ready to share that could outline pathways or other institutional information about their institution’s completion approach. Due to the emergent design, which is in the nature of qualitative research, I needed to expand my criteria to allow for certain contingencies, like participants working at another community college previously and transitioning to their current institution at some point in time. Even though my criteria was fairly broad at the outset, I recognized the need to adjust my expectations to see value in participants’ experiences that did not align with my archetype.
None of these factors affected my research approach, including how questions were framed or my impartiality during interviews. I went into each interview open to whatever each participant was willing to share and followed the protocol in all cases.

**No Common Meaning of Impact of Completion Agenda**

Despite my expectations, participants did not attribute a common and consistent meaning to the impact of the Completion Agenda on co-curricular education. Certain themes arose amongst groups of participants, which are discussed in the sections that follow, but I could not identify a definitive experience or structure that brought that experience about. One of the reasons is the complexity of the two topics at hand (the Completion Agenda and co-curricular education). The other reason can be attributed to the diversity of participants and institutions in where they work.

**Participant categories.**

As was discussed in Chapter 4, individuals fell into three broad categories: student affairs administrators, student life administrators, and student success administrators. Student affairs administrators serve as dean of students or work directly beneath that role; student life administrators oversee student life or student involvement; and student success administrators work with student success and completion.

There were commonalities amongst groups of participants. All of the student affairs administrators spoke about the relationship with faculty and connecting with academics on their work in student affairs. Most of them (in particular Lynn, Alicia, Joseph, and Coline) stressed the importance of aligning co-curricular education with what is taking place in the classroom. The Deans of Students (Lynn, John, Joseph, and Coline)
discussed the role of the president in particular, especially as it concerns strategic vision of the college and aligning divisional efforts. Student affairs administrators were all attuned to the current work of the Completion Agenda and its impact on their institution. Finally, all attributed some merit to the completion efforts, even if a few had some misgivings about challenges it had caused.

The student life administrators had less knowledge about the Completion Agenda and its impact on their institution in particular. They each had a working understanding of the term, and they knew of its impact from a certain lens, but there existed gaps in their knowledge. Stacie, who works at a Completion by Design institution said:

I guess, to find out that there’s so many facets to the Completion Agenda. It was just amazing to me to find out that they had all these different things out there.

I’m like, “Phew,” you know? I just thought there was one.

Henry admitted that he looked up information on the Completion Agenda prior to our meeting. Throughout our conversation, he returned to the idea that the Completion Agenda was focused on getting faculty and staff to better interact with students, which only peripherally explains its purpose. Such efforts may well have been the push at Lucas Community College, so gaps in knowledge may have been more of an institutional phenomenon than one brought about by the type of position occupied. However, most student life administrators took the stance that decisions regarding the Completion Agenda were not in their purview, and its impact was only relevant insofar as it affected programming.
The student success administrators were as knowledgeable about the Completion Agenda as the student affairs administrators. However, due to the nature of their work, they framed completion differently. As opposed to the impact on co-curricular education, Debbie and Aaron discussed their respective roles related to reporting, the Campus Completion Plan, and college-wide efforts. Debbie said, “Well, this is our second round of Completion Agenda. What we’ve seen already, some of the areas our initial goals were to move more with the [Prior Learning Assessment] components. That was probably one area that we aren’t as strong.” Aaron described areas that are important in his work:

Getting into the classroom, I think the completion design is really helpful. Doing data analysis, I’ve been looking at class completion rates for years, and it’s really starting to get paid attention to. We’re looking at that and saying, “Okay, well how can we move the needle? What is a good pass rate?”

Kip, on the other hand, only seemed interested in his role and the population he serves. In fact, unlike Debbie, Aaron, and many of the other participants, he openly expressed criticism about the Completion Agenda, as opposed to primarily focusing on how his work has changed as a result.

**Inability to place.**

Something that cut across each grouping of participants was the inability to place the Completion Agenda in terms of time. I asked each participant when they first learned about the Completion Agenda or when they began experiencing its effects in their work. Many did not know or misplaced when it actually became a national issue. Participants
did not have materials to reference, but I felt this question was basic enough, and the Completion Agenda is so pervasive, that they couldn’t help but not think about when it began taking effect. In addition, the eligibility survey most participants answered to take part in the study asked them if they worked in co-curricular education in 2010-2011 (or any time within that period), which hinted at when they should have begun experiencing the Completion Agenda’s effects. What I ultimately found was that very few participants had a clear answer or one that aligned with what was presented in Chapter 2.

A handful of the participants felt like the Completion Agenda had been around for longer that it has. Dario said, “Jeez, I can’t pinpoint a year. It feels like it’s been forever now.” Aaron said, “[Putnam State], I like to say, even back in 2007 when I was hired, has been concerned about that. They’re thinking, “What can we do?” These responses suggest that they either are so immersed in completion work that they cannot remember a time when it was not present or it is used as a blanket statement to say, generally, they have known about the Completion Agenda for a while. Lynn, who was more detailed in her recollection, drew a connection between the Completion Agenda and original student success efforts. She said, “It’s probably been maybe 12, 15 years that we’ve been talking in general completion.” She also referenced Achieving the Dream, from when she was in development and took part in writing Garfield’s first grant. Although demarcating student success initiatives from the Completion Agenda may seem semantic, since both are focused on student success and both called for greater accountability on the part of the institution, they are fundamentally different in terms of responsibility and reach.
Some participants generally recalled when the Completion Agenda came to the fore or had specific points of reference. A few participants, like Coline and Henry, said they began experiencing it three-to-four years ago. This timeline more closely aligns with widespread use of the term. Coline even recalled changes in institutional culture at that time:

I would say about three or four years ago it really became part of our shop talk. Our vice president of institutional research…started talking about it and actually putting numbers to it. To make it as concrete as possible she would say, this means this many more graduates for us. It gave us a goal to work toward which I thought was very helpful.

Another participant, Erin, presented specific information that tied back to the Completion Agenda: “When I went over [to Associate Director of New Student Programs in 2012], all of a sudden, I noticed the big completion push…That’s when I saw Redesigning America’s Community Colleges…and reading that book with a lot of different people.”

However, despite how much this work resonated with her, the book referenced came out in 2015, three years later.

The phenomenon of not being able to accurately place all different aspects of the Completion Agenda, including when it was ushered in, may have to do with its widespread impact and that fact that it has become part of the community college reality. However, one cannot assume that all of the participants were aware of basic facts or that they were viewing the Completion Agenda in a similar manner at the time of this study.
Different understanding of student affairs and co-curricular education.

Student affairs is a discipline within the field of higher education that developed due to a need to provide services to students while not continuing to overburden professors (ACPA, 2014a; ACPA, 2014b). Student affairs refers to the discipline practiced by those in higher education who work directly with and/or for students (Helfgot, 2005). Student development, on the other hand, is the theoretical and conceptual foundation for student affairs practice that is focused on the whole student (Creamer, 1989; Helfgot, 2005; Strange, 1994; Wimbush, Bumphus, & Helfgot, 1995). Student affairs has further sought to address student needs at critical junctures in their cognitive, psychosocial, moral, physical, and spiritual growth. In the latter half of the twentieth century, student success theories arose to describe the factors that contribute to student persistence, which include Tinto’s theory of academic and social integration (1975, 1986, 1993), Astin’s theory of student involvement (1984, 1993, 1999), and Kuh’s theory of student engagement (1991, 2001, 2005). These theories have shaped and continue to shape what takes place through co-curricular education.

Although each participant had a working understanding of student affairs and co-curricular education, and I had defined co-curricular education for the purposes of this study, they approached these topics from their unique perspective. The majority of participants (11) had completed a Higher Education, College Student Personnel, or related graduate program (or multiple graduate programs). Despite consistency in terms of education, participants brought with them a different understanding of the discipline. Beyond education, participants worked in institutions that used different organizational
terminology, whose student affairs divisions encompassed diverse departments, and who may have not even been considered part of student affairs or fallen within the student affairs side of the organization. When studying 12 different participants at 10 different institutions, variation is bound to present itself. However, some of the differences are critical to account for why participants did not ascribe common meaning to the impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education.

Even by defining co-curricular education for participants at the outset of the study, some had different interpretations of what co-curricular education means. One interpretation was that co-curricular education does not just happen outside of the classroom. Joseph said he is careful when he uses “outside of the classroom” because he believes it undermines the work they are doing. This aligns with the fact that many participants connected co-curricular opportunities back to the classroom. How they have attempted to make that connection was not always clear, which presents the opportunity for ambiguity regarding what participants believe is curricular versus co-curricular.

Student development and co-curricular education also go hand-in-hand to the point where these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Lynn said that there is a lot being done in student development at Garfield and she believes co-curricular education falls within student development. Alicia, who also works at Garfield, talked about how she attempts to infuse co-curricular education when working with students in conduct, which is somewhat the opposite of what Lynn suggested. Dave talked about “co-curricular development” and connected that to some of the outcomes that are related to co-curricular education, including being a responsible citizen. Kip’s student development
approach is in creating smaller units within the larger unit, which has more to do with belonging than on learning opportunities stemming from experiences.

Clearly, this is a very nuanced conversation, where participants may have misspoken or not intended any difference in meaning, but the point is the topics at hand are complex. Concepts that would seem simple, especially since co-curricular education was defined in the study, were not necessarily so.

**Common Themes**

Despite the overarching conclusion that there was no singular meaning of the impact of the Completion Agenda amongst participants, salient themes arose that considered data from many participants and which cut across different groupings based upon position type. These included:

1. **Being on Message for the Institution and Completion Agenda**
2. **Acute Attention to Work of Academic and Student Affairs**
3. **Growing Lack of Distinction between Student Affairs and Student Success**
4. **Occupying a Minor Place in Campus Completion Plan**

**Being on message for the institution and Completion Agenda.**

The majority of participants believed that the goals established by the Completion Agenda were something they should have been seeking to achieve all along. Dave expressed it in nearly those terms: “It’s something we should probably have been doing all along.” With the access funnel (something that Dave, Aaron, and Coline discussed), the focus was always on community colleges bring in new students and not tending to needs of the students they had. The Completion Agenda then provided an opportunity to
meet expectations that were foundational to student affairs work but were not always prioritized. Alicia said:

    I actually appreciate the Completion Agenda because…I think, in higher education, for a long time we were throwing a lot of things at the wall and hoping that they work. I think this is forcing us into more of an area of focus on completion, which really should be our job.

Joseph said, “I definitely think we’re on the right path, and I hope that it would continue, even if the funding formula changed back to enrollment only.” He suggested that there is no going back to the way things were and argued that educators would fight to keep the current model. Community College literature overwhelmingly highlights the value of the Completion Agenda, so the question was not so much whether student affairs educators believed they should engage in this work, but how it manifested in the ways that they described their experience.

Aside from direct statements, participants demonstrated that they were in support of college completion efforts, and the Completion Agenda as a whole, by how they reacted to what was taking place at their institution. Participants noted few challenges with the institutions where they worked or currently work, expressed the overall sentiment that they feel valued in their work, and described how they have prioritized administrative concerns over self-interest.

**Few challenges with institutions.**

Most participants expressed few concerns with the institutions where they work concerning the Completion Agenda. I imagined a setting like this would provide an
opportunity for participants to air grievances. Either participants were generally content with what was happening at their institutions or did not feel comfortable explicitly stating as much. On the surface, their statements were largely positive. Primarily, participants explained initiatives that were taking place at their institutions without questioning decision-making or even hinting that they may not agree. A perfect example is how Joseph described his division’s goals for the year. The division’s number one goal is the overall completion challenge, and Joseph expressed pride in the fact that their work aligns with that of the college. Similarly, Aaron described Putnam State’s push to have the highest completion rate in the state, which is something their vice president for academic affairs established as a goal. He said, “That will be just the recognition that, yes, we are pushing forward.” These instances demonstrated how the Completion Agenda has become something that has been embraced by student affairs educators.

Those who were not outwardly in favor either followed the company line or attempted to justify the institution, even if the college’s actions did not align with their expectations. At Oakwood, Erin described the push to bring in more international students. Of this, she said:

I think it’s bringing people to this area and experiencing the community college world, which depending on where you are in the world, you don’t have a good, solid community college system. I also think it’s benefiting our current students here by introducing them to people who don't think the way they do, don’t act the way they do, and still accepting them on our campus anyway. I think it’s just really making our campus more inclusive.
She also recognized that the push increases revenue and was reminded of her philosophy that “access without support is not opportunity.” In another instance, Stacie described how Bennington State is building a new campus, saying, “We’re hoping that boosts some of that enrollment”; however, she also discussed how her campus does not have recreational space for students. In yet another instance, Coline described the need for the “One Door” initiative. At the same time, a lingering concern for her is that Garfield has too many initiatives without the commitment to see them through. A disparity between what participants said and tensions I knew existed came through in these instances. Either that or they were able to separate aspects where they agreed from those that they did not.

Whether participants truly believed in the work they were doing or were falling back on institutional messages, the effect is roughly the same. Few outward challenges to institutional priorities or initiatives arose, with the exception of Kip, a self-described open book. In fact, little was said in response to Research Question #4, regarding tensions that exist related to their educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations. Often the question pertaining to this matter was avoided entirely. A possibility for why participants generally conformed was the research setting. Within the research setting, even though the semi-structured interviews took place where they work, they were being asked to discuss these matters with somebody they had only just met. Conversations with trusted colleagues or family and friends outside not documenting their beliefs may have resembled something different. In one instance, a participant asked that a statement he made be “off the record.” In a time of transparency
and mass communication, it was not surprising that somebody in a senior-level position
not want to share a criticism, even if it was buried in a research study and hidden behind
a pseudonym. The end result is that these participants were largely on message when it
came to the institutional response to the Completion Agenda.

*Feel work is valued.*

Participants, for the most part, stated that their work is valued or at least did not
express they feel their work is not valued. The ways in which this took place included
faculty understanding the value of their work, that they are able to deliver content that
otherwise would not be delivered in the classroom, and how their voice is heard from top-
level administration.

Oftentimes, academic affairs does not immediately recognize the value of student
affairs, but participants described how faculty have, in many ways, begun to understand
the impact of student affairs and co-curricular education. Related to conduct and
behavioral intervention, Lynn said, faculty do not often understand the value of student
affairs “until there’s a disaster.” Those instances, while initially frustrating, open up the
opportunity for better understanding. Another way to get faculty to understand the value
of student affairs is through education. Coline said, “A lot of it has to do with just
educating faculty on the implications of what happens in the classroom, and how it
affects student services, and vice versa.” She, and other deans of students, like Dave,
occur a strategic place at their institution and work to make systems align. From a
strategic perspective, Dave sits on committees made up of faculty; they, in turn, have a
place on his leadership team. While the inherent value of what takes place outside of the
classroom may need to be taught and messaged appropriately, it is still considered essential to the function of the institution.

One specific way that faculty value student affairs is through co-curricular education and what can be delivered outside the classroom that complements course content. Just as student affairs educators have attempted to connect their programs to the classroom, faculty have taken opportunities to connect their classroom to student life. Most of the clubs at Garfield Community College, Lucas Community College, and Bennington State Community College are tied directly to academic programs. Stacie talked about how advisors for clubs and organizations are primarily made up of faculty, which is a common occurrence on community college campuses. In addition, all community college have been instructed to condense curricula to help students move through programs as efficiently as possible. One way is by state mandates to reduce the number of credit hours to degree. As a result, general education learning outcomes have been streamlined at some institutions. At Garfield, faculty still find value in areas like “health and wellness,” even they can no longer teach these content areas in the classroom. Alicia explained how student affairs has partnered with academic affairs to address those areas that have gone by the wayside. Oftentimes, such content is delivered through co-curricular educational programs and reinforces the value of what takes place outside of the classroom.

Another way in which student affairs educators feel their work is valued is from support from the President and other top-level administrators. When budgets are tight and decisions are made at an executive level, student affairs educators feel valued due to
their continued place in the strategic direction of the institution. Dave, for instance, explained that it is hard to have a meaningful impact if the President and senior administrators do not have a student-centered philosophy. The student-centered approach also comes through in whether or not students have a voice at the institution. At Trumbull, a section of the Board meeting is devoted to students; conversely, student development takes on added importance within the institution as a whole. The value of student affairs starts at the top, and institutions with discernable support also have strong student affairs divisions and robust co-curriculars.

*Prioritization of administrative concerns.*

Student affairs administrators are often accused of not being in touch with the realities of how a college functions, such as the business of the institution, policies, and strategies. However, the student affairs administrators and student success administrators demonstrated keen awareness of the college’s priorities and how their work fits into the broader scheme of the institution. For instance, Alicia said:

I think, that is one of the things that we’ve done well, actually, is kind of zeroed in on those things that will maximize the amount of resources flowing into the institution, and then allow us to do the other co-curricular things that we know support student success. The priority, is the Completion Agenda.

Many of the participants were attuned to charges from the state and other external organizations that had trickled down to institutional priorities. A handful of participants (Debbie, Aaron, Joseph, and Stacie, in particular) discussed Completion by Design’s role in state efforts on completion. Some of these participants are not from lead institutions,
as one might have expected. Others talked about OACC’s work on topics like pathways, meta-majors, and other initiatives that are relevant at the state and national levels. In terms of performance-based funding, seven of the participants talked directly about those changes, and all participants mentioned funding in some manner. Alicia offered a particularly shrewd statement, saying, “Here at [Garfield], in an effort to kind of maximize our share of [state funding], and to make sure that we are getting the funding that we need, you cannot help but…focus on those things.” With the exception of a few participants, student affairs educators understood how their work was directly connected to that of the institution.

**Acute attention to work of academic and student affairs.**

The theme arose that participants place particular emphasis on the work of student affairs as it relates to academic affairs. This came through in their discussion about the role of student affairs educators in relation to academic affairs, the push to connect co-curricular education to the classroom, and the need to validate the work that takes place outside of the classroom.

**Role working with academic affairs.**

One insight that arose from this study was the way in which student affairs educators believe that their work supports that of academics. Participants (including Debbie, Alicia, and Coline), argued that student affairs is the “guide on the side” or “supporting cast.” Alicia said, “Really, when you think of it that way, that kind of defines the type of work that you do because we are here to basically ensure that faculty can teach, and then we handle everything else.”
This belief clashes with a widespread sentiment that the work of student affairs is equally important to that of academic affairs and that “learning is learning,” regardless of where it takes place. Due to a system built upon credit hours and credentials, most higher education administrators would agree that learning in the classroom is more important. Still, student affairs educators often argue that student development that takes place outside of the classroom parallels curricular education, and that did not happen here. The viewpoints here more closely align with what Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2006) stated when discussing creating community with faculty members: “student affairs educators create the bridge between rich in- and out-of-classroom learning experiences. In particular, student affairs exerts a major influence when creating engaged communities” (p. 152).

**Connecting to the classroom.**

In student affairs, there exists a narrative that student affairs needs faculty support to be effective. Speaking about the individual who formerly occupied his position, Joseph said, “I think the one thing I remember [is] his connections with faculty [were] as impressive.” This was not a trite comment but something that, in his mind, best represented that individual’s legacy in the position.

Participants in this study took that narrative a step further and argued that co-curricular education needs to be unavoidable, and the way to do so is connecting these opportunities back to the classroom. Making student engagement inevitable is something community college leaders have encouraged in the Completion Agenda context (CCSSE, 2009; McClenney, 2013; O’Banion, 2011). Seven of the 12 participants discussed how
connecting co-curricular education back to the classroom needs to take place in order to make opportunities effective and to be good stewards of financial resources.

The overwhelming sentiment was that, since community college students have many demands and are typically not residential, it is not realistic or arguably in their best interest to expect them to attend outside-of-class activities. Accordingly, they spoke about the need to make programs both meaningful and enticing. Coline said:

With commuter students it’s very hard to keep their attention outside of class or hold them on campus beyond class for a social activity. We’ve tried to combine the social and the academic and partner with faculty to put on some programming they would find attractive.

At the same time, student affairs administrators oversee co-curricular education and the student life administrators administer these opportunities, so they believe in the inherent value of co-curricular education.

The individuals in the study recognized the value of co-curricular education based upon their background and corresponding student development philosophies. In terms of the benefits to students, Lynn said:

If we believe Tinto’s theory of engagement and Astin’s work on engagement, if it helps to have students involved with each other and interacting in events, then you’ve got to have a way to tie that back to the outcomes that they came for and then also look at the benefits that they can derive, that maybe they didn’t come for, but they need.
Within this study, this was a rare case of applying theory to practice. Lynn’s statement connected learning outcomes to student success theories, which is something that also has not been common in community college student affairs literature. In doing so, she brought together these two potentially competing demands, for student affairs educators to make co-curricular education both meaningful and attractive.

A related discussion is the need to be good stewards of financial resources. In a time when budgets are tight and students are treated more and more like consumers, attention needs to be given to how student activities funds are spent. The three participants from Garfield Community College warned that times have changed and it is no longer acceptable to spend funding on events with little educational benefit. Lynn was candid about the topic: “I’m sounding like an old prude, but I sometimes think we shoot ourselves in the foot by having events that would seem to be childish or useless.”

Participants at other community colleges, like Dario and Henry, discussed how spending would need to be justified and the challenges that can arise as a result of spending within this climate. Underlying this discussion was the concern of how others might perceive co-curricular education or student affairs as an entity, the continued pursuit to legitimize those efforts.

*Needing to validate work.*

Concern over the functions of student affairs and academic affairs has led to student affairs needing to validate its work. Student affairs has had to justify its existence over time. This was, in large part, a result of how student affairs came into being following the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACPA, 2014a; ACPA 2014b). It has
occupied a secondary status in the academy since its inception. This dynamic was reinforced through the findings in this study. Joseph said, “Maybe we’re not center stage, but we are definitely the strong guy on the side to compliment the academic setting. I think we do have to fight to remind people of the importance of why we’re here.”

Statements like these are common and have not changed considerably over time; the need today is the same as it was when community college student affairs first organized. Keyser (1985) said that, as a result of environmental challenges, there is a “new urgency for student development professional to demonstrate their contributions to the achievement of student an institutional goals.” Similarly, over 20 years later, in this study Dave said, “I think this is a time for student affairs to stand up…It’s a time to fully flex the muscle in terms of, ‘This is what we do.’”

In many cases, the need to validate the work of student affairs and, in turn, co-curricular education is something that happens internally at the institutional level. Justifying the work of student affairs often means justifying its importance to academic affairs. During our discussion, Lynn said, “I think it’s constantly trying to retell that story to the academic side of the house.” She offered the opposite but equivalent statement in saying that faculty do not recognize the value “until there’s a disaster.” In addition, sharing the work through assessment that others will find meaningful is a continued focus for student affairs educators. Alicia acknowledged that building a culture of evidence is not a new idea; it was a focus of her graduate program several years ago. However, Dario and others expressed challenges with directly equating the work they do with metrics that matter to others at the college, like retention and
completion. For instance, proving that student success is a result of co-curricular programming and not the myriad of other factors that affect the student experience. Even if challenges exist with student affairs assessment, participants overwhelmingly recognized the continued—or, arguably, heightened—need to do so.

**Growing lack of distinction between student affairs and student success.**

Something that has begun to justify the work of student affairs and co-curricular education is the further pairing between student affairs and student success. Student success has arguably aligned with student affairs for some time based upon the work of Tinto (1975, 1986, 1993), Astin (1984, 1993, 1999), and Kuh (1991, 2001, 2005); however, community college student affairs has only recently fully embraced student engagement and research published by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement.

A widespread understanding and appreciation for student engagement is being development in the community college setting. The attention that has been given to completion in recent years has helped to solidify the uniting of student affairs and student success. Ozaki and Hornak (2014) argued that increased attention to student completion has led to greater focus on student success, which, in turn, has led to a call for student affairs excellence. Other areas within community colleges, such academic affairs, may still not fully understand the function of student affairs; however, those areas are more likely to once student affairs fully embraces this connection to student success.
Retention role.

Student affairs educators have more fully presented their role related to retention, or arguably have more accurately done so. Dave provided an astute observation during our interview: “From a student affairs and a student development perspective…we’ve always been retention offices. Even though we might not be classified in that manner, or seen in that way, retention needs completion, [and] if students aren’t retained, they don’t complete.” Helfgot and Culp (2005) argued along those same lines: “Student affairs professionals in the community college have always been student-centered, always believed in the value of the work they do, and always known that they make a difference in the lives of students” (p. 1-2).

Accordingly, participants in this study focused on all aspects of student development concerned with student persistence. Using the Loss-Momentum Framework, their retention work focused on areas that spanned from Entry to Completion. Considering how the student experience is the foundation of student development, it was not surprising how student affairs educators viewed their role related to a student’s connection to the institution, with the ultimate goal of student retention and completion.

Focus on onboarding.

In community college research, such as the Survey of Entering Student Engagement, there is a focus on making early connections and how those early connections have a significant impact on persistence. Dave, Debbie, Aaron, Coline, and Dario oversee or play a major role in new student orientation at their respective
institutions. Beyond their work with new student orientation, these participants and others devoted a striking amount of attention to onboarding during interviews.

An insight that came from this study is that, while the efficiency model is still being applied across the board, there has been more attention to slowing down the *Connection* process and making sure students encounter the right learning opportunities from the outset. Erin described the process in pregnancy terms: where the first trimester is the application, the second trimester is orientation, and the third trimester is the first semester. Lynn and Dave explained that they are working on streamlining the process in making fewer touch points but in making those connections more meaningful. Henry explained that, even though Lucas Community College is hurting for resources, more funding is being devoted to the admissions process and getting students acclimated.

The focus on onboarding is in direct response to student success. Dave referred to the onboarding process as the Allen State way:

> We talk about [onboarding] from the success marker standpoint. It actually takes us a little longer to do it this way, but it’s a return on an investment process. It helps the student feel, like we talked about, more comfortable as they transition into this. We’ve had that crucial conversation.

Joseph said that during Student Affairs’ “Welcome Week,” the entire theme is devoted to getting students to think about graduation. For Lynn, the focus is on making sure students take on only what they can handle. She said, “If they’re that busy…how are they able to participate in these co-curricular events?” Attention to onboarding is something that has extended the student affairs educator’s role beyond student
involvement and helping the students have meaningful interactions during their time at the institution. It is actually frontloading opportunities at the outset of the experience in hopes that they will have some lasting impact.

*Focus on career development.*

Along with the front-end of the student experience, student affairs and co-curricular education have placed more emphasis on career development. Kip argued that the Completion Agenda has caused this shift: “Now it’s get them in, get them through, get them out of here...It’s more of a cradle-to-career approach.” According to participants, the focus on career development has happened in a variety of ways.

Related to onboarding, Allen State has placed greater emphasis on career decision-making from the outset of the student’s experience. Thompson Community College and Lucas Community College dissolved their Career Services departments in recent years, and student activities has had to supplement some of the learning opportunities previously offered. Henry, for instance, has redesigned programming to invite a national speaker on careers and provided workshops that feature career panels. Greater attention has also been given to what happens to students after they graduate. Lynn said that gainful employment is something that has begun to affect the work of student affairs and can actually be of benefit to co-curricular education, since it is able to show that students who took part in specific learning opportunities were then employed.

According to the participants in this study, the efficiency model has placed considerable emphasis on the beginning and end of the student experience and not as much attention to what happens in the middle. As a result, co-curricular education has
expanded to the extremities of the student experience, as opposed to students taking advantage of opportunities during the bulk of the time when they are in college.

*Practices over research.*

During conversations with participants, references to student affairs literature were virtually nonexistent. Lynn referenced Astin in talking about student involvement, and Erin cited Tinto in her professional philosophy. The only other references to theory were not community college or student affairs specific. Kip, who was possibly the most scholarly of those who participated, fully articulated his educational philosophy. He described himself as a Dewian (John Dewey) in the sense that he is a democratic educator, and he also stated that he is a relational pedagogist. None of the other participants made reference to research or theory.

Instead, participants referred to practices that their institutions had undertaken that were designed to enhance the student experience, such as pathways (Erin, Debbie, Lynn, Alicia, Aaron, Kip, and Coline) meta-majors (Alicia and Aaron), and customer service (Joseph, Kip, Coline, and Henry). Ozaki, Hornak, and Lunceford (2014) said:

> Given the unique work of community college student services professionals and the lack of focus and research on best practices for their work, the preparation, training, and professional development available to this sector of student affairs is lacking. A discussion of research and best practices specific to student services practitioners at two-year institutions is needed in order to support the quality and efficacy of their work. (p. 2)
The tendency to put practice over research is not something that affects community colleges exclusively, but the widespread gap between the two does seem be a community college phenomenon.

Admittedly, in a research setting, it may be difficult to pull scholars and theories from memory. In addition, I am not suggesting these participants were not learned or these theories were not informing their work. However, participants tended to talk about current trends. This evidence reinforces concerns about national community college leaders dictating what is most important for community college student affairs educators and those beliefs being put into practices without sufficient evidence or discussion.

**Occupying a minor place in campus completion plan.**

Co-curricular education and student development occupied a minor place or was absent in each community college’s Campus Completion Plan. The level to which this existed was surprising, but the lack of focus on these areas of student learning aligns with the community college efficiency model and its neoliberal foundations.

**Potential to feature co-curricular education and student development.**

The state of Ohio took measures to ensure Campus Completion Plans were organized in a similar fashion by using common language and providing a structure for the document. Many of the institutions used similar approaches, but others took liberties with the report. The purpose, as described by the Ohio Department of Higher Education, is as follows: “The purpose of this Campus Completion Plan is to develop a systemic improvement approach for institution-wide policy and practice change, that reaches the department and classroom levels for direct impact on student persistence and
completion.” Even though the Ohio Department of Education is concerned with what is taking place in the classroom, it put no restriction on the types of learning that could be included. This means co-curricular education and student development could occupy a significant place if the institution believed that these areas in fact did. Campus Completion Plans, however, overwhelmingly did not feature co-curricular education or student development.

*Places where co-curricular education and student development arose.*

Only in a few select cases did co-curricular education and student development surface. Bennington State College is the only institution to mention student activities directly in the Campus Completion Plan. It is important to note that this is the same institution where the Coordinator felt like she lacked support based upon a stagnant budget and no recreational space. However, Stacie’s concerns may have been heard because a new strategy to create recreational space for students was featured in the 2016 Campus Completion Plan. In other instances, student development was a focus within a strategy or current initiative, such as what was outlined at Garfield Community College for 2016. In Campus Completion Plans that identified leadership who would oversee these strategies, student affairs and student services surfaced, but most of those initiatives dealt with retention, student support, and academic and career development. In addition, nearly every related strategy was located at the front-end of the student experience in *Connection* and *Entry* and almost none of the strategies were presented in the *Progress* or *Completion* phases.
Co-curricular education and student development absence.

The lack of focus on co-curricular education and student development was not entirely surprising, but I was surprised by the fact that it was entirely absent in so many cases. As a researcher, I imagined that at least one strategy per school would connect student success and completion to student life, co-curricular education, or student development (as was the case with Bennington State College). In addition, being able to analyze updates from 2014 to 2016 provided further insight. Aside from Garfield Community College and Bennington State College, co-curricular education and student development remained consistent or became even less of a focus for community colleges over time in Ohio.

Participants who replied to my further inquiry agreed that it was either an area that was lacking or its absence was something they were working to improve. There is no evidence that the trend of co-curricular education and student development being secondary to completion efforts will continue. However, the lack of strategies related to these areas, and, in turn, the sheer weight of strategies devoted to other facets of completion would suggest major changes need to take place for there to be better alignment between student affairs and the college as a whole.

Connection to neoliberalism.

The Completion Agenda acts out its neoliberal approach in terms of how it is structured and delivered. This can be recognized in the work of guided pathways, which attempt to standardize the student experience and move students in, through, and out as quickly as possible. A student’s career goal, assuming that is the individual’s purpose,
exists at the center of the educational design. For advisors or counselors who oversee a caseload of students, there is no way to fully serve all students without determining need and focusing on students where greatest gains can be made. Data analytics can be used to determine a student’s level of risk, which allows resources to be stretched further in an attempt to get as many students across the finish line as possible. Other efforts to eliminate barriers and make resources available also work toward getting more students to complete.

Certain completion efforts, which streamline the student experience and minimize student development, can be seen in the community college Campus Completion Plans that I analyzed in this study. Very little attention had been given to co-curricular education and student development in favor of what directly connects to earning a degree or certificate, in other words course completion and credit hour accumulation. In addition, considerable effort was focused on the front-end (getting students in, oriented, and ensuring they have a successful first-year) and making sure they fulfill degree requirements on the back end (through degree audits and communication about outstanding steps). Neoliberalism can be seen by what is prioritized and, conversely, what is omitted in each plan. As a result, educators should start to consider what needs to be preserved within a community college education and the learning outcomes that are tied to the mission of each institution.

**Summary**

Participants in this study did not attribute a common meaning to the impact of the Completion Agenda on their work in co-curricular education. A few reasons were that
participants fell into different groupings based on position at their respective institutions, some were unable to place or misplaced when the Completion Agenda took effect, and they each brought with them a different understanding of co-curricular education and student development. Even though some of these concepts were defined for them, like my definition of co-curricular education, the topics at hand were so complex that no one common meaning or circumstances that brought about that understanding arose.

Similarities did exist amongst groups of participants, which included student affairs administrators, student life administrators, and student success administrators. The similarities and differences between groups helped to explain why no singular experience existed amongst participants.

Some themes arose during data analysis, and these included participants being on message for their institution and the Completion Agenda as a whole, acute attention to the work of academic affairs as it relates to student affairs, a growing lack of distinction between student affairs and student success, and the fact that co-curricular education and student development occupies a minor place in each Campus Completion Plan.

Participants were generally receptive to efforts made by their institution and the work being done within the Completion Agenda. They defined their work in relation to academic affairs and described their attempts to legitimize the efforts of student affairs. Many participants regarded their work as directly related to retention and student success, and co-curricular education and student development have been points of emphasis at the outset and conclusion of the student experience. Finally, even with participants’ firm belief that their work is valuable, co-curricular education and student development was
less prominent than other areas at their institutions, according to each Campus Completion Plan.
Chapter 6: Discussion

In the following chapter, I reflect upon the research study, draw conclusions within the parameters of the study, recommend implications for practice, and offer suggestions for future research.

Purpose of Study

This study was undertaken to better understand what impact the Completion Agenda has had on community college co-curricular education. Through increased regulations, including completion-based funding models, the Completion Agenda has mandated efficiency strategies to move students into college, through the curriculum, and out into the workforce as quickly as possible. At the same time, community colleges have maintained a separate history from four-year institutions concerning their work with students in terms of their development. The dominant rationale is that community college students often have more demands that require time and energy, are more transient, and require fewer credit hours to earn a degree or certificate. Despite established literature that supports involvement leading to student success, co-curricular education has not been deemed a priority at community colleges and arguably less so in the Completion Agenda context.

Despite widespread changes in community college educational delivery, research has not been conducted on how national trends have shaped the work of student affairs educators (those professional working directly with students in areas of student affairs, student development, or student life) or how student affairs educators view the purpose of co-curricular education within the current context. The purpose of this phenomenological
study was to better understand shared experiences amongst student affairs educators regarding co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda. Shared experience was defined as how these individuals view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda, how they feel their work is valued at their respective institutions, and tensions they feel exist between their personal values and current cultural expectations.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?

2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?

3. During the Completion Agenda, how do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at institutions where they have worked?

4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations?

**Methodology**

For this study, I used a phenomenological research approach to examine how community college student affairs educators understood the purpose co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda and how they felt their work was valued at their respective institutions. Criterion sampling was employed to locate participants in Ohio.
who worked or continue working in co-curricular education. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were primarily used to gather data, and document analysis was used as a secondary data source. Data analysis steps were followed to reduce data into categories and develop themes, which informed the discussion to follow. Finally, validity was checked to ensure accuracy through member checking; triangulation; reflexivity; peer-debriefing; and thick, rich description.

**The Researcher’s Experience**

As a champion of co-curricular education and a skeptic of the unconditional benefits of the Completion Agenda, I sought to learn from student affairs educators who were working directly in this area and had likely experienced changes within their field as a result of external demands. Based on data gathered during the in-person interviews, I was surprised by the fact that most participants could not recall when the Completion Agenda came about and did not have strong reactions to it. Most focused more on their current roles and how the Completion Agenda has impacted their work at present, which was something I was interested in but did not encompass the entirety of the study.

Despite initial frustrations, I gained what participants were willing to share, which was considerable. According to my process, I did not return to each transcribed interview until at least a week later, which helped me approach the dialogue with fresh eyes and ears. To the extent possible, I set aside my initial reactions and focused on the information participants shared. Although I did not feel like I had something cohesive when I collected my data, through reading, listening, re-reading, and re-listening, I
learned that what participants provided was substantial and had the potential to impact co-curricular education within the Completion Agenda.

For reliability, alongside triangulation; reflexivity; and thick, rich description, I conducted member checking and peer-debriefing. According to Creswell (2014), member checking is used to “determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 201). Creswell encouraged taking part of the polished work, as opposed to raw transcripts. I sent participants an explanation of the member checking process, my research questions, and quotations taken directly from the findings that pertained to that participant. This process allowed participants to take part in the research process and to provide feedback on whether or not my interpretations of their language rang true. It also provided opportunity for further insight and clarification, which was critical to the analysis process. In addition, with a trusted peer from my graduate program, I conducted peer debriefing to ensure my findings and analysis were accurate.

Limitations

Some limitations to this study existed, which had to do with sampling and data collection. These limitations were unforeseen due to factors that could not be known at the outset of the study.

Participant self-selection.

I used a thorough but simple methodological approach to select participants for this study. To the best of my ability, I located individuals at institutions who would fit
the criteria based upon position. Through email, I briefly explained the study and requested that prospective participants complete a survey, at which point they would answer whether or not they met the criteria. Since I defined co-curricular education for participants and asked them a question that encapsulated the criteria I had defined (“In 2010-2011 [or any time within that period] were you employed at a community college where you worked directly with students in support of their co-curricular education?”), I did not anticipate individuals to self-select who would be outside of the area of student affairs or who had defined co-curricular education differently from my definition, a few of whom did. In addition, I had a few participants decline to participate but recommended others at their institution who they felt fit the criteria.

Due to emergent design, with the hope of collecting more unique and nuanced data regarding the research topic, I expanded my sample to include participants who may have not automatically qualified. While this decision provided rich data, it also may have impacted phenomenological results, since participants did not have a common experience but more aligned with others in a similar position at their respective institutions.

**Diversity of participants.**

Based upon sampling measures, which included locating participants within a particular state and generating participation through availability and interest, there was diversity in terms of gender (six female and six male participants) and experience (eight years to 36 years in higher education). For the most part, I regarded the more experience participants had as a positive factor, especially since these educators witnessed changes within the Completion Agenda since its inception; however, those who have been
assimilated into their roles as student affairs educators may find less fault with the current system if they have become products of their environment. New administrators may bring fresh insights that were not found in this sample.

Due to sampling measures, the racial make-up of the sample was a limitation. Only one of the 12 participants identified as African American, whereas the rest identified as White. A more diverse sample may have presented different insights and more fully represented the population of student affairs administrators at community colleges. In addition, an aspect of this study that was potentially lost was racial minority participants may have been more critical of higher education systems. They may have approached this topic from a critical lens as a result of other issues they face that the majority do not. While the lack of diversity was a random occurrence, different sampling measures could be put in place to ensure that a similar study is fully representative of student affairs educators.

**Follow-up interview.**

Data were primarily collected through in-depth, in person interviews. Conducting each interview in person was beneficial for a variety of reasons, including being able to read body language; make sense of potentially confusing statements; and for the ability to later provide thick, rich description. During my initial interactions with participants, I informed them that this study would require a follow-up phone interview. After gathering rich data from the 12 study participants, I conducted member checking. At that point, I also requested that they participate in a brief follow-up phone interview. I only had three participants agree. In addition to member checking, which allowed me to
reconnect with participants, I separately sent my document analysis of each Campus Completion Plan to the corresponding participant, which provided the opportunity for further participation.

Time and funding, along with participants’ willingness to take part, were factors that affected my ability to conduct additional interviews that may have yielded more substantial data. However, multiple follow-up attempts provided different types of feedback that were vital to the research process.

Conclusions

I drew eight conclusion based upon the research questions and the parameters of the study. Since purposeful sampling is employed in qualitative research, by its very nature, a qualitative study cannot be generalizable. However, the concept of concrete universals (Erickson, 1986) describes how the universal can be found in the particular. The following conclusions are based upon this limited data set, but they have the potential to have far-reaching implications:

1. There exists a range of understanding and reaction to the Completion Agenda from student affairs educators.
2. There exists a tacit acceptance of Completion Agenda from student affairs educators.
3. External forces that have resulted from the Completion Agenda have affected student affairs and co-curricular education.
4. Student affairs and co-curricular education have begun to be defined in relation to the Completion Agenda.
5. Within the organization, student affairs educators have paid greater attention to what is taking place outside of student affairs.

6. The need to make a case for the value of student affairs and co-curricular education has intensified.

7. A greater need for data-driven decision-making and sharing has arisen.

8. Institutions with top-level support for student affairs and co-curricular education function better.

**Range of understanding of the Completion Agenda.**

Participants in this study demonstrated a range of knowledge when discussing the Completion Agenda. Student affairs administrators and student success administrators more often worked in circles where the Completion Agenda was frequently discussed (such as president’s cabinet) or described how the Completion Agenda was part of their day-to-day activities. In fact, some colleges in Ohio, like Garfield and Thompson, have now devoted resources to positions directly focused on student completion. Most participants were able to discuss the Completion Agenda as it has impacted their position and initiatives that have taken place at their institution as a result. With this being the case, they each approached the Completion Agenda from a specific lens.

Beyond this study, student affairs educators will likely understand the Completion Agenda based upon certain factors that are *institutional* (where they work, what implications it has had on their position, emphasis from supervisors or institution as a whole, and level of transparency from administration), *educational* (their educational background, professional development, and familiarity with current literature), and
personal (where they were when it first arose, interest, and ability to comprehend). With so many factors affecting each individual, it is all but impossible to derive a common understanding amongst those working with students in co-curricular education.

**Tacit acceptance of Completion Agenda.**

As participants in this study demonstrated, the Completion Agenda has become part of the world in which they work. Although student affairs educators do not openly embrace change, when it happens as a force driven by an institution, within a field, or as part of a political platform, slow and steady progress has the power to render initial reluctance defenseless. Over time, new developments become the norm.

In many ways, it would be counterproductive for student affairs educators to resist the rise of the Completion Agenda, and that would be assuming the developments that have taken place have been entirely negative. However, student affairs educators may be a relatively compliant group, considering how much of their work is focused on helping others and minimizing conflict. Community college student affairs educators, in particular, adapt to changing circumstances and see this quality as representative of their professionalism (Hirt, 2006). To the extent community college student affairs educators obediently conform, they run the risk of being complacent as the environment changes around them. Critical discussion and inquiry is needed in order to counterbalance the widespread impact the Completion Agenda has had and will continue to have.

**External forces affecting student affairs work.**

Historically, community college student affairs educators have been asked to respond to external forces and, relative to their four year counterparts, have been able to
do so in a timely fashion (Hirt, 2006). However, the Completion Agenda has impacted the urgency and nature of response from student affairs educators. Continuous quality improvement and external mandates have increasingly affected the world in which student affairs educators work.

In Ohio, much is made about the state’s role in the Completion Agenda context because the state is the largest source of funding for institution. For example, the Ohio Association of Community Colleges has a strong presence within the state, and its Leadership Institute is primarily focused on the state share of instruction. State funding came up in every conversation I had with participants, which suggests that the focus on resources may be a central topic of conversation at institutions. In fact, even the most sheltered group, student life administrators, experienced the direct effects of funding in that their budgets have remained stagnant in recent years.

Beyond funding, policy and practices have affected community colleges, and, in turn, the nature of student affairs work. The American Association of Community Colleges, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Jobs for the Future, and the Lumina Foundation all have a presence in Ohio. The push to move students through the collegiate experience as quickly and with as few barriers as possible is advanced by efforts from these and other national organizations. As participants were able to attest, it is all but impossible to function without responding to the demands of community colleges’ many stakeholders. Beyond specific organizations, certain efforts have gained national momentum; such as pathways, meta-majors, and customer service. These
practices have also shaped student affairs work and affected the purpose co-curricular education.

**Defined in relation to the Completion Agenda.**

Participants in this study said it best when they argued student affairs has always been focused on retention; they now just need to take ownership of that responsibility. Although student success theories have been a part of student affairs literature for some time, those focused on four-year institutions were not fully embraced by community colleges. The theory of student engagement put more onus on the institution for student success, and community college student affairs has taken this approach when delivering co-curricular education.

Further developments that have resulted from the Completion Agenda are the need to connect co-curricular education to the classroom, to be good stewards of financial resources, and to demonstrate that co-curricular education meets learning outcomes and is of direct benefit for students regarding their overall success. Due to the bureaucracy of community colleges, community college student affairs may have been moving in this direction all along (Hirt, 2006); however, participants in this study were acutely aware of the need to take such measures to legitimize the work of student affairs, including focusing on the beginning and ending phases of the student experience. The call to regulate unnecessary activities reflects current community college student affairs literature, so this development is likely something that would be observed beyond this sample.
More focus outside of student affairs.

Student affairs educators are often criticized for being inwardly focused and not aware of the realities regarding how an institution functions. The call for co-curricular education to better connect to the classroom and the institution’s general educational learning outcomes is likely in response to that shortcoming. However, a surprising finding from this study was how attuned participants were to what was taking place outside of their area or division, especially in academic affairs and administration. Granted, student life administrators were not as aware of what was taking place related to the Completion Agenda, but they were not oblivious to the reality that external factors have had a direct impact on their work. Student life administrators were especially aware of the need to adjust programming to connect with academic affairs, even if they were most often directed to do so. In many cases, student affairs educators were not only aware of what was taking place outside of their area, but they proactively adjusted their work to fit within the fabric of the institution. Increased collaboration played a part in this, but so did greater awareness of the need to make a case for the value of their work.

Needing to make a case for value.

In this study, I found that student affairs educators perceived a need to make a case for the value of student affairs and for co-curricular education in particular. Community college student affairs educators view themselves as second-class citizens within the profession (Hirt, 2006), which could underscore the need to make a case for their value at the institutions where they work. This need to make a case for value is something that will continue for the foreseeable future, especially as it is unlikely
outsiders will recognize the inherent value of these areas of student learning. Testimony from participants echoed what has been present in the literature for some time, that others within the institution (such as faculty) do not fully understand the purpose of student affairs or its worth.

Even while college leaders, scholars, and others attempt to bridge the gap between academic affairs and student affairs, which is happening on campuses like Garfield Community College Downtown, student affairs will likely continue to be understood in relation to academic affairs. Since degrees and certificates, and not the learning itself, are what matter most to society at large—especially within the Completion Agenda context—student affairs will likely maintain its secondary status.

Even while participants argued that student affairs exists to support the work of academic affairs, they described the benefits that can be gained from co-curricular education in terms of lifelong impact. As resources become tighter and more emphasis has been placed on outcomes that do not directly encompass the work of student affairs, the need to make a case for the value of student affairs and co-curricular education is critical to its continued place alongside academic affairs.

**Greater need for data informed decision-making and sharing.**

A participant in this study stated that she graduated from her Master’s program a decade ago, and assessment was the hot topic at the time. Literature supports the fact that student affairs assessment is not a new topic. What that participant found interesting, and what is potentially revelatory, is the fact that people are talking about the unmet need for assessment in much the same manner they were years ago. Findings in this study suggest
student affairs has made strides in this area, in that participants were aware of needing to provide measures of effectiveness or how data were needed to fully tell their story; however, there is still considerable room for improvement.

Garfield Community College Northshore was the only college from this sample actively engaged in the pursuit of measuring and tracking learning outcomes in a meaningful way. Others were aware of the need to align their work to CAS standards or to better assess programs, but there still remained a lack of familiarity with assessment or the inability to connect those data to overall student success. Such a scenario is expected in that for every division of student affairs dedicated to assessment, there exist a handful of others behind the times. Still, in an era of transparency and scrutiny, there exists an increased call for data-driven decision-making in order to share the good work of student affairs and co-curricular education.

**Institutions with top-level support function better.**

Within this sample, it was immediately apparent which institutions placed value on student affairs and co-curricular education as a part of their institutional culture. One of the indicators was that participants at these institutions were quick to talk about the support they received from administration. Another reason was the innovative work these educators were doing in the area of co-curricular education with awareness to how their work fit into the institution as a whole and the college’s overall completion plan.

I approached this research with the assumption that large, urban institutions within the state had the biggest gap in success rates impacting funding and, as a result, would devote more efforts toward improving completion on all fronts. What I soon
realized was that the size of the institution was secondary to institutional culture. In
general, the Completion Agenda now affects how community colleges do business. One
example is the requirement for each college to submit a Campus Completion Plan every
two years. In addition, the size of the institution had no bearing on the institution having
a student development philosophy or the vibrancy of student involvement.

Beyond Ohio, the extent to which co-curricular education is prioritized at an
institution is likely directly proportional to the amount of support student has received
from the president and other administrators. Even though I went into this research
assuming a college’s strategy to increasing completion rates would determine how
student affairs was prioritized, I learned that the institution’s culture was of far greater
influence.

Neoliberalism at Work

Neoliberalism provided a framework for this research. It also informed my
thought process when conceptualizing this study and the need to the need to answer the
research questions I had established.

With consideration to the conclusions that I drew, I was surprised that participants
did not fully echo my concerns about how the marketplace is influencing higher
education, especially as it concerns the role of community college co-curricular education
today. As an outside observer, I see student development and co-curricular education
being valued in theory or not at all, which most clearly came through in this study in
terms of their absence in Campus Completion Plans. Follow up conversations about
Campus Completion Plans provided a platform for participants to express concern, due to
the fact that these areas did not appear to be priorities for the institution; however, participants were largely unaware that a disconnect existed between the values they placed upon their work and those established by their institution.

Some of the insights in this study; including participants’ acceptance of the Completion Agenda, responsiveness to administrative concerns, the tendency to define their work in relation to the classroom, and more programming focused on onboarding and transitioning beyond college; suggest that these educators are complicit in the Completion Agenda moving forward in its current form. This is to not criticize the participants themselves. Rather, such an observation seeks to bring awareness to the reality that without critical discussion the Completion Agenda will continue on unimpeded.

With greater attention to completion rates and metrics of effectiveness from external forces, and with fewer resources with which to do so, colleges may be asked to further streamline the educational experience. Underlying this push is neoliberalism’s omnipresent force, including the idea that completing college will lead to an individual’s better quality of life due to increased lifetime earnings.

I envisioned student affairs educators would be more aware of the Completion Agenda’s neoliberal underpinnings. However, I also have come to realize that the invisible hand of the market was functioning in much the same way neoliberal experts say it does: that it proceeded largely unnoticed. Even if the Completion Agenda has directly affected student affairs educators’ work, and my analysis demonstrates that it does, there is no guarantee that student affairs educators understand this dynamic or find
fault with it if they do. For instance, neoliberalism’s presence surfaced at times during interviews, especially in instances when participants directly attributed the value of a community college education to its monetary benefits.

The discussion about how neoliberalism operated during this study is equally concerned with what participants did not say as well as what they did. Such a conjecture can, therefore, run the risk of not being grounding in data. On the other hand, there is no way participants can describe this phenomenon if they are largely unaware that it is taking place. In response to this paradox, my continued belief is that neoliberalism undergirds the Completion Agenda, only more extensively than I originally imagined, due to participants being largely unaware.

Understanding the impact the marketplace has on community college education means engaging in critical discussions about the issue to ensure student affairs educators recognize how their work is not isolated from larger societal goals. I intend to share this discussion with participants in hopes that these individuals will be more cognizant of factors impacting their work. In turn, they may be more likely to engage in discussion, assess their beliefs, and share information that could ultimately affect change.

**Implications for Practice**

The following implications for practice outline specific recommendations resulting from this research that can be applied by student affairs educators.

**Strategic discussions on the Completion Agenda.**

Colleges that collaborate across divisions and move in the same strategic direction appear to function better. Having standing meetings to discuss ongoing work that is
taking place related to the Completion Agenda is imperative, especially since most institutions are involved in multiple initiatives and efforts at any given time. Creating opportunities for sharing provides opportunities for reflection, critical insight, and engenders a sense of respect amongst educators with similar overall goals concerning student development and student success.

Unfortunately, aligning institutional direction would require substantial changes at institutions where this is not already taking place. It appears that institutions that do this effectively have built a student development philosophy into the mission of the institution and employ administrators, including the president, who support those efforts. At institutions without a student development philosophy, hopefully leaders can initiate change or cultural shifts will take place over time.

**Assessment tied to learning outcomes.**

The need to create a culture of evidence has existed in community college student affairs for some time with varied levels of success. Divisions of student affairs should have clearly defined learning outcomes and measure student development in relation to those standards. Creating a culture of evidence is not an easy proposition, in that finding appropriate evidence to substantiate various types of learning often lacks the empiricism found in curricular education. Yet, utilizing appropriate measures of effectiveness is precisely what will lend a certain level of authenticity to the work that is being done in student affairs and co-curricular education. Beyond the ongoing debate that will ensue between the value of student affairs alongside that of academic affairs, at its core
assessing learning outcomes is an opportunity to measure learning, which is what really matters.

**Transparency amongst internal stakeholders.**

Finding ways to share successes and challenges within the institution creates more opportunities for others at the institution to understand the function of student affairs and co-curricular education. Once individuals better understand the value of the work that is taking place, they are more likely to support those efforts and disseminate information to other stakeholders. Effective communication starts with maintaining the same level of transparency that has come to be expected from other areas of the institution (e.g., enrollment numbers). One of the reasons student affairs and co-curricular education have remained misunderstood is because sharing work that is being done has not been required. The same mandates for reporting (such as “Right to Know” data) do not apply to student affairs or have an equivalent data set. However, in order to stay relevant and be recognized as an equally important part of the institution, student affairs divisions will need to be proactive in what data is gathered, what is shared, and how data is made available.

**Framing co-curricular education within the student experience.**

The idea of pathways has framed the student experience within very limited parameters. Students are not always degree-seeking or decided when they enter an institution, and individuals encompass more than the credits they bear in terms of enrollment. Even though a student’s experience is not solely curricular, it is often framed
as such. Institutions do this by focusing on degree maps and pathways when helping a
student design the optimal student experience.

Outlining opportunities for student engagement visually, and not necessarily
along the pathway provided by Completion Agenda experts, can help with sharing work
that is taking place at certain junctions of the student experience. As student affairs now
more readily encompasses the entirety of the student experience (with a focus on
onboarding and the transition beyond college) student affairs educators need to better
define where and how they work along that student development continuum. As a result,
others at the institution can better understand where co-curricular education takes place
and where other types of learning connect. This type of sharing and transparency can
facilitate connections across different areas of the college.

**Maintaining core of profession.**

Within this study, much has been made about getting others outside of student
affairs to see the value of student affairs and co-curricular education. In this study,
community college student affairs has been described as reactionary to forces that have
arisen as a result of the Completion Agenda. Considering the prospect of defining this
work in relation to external forces, it remains imperative to preserve what is essential
about student affairs and co-curricular education without compromising what student
affairs educators have always held valuable. Culp (2005) said:

Student affairs practitioners have always known that community college students
are clients, students, customers, and learners, which is why—despite the name
changes—practitioners were able to hold fast to the profession’s core values:
ensuring access and opportunity for all, developing the whole student, providing quality services to meet student needs, believing that all students matter, facilitating student learning and success, and believing in the educational richness and power of the out-of-classroom environment. (p. 77)

At community colleges, in particular, student affairs educators continue to work within the two-year environment due to their purpose serving students. Hirt (2006) said, “First and foremost, student services professionals at community colleges serve students. For most, this is the reason they work in a community college environment” (p.147).

In a context where society values doing more with less, when colleges are rewarded for the number of credentials that are conferred and where quality of life is largely defined in monetary terms, student affairs educators may be asked to compromise those values in an attempt to meet new measures of success. Maintaining the core of the profession is not something that can be implemented in the same way as the other recommendations, but it is tantamount to all of the others having the same, deep impact.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The focus of this research was on educators who worked in a community college setting in co-curricular education at the outset of the Completion Agenda and who have continued to work at a community college in some capacity today. While this research has delivered useful results, it also raised questions that could be answered through further research.
Revised sample.

Within Chapters 4 and 5, I attempted to describe the experiences of different groupings of participants. Being able to draw from individuals who delivered co-curricular education in different ways and who, in some cases, occupy different positions at their respective institution, provided a breadth of knowledge. However, the question remains: how did the experiences between student affairs administrators, student life administrators, and student success administrators differ? A study could be conducted with any of these populations to provide more cohesive data. In addition, other populations, such as faculty, top-level administrators, and students could offer new and different insights.

Study conclusions.

Alongside the breadth of knowledge that was gained from this research, eight conclusions were drawn from this limited data set that may provide greater insight into how student affairs educators see co-curricular education functioning within the Completion Agenda context. While this study has begun to provide evidence for some of these claims, any or all of these conclusions could be further researched, which would lend further insight into this area of inquiry.

Role of Completion Agenda over time.

This study analyzed participants’ beliefs about the Completion Agenda and how it impacted their work in co-curricular education during a specific timeframe. Since the Completion Agenda is not something that appears to be going away any time soon, a longitudinal study of student affairs educators would lend new insights and provide
information on changing beliefs regarding the Completion Agenda as it relates to co-curricular education.

In addition, the Campus Completion Plans yielded interesting findings, since there existed a disconnect between what student affairs educators held valuable and what strategies were actually featured at each institution. Since the Campus Completion Plans will be updated every two years in Ohio, a longitudinal study of the prominence of co-curricular education and student development within that document could provide meaningful insights, especially since those areas of student learning were not a focus and featured even less prominently from 2014 to 2016. Other states may have similar plans that would be interesting to study or to compare to what exists in Ohio.

Summary

This phenomenological study looked at what impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education and how it has affected the work of student affairs educators who worked directly with students when the Completion Agenda became a topic of conversation. At the outset of this study, I believed that co-curricular education had come to be valued only to the extent that it relates to the larger goal of student success. Since the work of student affairs educators and the value of co-curricular education has not been widely appreciated at community colleges, I asked to what extent the Completion Agenda has affected the work of student affairs educators and how they feel their work is valued at their institutions. For data collection, I interviewed 13 participants (one of whom dropped out) at 10 different community colleges within the state of Ohio. Ohio is a performance-based funding state, it has a strong statewide
organization in the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, and it is one of the lead states for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design. I also analyzed documents, primarily each college’s Campus Completion Plan, which was submitted to the state in 2014 and again in 2016.

Participants fell into three categories based upon their position: student affairs administrators, student life administrators, and student success administrators. Due to the diversity of participants’ roles at their respective institutions and the complexity of the topics at hand, there was no common meaning of the impact of the Completion Agenda amongst participants. However, there were similarities within each group. Student affairs administrators were knowledgeable about the Completion Agenda and the efforts at their institution, they saw the need to work closely with faculty, and they believed that co-curricular education should be tied to the classroom. Student life administrators had gaps in knowledge about the Completion Agenda and were not as versed in what was taking place at the institution in terms of efforts to increase completion. Student success administrators’ work was directly tied to the Completion Agenda, and they framed the discussion about co-curricular education accordingly.

Some additional factors that impacted why there was no common meaning amongst all participants was most participants’ inability to place the Completion Agenda in terms of when it began affecting their work, and how each brought with them a different understanding of student affairs and co-curricular education. Many participants also balanced multiple perspectives that on the surface seemed contradictory, but which
demonstrated a complexity of meaning they attributed to the Completion Agenda and to co-curricular education.

Four major themes emerged from this study. These included being on message for the institution and the overall Completion Agenda, acute attention to the work of academic affairs and student affairs, a growing lack of distinction between student affairs and student success, and co-curricular education not being a substantial part of each Campus Completion Plan. In terms of being on message, participants expressed few challenges with the Completion Agenda, they felt their work was valued, and they have prioritized administrative concerns. Related to the focus on academic and student affairs, participants described their role in relation to academic affairs, their believed in connecting co-curricular education to the classroom, and they felt a need to validate the work of student affairs. The lack of distinction between student affairs and student success is due to the retention role student affairs educators take on, a growing focus on onboarding and career development, and prioritizing recommended or best practices over scholarship. With increased attention to practices that will improve completion rates, each Campus Completion Plan provided strategies meant to impact policy and practice. Most focused little on student development or the role of co-curricular education within the overall completion framework.

Overall, this study answered the research questions, with awareness to certain limitations, and provided conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
References

http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/history/Pages/pasttopresent.aspx

http://www.nova.edu/cwis/saase/forms/powerful_partnerships.pdf

http://www.acpa.nche.edu/student-learning-imperative-implications-student-affairs

ACPA. (2014a). The Student Personnel Point of View (1937). Retrieved from:

ACPA. (2014b). The Student Personnel Point of View (1949). Retrieved from:
http://www.acpa.nche.edu/student-personnel-point-view-1949


ACPA, & NASPA. (2010). Professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners. Retrieved from:


Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2002). Engaging Community Colleges: A First Look. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2003). Engaging Community Colleges: National Benchmarks of Quality. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.
Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2004). Engagement by Design. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2006). Act on Fact: Using Data to Improve Student Success. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2007). Committing to Student Engagement: Reflections on CCSSE’s First Five Years. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2008a). High Expectations and High Support. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2008b). Starting Right: A First Look at Engaging Entering Students. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2009). Making Connections: Dimensions of Student Engagement. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2010). Benchmarking & Benchmarks: Effective Practice with Entering Students. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.


Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). A Matter of Degrees: Practices to Pathways. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2015). Engagement Rising: A Decade of CCSSE Data Shows Improvements Across the Board. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.


Higher Learning Commission. The AQIP pathway. Retrieved from:
https://www.hlcommission.org/Pathways/aqip-overview.html


http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/new-understanding-non-academic-support.pdf


the student success puzzle: Research, propositions, and recommendations. *ASHE

Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 196-212). Nashville,
TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Successful approaches to fostering student learning and personal development


Kumashiro, K. K. (2012). When billionaires become educational experts: “Venture
from: http://www.aaup.org/article/when-billionaires-become-educational-
experts#.VJC5aivF_jE


In J.S. Keyser (Ed.), *1984 Traverse City statement: Toward the future vitality of


Levin, J. (2000). The revised institution: The community college mission at the end of the
Retrieved from:
http://www.luminafoundation.org/advantage/document/goal_2025/2013-
Lumina_Strategic_Plan.pdf

Angeles Times. Retrieved from:

Manning, K., Kinzie, J., & Schuh, J. (2006). One size does not fit all: Traditional and

Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Massy, W. F. (2011). Metrics for efficiency and effectiveness in higher education:
Completing the completion agenda. Washington, DC: National Governors’
Association.


Matson, J. E. (1972). Student personnel work four years later: The Carnegie Study and its
impact. In T. O’Banion & A. Thurston (Eds.), Student development programs in

Community College Week, 26(8), 4-5.

McClenney, K., Marti, C. N., & Adkins, C. (2006). Student engagement and student outcomes: Key findings from CCSSE validation research. Center for Community College Student Engagement. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.


Tyrell, S. (2014). Creating and implementing practices that promote and support quality student affairs professionals. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 16*, 63-77. DOI: 10.1002/cc.20103


Appendix A: Loss and Momentum Framework

Loss Points:
- Do not apply to PS
- Delayed entry to PS
- Poor college counseling leads to under enrollment, poor matching and failure to obtain financial aid for which they qualify.
- Poor academic preparation
- In community colleges, 60% referred to developmental education, only 30% over take subsequent college-level courses.
- Fail to enroll in gatekeeper courses (e.g., entry-level math and English).
- 75% of low-income students need to combine work and school work more than 20 hours/week, schedule changes.
- Part-time enrollment means slow progress, loss of momentum.
- Life happens; complex lives mean many dislocations, stop out or drop out.
- Limited advising leads to credit (and debt) accumulation not matched to degree attainment.
- Leave with credits needed for degree but for college-level math.
- Transfer without credential.
- Credential doesn’t garner family-supporting wage job or isn’t “stackable” to career that does.

Connection:
- Interest to Application
- Enroll to Completion of Gatekeeper Courses
- Entry into Course of Study to 75% Requirements Completed
- Complete Course of Study to Credential with Labor Market Value

Student Progression:
- Consistent college & career ready standards.
- Foster college-going norms supported by peers and trusted adults.
- Increase understanding of college requirements, application and financial aid processes.
- Improve information matching and financial aid products.
- Early college enrollment.
- High school admission.
- Placement exam in high school.
- Enrollment directly from high school.
- Diagnostic assessment & placement tools.
- Mandatory "intrusive" advising, attendance, life skills courses, declared courses of study limited career pathways.
- Improved academic catch-up (prerequisite, supplemental instruction, concurrent enrollment, contextualization, and competency-based digital prep).
- Aggressive financial aid application support.
- Course redesign to go faster, cheaper.
- Innovative programs to incentive optional (e.g., high intensity, continuous attendance).
- Leverage technology to make real-time feedback, intensive advising, accelerated, flexible, and student-centered learning more available.
- Intentional, accelerated, competency-based programs of study leading to credentials in high-demand fields like STEM and health care.
- Provide emergency aid to deal with unexpected life events.

Student Data System (From Day 1 to Completion):

Student Engagement:

Leadership Focused on Completion (Faculty, Administration, Trustees)
Appendix B: IRB Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Number</th>
<th>16-E-125</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Status</td>
<td>APPROVED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee:</td>
<td>Office of Research Compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Contact:</td>
<td>Shelly Rex (<a href="mailto:rexs@ohio.edu">rexs@ohio.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Investigator:</td>
<td>Patrick Gill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>A Phenomenological Study Examining the Perceived Value of Co-Curricular Education within the Community College Completion Agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Review:</td>
<td>EXEMPT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ohio University Office of Research Compliance reviewed and approved by exempt review the above referenced research. The Office of Research Compliance was able to provide exempt approval under 45 CFR 46.101(b) because the research meets the applicability criteria and one or more categories of research eligible for exempt review, as indicated below.

| IRB Approval: | 06/03/2016 12:02:13 PM |
| Review Category: | 2                     |

If applicable, informed consent (and HIPAA research authorization) must be obtained from subjects or their legally authorized representatives and documented prior to research involvement. In addition, FERPA, PPRA, and other authorizations must be obtained, if needed.

The IRB-approved consent form and process must be used. Any changes in the research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, enrollment numbers, etc.) or informed consent process must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented (except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects).

It is the responsibility of all investigators and research staff to promptly report to the Office of Research Compliance / IRB any serious, unexpected and related adverse and potential unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
This approval is issued under the Ohio University OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00000095. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Compliance staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.
Appendix C: Participation Email

Hello,

I am a doctoral student in Ohio University’s Higher Education program. This email is a request for your participation in a study to learn more about the Completion Agenda’s impact on co-curricular education at community colleges and how external forces have affected the work of student affairs educators.

You are being sent this request due to your current position in student services, student affairs, or some related area at a community college in Ohio. Participants will be asked to be available for an in-person interview (60 minutes) and a follow-up phone interview (30 minutes), which will take place in summer 2016.

The following brief survey will be used to learn more your ability and willingness to participate: https://ohio.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6ESjqE3b0hYltLD

Information you submit will only be stored for contact purposes and will be removed if you do not wish to participate or do not meet the qualifications. If you feel like this request is better suited for someone else at your institution, please forward this information to the appropriate individual(s).

This project [16-E-125] was approved by the Ohio University IRB on 3/28/16. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Patrick Gill, the Principal Investigator, or Laura Harrison (harrisol@ohio.edu, 740-593-0847), Advisor.

Thank you for your time,

Patrick Gill
Principal Investigator
(937) 903-8838
pg424111@ohio.edu
Appendix D: Co-Curricular Education Survey

Q1 Based upon your answers to the following questions, you may be asked to participate in a study. Your responses will provide insight into your current position, your previous professional experience, and your ability/willingness to participate in this study. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

The study that follows is being done to learn more about what impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education at community colleges and how external forces have affected the work student affairs educators do with students. Co-curricular education is defined here as any learning that takes place outside of the classroom.

Information you submit will only be stored for contact purposes and will be removed if you do not wish to participate or do not meet the qualifications.

Q2 Name:

Q3 Institution:

Q4 City:

Q5 State:

Q6 Email Address:

Q7 Phone Number:

Q8 In 2010-2011 (or any time within that period) were you employed at a community college where you worked directly with students in support of their co-curricular education?

☑ Yes (1)

☒ No (2)

[If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey]

Q9 Where did you work?

Q10 What was your title?
Q11 For this study, you would be asked to be available for an in-person interview (60 minutes) and a follow-up phone interview (30 minutes). Interviews are scheduled to take place in summer 2016. Would you be willing to take part?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't Know (Tell me more) (3)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q12 What is the best way to reach you?
- Phone (1)
- Email (2)
- Other (3) ________________

Q13 Is there any additional information that you would like to share?
Appendix E: Participant Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to provide answers to the following questions. You may send your resume in place of or to supplement answers. Your feedback will provide background information for our discussion and may be useful for data collection.

**Identification**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How many years have you worked in higher education (not counting graduate school)?

**Educational Background**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate Institution:</th>
<th>Major/Degree:</th>
<th>Years:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Institution:</td>
<td>Major/Degree:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Other Institution:</td>
<td>Major/Degree:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Background**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer:</th>
<th>Position:</th>
<th>Years:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer:</td>
<td>Position:</td>
<td>Years:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Training**
List any relevant training or licensures:
Professional Development
List any relevant professional development opportunities or affiliations:

Job Duties
In the position you held in 2010-11, list your job duties or accountabilities:

List or describe your direct interaction with students in that position:

Initiatives
What initiatives were taking place at your institution around 2010-11?

What initiatives have you witnessed since then at your previous or current employer?

Meeting
When would you prefer to meet? To help arrange a time this summer, please list any preferred dates/times or limitations.

Finally, are there any documents you have at your previous or current institution that describe the college’s completion philosophy or approach (e.g., pathway framework, strategic priorities, initiatives, etc.)? If applicable, please send these along or make them available when we meet. Thanks!
Appendix F: Informed Consent

Ohio University Adult Consent Form With Signature

Title of Research: The Value of Co-Curricular Education within the Completion Agenda

Researchers: Patrick Gill

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done to learn more about the impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education at community colleges and how external forces have affected the work student affairs educators do with students.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to describe your professional experience, discuss your role at your current community college institution, reflect upon your professional experience in relation to outside factors, describe changes you have seen take place at your institution, analyze how you feel your work is valued at your institution, and discuss how cultural expectations at your institution align with your professional values.

You should not participate in this study if you do not work directly with students in your current role or you have not had experience in co-curricular education, or learning that takes place outside of the classroom.

Your participation in the study will last 1 year, with participation at select times, including: an audio-recorded in-person interview that will last 1 hour, a follow-up audio-recorded phone interview that will last 30 minutes, and availability for follow-up discussion through email or by phone to provide feedback on the accuracy of findings.

Risks and Discomforts

Risks or discomforts that you might experience are willingness to discuss your current work and employer while still being employed at that institution. You may also experience discomfort by discovering tensions that exist between your education and professional values related to your previous or current work experiences.
**Benefits**

This study is important to science/society because no research has considered the impact of the Completion Agenda on co-curricular education or taken into account perspectives from those who are not also national leaders in the field. You may benefit by taking time to reflect upon co-curricular work you do at your institution as it relates to larger societal forces.

**Confidentiality and Records**

While I request to audio-record our conversations, your study information will be kept confidential by storing the interview data in a password protected location. In addition, when data analysis is conducted and conclusions are written, I will take steps to ensure that what you say will not be attributed directly to you. A pseudonym will be created for you, and, to the extent you want this information to remain unobtainable, nobody will be able to connect your testimony to your professional role. The audio recordings will be destroyed when the project has been successfully completely, which I anticipate to be May 2017.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator, Patrick Gill, pg424111@ohio.edu, (937) 903-8838 or the advisor Laura Harrison, harrisol@ohio.edu, (740) 593-0847.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered;
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction;
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study;
- you are 18 years of age or older;
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary;
- you may leave the study at any time; if you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Introductory Protocol: To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversation today. For your information, only my Advisor for this the project and I will be privy to the tapes, which will kept in a secure place until the completion of this project, at which time they will be destroyed. In addition, you must sign a consent to participate form, which outlines your participation in this project, the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and potential risks. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. I will give you a few minutes to review the consent to participate form. If you are willing, we will begin the interview process. (Allow interviewee to review and sign Consent to Participate form).

Interview Process: I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several topics that I would like to cover, but the interview will be semi-structured, so we can move between topics based upon our conversation.

Description: This study is being done to learn more about what impact the Completion Agenda has had on co-curricular education at community colleges and how external forces have affected the work student affairs educators do with students. Your input is valued due to your current professional position at your institution and any experience you have in higher education related to this topic.

Interview Sections Used:

___ A. Interviewee Background
___ B. Completion Agenda Impact
___ D. Value of Work
___ E. Challenges Experienced
___ F. Anticipated Challenges

A. Interviewee Background
B. Completion Agenda

1. What is your understanding of the Completion Agenda? How do you define it?

2. When did you see it taking effect at your institution/ in your role?

3. Do you feel the Completion Agenda has impacted your work with students? In terms of co-curricular education (defined here as any learning that takes place outside of the classroom)?

4. What overall impact do you feel the Completion Agenda has had at your institution?

C. Value of Work

5. How would you describe the purpose of your profession?

6. Personally or professionally, how do you describe the value of your work?

7. Has the purpose of your profession/value you place on your work changed over time (from the start of the Completion Agenda until now)? What forces have affected it?

8. How do you believe others at your institution value your work?

D. Challenges Experienced

9. Have you experienced any challenges between the value you place on your work and what is expected of you by others?

10. Do tensions exist between your work and larger institutional goals?

E. Anticipated Changes

11. What changes do you anticipate in your division in the next few years?

12. How do you see your area (student affairs, student services, etc.) changing?

13. In what ways will you envision co-curricular education to be impacted in the future by growing demands for completion?

Documents Obtained: ____________________________________________________________
Appendix H: Member Checking

[Participant’s Name]

According to Creswell (2014), member checking is used to “determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 201). He encourages taking part of the polished work, as opposed to raw transcripts.

Creswell also said this process can involve conducting a follow-up interview. While I gathered excellent data during our initial interview, I would still like to conduct a follow-up phone interview if you are willing and feel you have more to contribute. I encourage you to provide written feedback based on what I have written, which can be equally beneficial.

I am sending you a “Portrait of Participants,” which attempts to describe you as an educator, including your background and where you work. I plan on using a pseudonym for you, but I would like to give you the opportunity to let me know what name you would like to use. Otherwise, I will use something similar to your name in terms of origin, length, sound, etc. As you can see, I have also changed the name of your institution to further distance yourself from your testimony and honor confidentiality. Finally, I have sent along some key statements from the findings section, the headings, and topic sentences they fall under in direct response to the research questions, which are provided (see Reverse).
Research Questions

1. What changes in co-curricular education did community college student affairs educators experience at the onset of the Completion Agenda?
2. How do community college student affairs educators view the purpose of their profession within the Completion Agenda?
3. During the Completion Agenda, how do community college student affairs educators feel their work is valued at institutions where they have worked?
4. What tensions exist for community college student affairs educators related to educational or professional values and previous or current institutional expectations?

Findings

Portrait of Participants

[Relevant information from Research Study Findings]

Changes in Co-Curricular Education at the Onset of the Completion Agenda

[Relevant information from Research Study Findings]

Purpose of Profession within the Completion Agenda

[Relevant information from Research Study Findings]

Value of Work at Institutions

[Relevant information from Research Study Findings]

Tensions Related to Values and Institutional Expectations

[Relevant information from Research Study Findings]
Appendix I: Document Analysis Feedback

Since our last communication, I have conducted additional data analysis, which was part of my research design. The documents I used were each college's Campus Completion Plan. I have attached a document that shares what I presented in my findings related to your institution's 2014 and 2016 plans. A larger theme from this data was: “Completion Plans overwhelmingly did not feature co-curricular education or student development.”

Please give a review of the document (a) and some feedback if you are able. Here are some areas that might be helpful for further analysis:

- Were my findings in fact the case?
- What role did you have in developing either or both Completion Plans?
- How do the Completion Plans connect with the value you place on co-curricular education and student development?
- What future developments do you envision concerning the role of co-curricular education and/or student development related to completion?

Anything you can add that you think will be helpful would be appreciated. Thanks again for your help!
In my study, I also gathered documents for data, primarily each institution’s “Campus Completion Plan.” The Ohio Department of Higher Education requires each public institution within the state to submit a Campus Completion Plan by June 30, 2014 and to be updated every two years. Another Completion Plan was submitted by June 30, 2016. Information can be found here: https://www.ohiohighered.org/campus-completion-plans

From this data, I arrived at this theme: Completion Plans overwhelmingly did not feature co-curricular education or student development.

Below you will see my findings from your institution. In almost all cases, I noted that few (if any) strategies that were outlined in the Completion Plan directly connected to co-curricular education or student development. Your feedback will help me to make sense of:

- If this is in fact the case
- What role you had in developing either or both Completion Plans
- How the Completion Plan connects with the value you place on co-curricular education and student development
- Future developments concerning the role of co-curricular education and/or student development related to completion