

Message from the Program Coordinator

Roger Baldwin

As Coordinator of the Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education (HALE) program at Michigan State University, I am pleased to present a compilation of our Dissertation Abstracts for 2006. These abstracts of the doctoral dissertation research of recent HALE graduates are evidence of the rich and dynamic community of scholars we have in the HALE program. You can see from reviewing the enclosed abstracts that our students and faculty study a wide range of topics that emerge from a diverse and evolving global system of postsecondary education. The research presented here ranges from technology-based online education to engineering students' identity development, and the politics of education reform. Many of the studies look at education issues beyond the boundaries of the United States, reflecting HALE's expanding focus on postsecondary education throughout the world. I hope that you will take this opportunity to learn about the interesting research that goes on in the HALE program. To learn more about HALE, please click on the College of Education's website [<http://www.educ.msu.edu/>] and plan to visit us in East Lansing.

CHILDREN OF DEAF ADULTS (CODAs): A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES AND THE EMERGENCE OF SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING BEHAVIORS

Stuart David Blatt

Committee Chair: Steve Weiland

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between early integration of self-directed learning behaviors and how they manifest themselves during the adult years in the Children of Deaf Adult (CODA) population. This dissertation employed an in-depth study of hearing CODAs to achieve its objectives. This inquiry utilized both quantitative (self directed learning readiness scale (SDLRS), and qualitative (interview) measures to ascertain meaningful answers to the questions under study. The research project addressed the following three primary questions:

- 1. How do CODAs perceive the impact that culture and the key developmental factors had on the emergence of their Self-Directed Learning behaviors?*
- 2. Which of the identified Self-Directed Learning characteristics are most prevalent in the sample CODA population?*
- 3. How do CODAs understand the influence that their culture and key developmental factors had on the identified Self-Directed Learning characteristics?*

The data analysis demonstrated the following 4 relationships: (1) There was congruence between the qualitative and quantitative components around the SDL characteristics of; love of learning and self directedness. (2) Love of learning and self directedness characteristics are ranked highest on the SDLRS. These characteristics were not influenced by age, gender, frequency of signing, education or birth order of the CODAs studied. (3) The demographic data indicates that the more often one signs the greater the developmental impact and influence it had on creativity, lifelong learning, self awareness and acceptance of responsibility for one's learning within the CODA population studied. (4) Table 4 (page 63) indicate that love and learning and self concept were the key influences for SDL behaviors on both the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Implications for the field of SDL were explored and recommendations for further research offered.

JAPANESE UNDERGRADUATES AT AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY: ACCULTURATION IDENTITY, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND VALUES

John Richard Brender

Committee Chair: Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela

Using a multidisciplinary approach that incorporated studies from anthropology, social psychology, cross-cultural communication, and linguistics, I examined the experiences of Japanese undergraduates of varying acculturation identities at a university in the Midwestern United States. I provided biographical sketches for twelve students: three identified as integrated, three as assimilated, three as separated, and three as marginalized. I then examined the students' perceptions of Japanese and American cultural identities in light of Hofstede's (1984) work-related values: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. Subtopics such as family, education, language, and the workplace emerged under each of the work related values. Participants supported Hofstede's (1984) assertions that Japanese identity was consistent with high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, and low individualism while American cultural identity was associated with low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, and high individualism. Since both countries ranked high in masculinity, I pointed to several subtopics in which Japanese were perceived as more masculine, and others in which Americans were perceived as more masculine. The study concluded with key findings that suggest future research on links between acculturation identity and assorted variables. I concluded with recommendations for faculty and administrators to retain and better serve Japanese and other East Asian students.

FACULTY RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Christina Hee Young Dokter

Committee Chair: John Dirkx

Faculty behavior towards technology integration has become a key focus in the drive towards student-centered learning in postsecondary institutions. While many institutions plan and strategize to implement technology, in most cases, a paradigm shift from teaching to learning has been difficult. In particular, faculty responses that show lasting pedagogical changes do not seem to arise from most faculty development programs. Faculty beliefs and the environment in which they work affect the way they teach.

This study looks at faculty responses at an institution that purports to have used a systems approach to technology integration for student-centered learning. The model this institution used reflects an attempt to integrate technology holistically, both in terms of faculty development and organizational change. However, this study hypothesized that even such a model will not fully facilitate the paradigm shift from teaching to learning unless the faculty responds positively to such a change. Therefore, this research studied the faculty's perceptions toward this new change model.

The study used a qualitative approach to research. With an institution-wide online survey, the study examined the extent to which the faculty members have adapted to change.

Then from that survey, a cross section of faculty was chosen for further study through semi-structured interviews and observations. From the data gathered from these instruments as well as from document analysis, the study concludes that while the students have become empowered with student-centered learning, the faculty members feel marginalized. This de-authorization is a result of a political shift in the power structure, as well as neoliberal external policies that enabled the creation of a post-Fordist model of technology integration. This model allows shorter face-to-face contact hours between the students and the teacher. The question remains as to what the role of the faculty should be in this type of student-centered learning, and whether the role of the information and library staff is sufficient in the absence of a teacher. The study also illuminates the need to further examine educational processes that aim to make teaching and learning more efficient and cost-cutting.

PARENT-CHILD MYTH IN UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Daniel Ray Kittle

Committee Chair: John Dirkx

This study seeks to understand the dynamic relationships between students and permanent residents in university communities (relationships often characterized by frustration, anger and conflict). The purpose of this research is to more deeply understand the way community representatives (i.e., local government officials, community leaders, and long-term residents of university communities) have come to know what it means to be a college student.

Using a depth psychological framework (specifically the work of Carl Jung), this dissertation hopes to contribute to a better understanding of community representatives' beliefs and assumptions that provide the rationale and context for their opinions of, and actions towards, college students (Pietikaninen, 1999). A semi-structured interview protocol with symbolic and phenomenological approaches provides meaningful qualitative data to begin to uncover the life experiences and individual sense-making processes that relate to community representatives' understanding of college students.

The data reveals three themes (family, their own college experience, and their own socio-economic context) that serve to mediate how the participants have come to know college students. It is also argued that in addition to this conscious process of meaning construction, unconscious elements of the psyche are also influencing how participants understand college students. An interpretation is offered that argues that these unconscious elements are evoking a structured set of beliefs and assumptions that come together to form a mythology of the college student. Finally, it is claimed that this evoked myth can be placed within the larger parent-child myth (Jung, 1954; Singer, 1994). This study points to a largely unconscious process of mythology in which the participant (and community) is parent, while the student is child. I speculate that their style of "parenting" (masculine versus feminine) is in conflict as a reflection of our society's struggle with the emerging feminine voice versus the established patriarchal structure (Bondurant, Donat, & White, 2001; Fine and Carney, 2001; Maraeecek, 2001; Woollett and Marshall, 2001; Singer, 1994).

RESTRUCTURING STUDENT AFFAIRS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF STUDENTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Christina J. Lunceford

Committee Chair: Kristen Renn

Student affairs plays a major role in the retention, attrition, and student experience in tertiary institutions. The current transformation in South Africa presents the opportunity to shape the entire system of higher education. Some universities are reexamining the role divisions of student affairs play in the student experience on campus and success, however defined.

The purpose of this study was to explore organizational change within student affairs in South African higher education viewing students as key stakeholders. With this study I hoped to (a) understand and inform other institutions about the role students play in organizational change and (b) add to the understanding of student affairs and services in South Africa. I studied the context of change, the process of change, and the role stakeholders played in the change in order to understand the process and outcomes of change, understand stakeholders' perceptions of students and student affairs, and determine if the change met expectations and intended outcomes.

This study was a case study of a single Historically Black University (HBU) in South Africa. I used a qualitative research design that involved interviews and document analysis. I interviewed 4 university administrators, 11 staff, 14 students, and the outside consultant involved in the change.

Key findings were individuals' leadership styles and behaviors had the largest affect on change and outcomes within the university; a shift in focus within the student affairs division from administrative support to student development increased the student involvement on campus, student leadership development, dedication to staff

development, research capacity within the division, visibility of the division, and overall student support; and formal student leaders had different perceptions of the student experience than other stakeholder groups.

Implications include the importance of shifting student affairs divisions from one of conflict management and mere administration to an educative and developmental unit, the importance of staff development and professionalization, the importance of individual leadership style in organizational change, and the need to explore the current role and actions of formal student leadership (i.e., Student Representative Councils) in South African higher education. Suggestions for further research are provided.

COLLEGE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN AN ON-LINE CLASS

Liliana Mina

Committee Chair: Ann E. Austin

This study examined the nature of traditional-aged college student involvement in four on-line classes. The research revealed that traditional-aged college student on-line involvement was multidimensional in form and process. Involvement in the on-line learning setting depended in considerable part on the following connection: 1) the connection between students' academic preparation relevant to the subject, 2) the students' sense of the significance of the class, and 3) the students' degree of self-efficacy.

The extent to which students participated in on-line class activities was also influenced by the value they attributed to their on-line class. For instance, students who managed to succeed regardless of their weak academic preparation seized learning opportunities. Though they entered their large on-line classes with the knowledge that their aptitudes and skills were not adequate, these students understood that the methods used to evaluate competence were attainable by applying extra effort. These students were highly involved and committed to learning. Therefore, because they were aware of their weak academic preparation for the subject, but also involved in the class, they were ardently influenced to overcome their shortcomings.

A major finding of this study was that proactive learners felt it critical to connect with faculty and fellow classmates in making the on-line learning experience meaningful. In so doing, the study suggested that traditional-aged college students are able to actively engage themselves in the learning process within an on-line course in the following ways: 1) they actively initiated and engaged in discussion regarding course content; 2) many with the proclivity to interact with classmates responded to requests for assistance and served as unpaid tutors; 3) those who valued the opinions of their classmates openly shared and information while benefiting from the collective knowledge of the group.

Another major finding of this study and one not initially sought was the reported widespread condoning of academic dishonesty. Participants reported having observed, engaged in or known of cases of cheating (i.e., the purchase of completed essays, sharing answers via text messaging with fellow classmates during a test, and /or use of the

student-only Web site for tests items and answers and other aids). Moreover, this behavior is reportedly both excused and supported by traditional-aged college students who view cheating as a way of *surviving in college*.

These findings constitute the major discoveries of this research and offer implications for institutional policies and instructional practices.

EXPERIENCES OF THE EXCELLENT: A STUDY OF EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY AND WAYS THEY THINK ABOUT THEIR TEACHING

Suzanne Moore

Committee Chair: Marilyn J. Amey

Higher education literature continually focuses on the urgent need to pay more attention to teaching. However, while community colleges are traditionally viewed as institutions devoted to this enterprise, they are also castigated due to their perceived lack of quality, under-served student population, and a lack of faculty publication. There is emerging evidence, on the other hand, that while certain elements of teaching in the community college context present barriers, more work needs to be done to learn about how to identify and nurture great teaching despite such obstacles and negative perceptions. One way to advance such understanding is to consider how best practice is initiated by its best teachers. This dissertation was designed to explore the pedagogical knowledge and stories of six mid-west community college faculty deemed exemplars by their Presidents and Vice Presidents, Provosts/or Academic Deans. By revealing more about the teaching lives and contexts of excellent community college faculty, this research may contribute an enriched sense of the themes that encompass this world, viewed through narratives constructed from this special group of subjects.

A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: THE PROCESSES OF IMPLEMENTING AN ONLINE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Peter G. Osborn

Committee Chair: Ann E. Austin

Over the past decade online distance education has emerged as one of the most significant issues of change facing institutions of higher education (Baldwin, 1998; Batson & Bass, 1996; Delamarter, 2005; Dolence, 1995; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Johnson, Hanna, & Olcott, 2003). Faculty, administrators and staff are wrestling with what role

online distance education courses and programs will serve at their institution. Although many institutions of higher education have been implementing online distance education programs (National Center for Education Statistics), graduate theological education as a whole has refrained from such practices (Delamarter, 2004). The purpose of this research was to provide a rich description of the processes of organizational change by which one graduate theological school implemented an online distance education program. The following questions provided direction for the study:

- What are the key factors that assist graduate theological schools during the implementation of online distance education programs?
- What are the key forces of resistance that hinder graduate theological schools during the implementation of online distance education programs?
- How have some of the graduate theological schools that have implemented online distance education programs managed the tension between the factors that led towards and the forces that resisted the implementation of online distance education programs?

The significance of this study is the contribution it makes to the literature on how graduate theological schools can better understand the change processes of implementing an online distance learning program. The findings of this research support the fact that change is messy and complex. Although change is difficult, graduate theological schools can successfully implement distance learning programs. Based on the findings of this study, faculty and administrators/staff will be well served to adopt factors that assist (i.e., motivating factors, initiating factors, and confirming factors) in the implementation process. Faculty and administrators/staff will also be well served to adequately respond to the forces of resistance (i.e., diminishing forces and persisting forces) that can hinder the effective implementation of an online distance learning program.

COOPERATIVE ENGINEERING STUDENTS' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Amy Radford-Popp

Committee Chair: Marilyn Amey

This study examined the identity process of becoming an engineer, as well as the phenomenon of socially responsible leadership as understood by cooperative engineering students. The experience of cooperative education was selected due to its multi-level context. Students were not asked specific questions about the effect or influence of their cooperative experience on their perspectives per se, however, as cooperative education students it was believed that they had multiple frames of reference from which to describe their emerging identity as engineers because they had more than classroom learning.

As *The Engineer of 2020* calls for future engineers to be prepared to serve in leadership roles, to be global citizens, and to be ethically grounded (National Academy of Engineering, 2004), it is a critical time to explore the phenomenon of socially responsible leadership as it relates to what it means to be an engineer. The definition of social responsibility for this study is a personal commitment to the well-being of people, a shared world, and the public at large (Berman and LaFarge, 1993, p.7; Komives, et al., 1998, p.15). This qualitative study of ten cooperative engineering students used a constructivist approach to data collection because of the interest in understanding students' meaning making about becoming an engineer, and the influence of socially responsible leadership behavior.

The findings reflected the emerging identity of what it means to become an engineer including: the importance of service to the profession and the community, as well as ethics in their own decision-making processes. Individuals attempted to balance these different aspects of expectations upon them, but, sometime struggled to find their voice regarding their own values, especially in their current student status. Participants identified three levels of understanding regarding socially responsible leadership including: one's individual identity, relationship to others, and connection to the community. They shared characteristics and aspects of social responsibility and leadership from their engineering perspective, even though the terms "social responsibility" and "leadership" were not familiar to them. The themes that emerged included aspects of identity development, professional competency, the identification of socially responsible behavior, and the ability to make sense of leadership.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SITUATED IDENTITIES OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRS: A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

*Karin Christina Rade**

Committee Chair: Ann E. Austin

A large number of department chairs experience role conflict and role ambiguity due to their linking pin position between the faculty and administration. In addition, due to long-term socialization as faculty members, chairs often do not sufficiently 'identify' as chair and see the chair job as a temporary assignment at best, and a temporary nuisance at worst. The results of this situation are problematic and often costly for the chair, the department, and the institution.

The chair literature has shown that chairs learn their job predominantly in practice, by trial and error. Furthermore, chairs have to go through various major and difficult transitions from faculty member to chair, and that very few chairs make the complete transition. However, the literature has not addressed how chairs learn to be a chair, in other words, how they develop their identity. This Ph.D. dissertation fills this gap by looking at the ways that department chairs construct multiple situated identities in practice. With this dissertation, I wanted to find out how chairs understand their job in

terms of role identity. The objective was to understand how academic middle managers handle role conflict and role ambiguity.

Grounded in the idea that chairs learn predominantly in practice, this study used a social practice framework. In this theoretical perspective, learning is viewed as changing one's participation and understanding in social and cultural practice. In that view, chairs negotiate, situationally, their role identities by participating in practice. The focus of study was the discursive practice of chairs in constructing identities. Discourse analysis, with a basis in social psychology, was used as a methodology. This strand has theoretical foundations in ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and postmodern thought.

Data collection consisted of multiple open-ended interview sessions with 2 department chairs and 2 school directors, all male and Caucasian, who worked at a state research university. Multiple coding cycles and detailed textual analysis led to the identification and formulation of eight rhetorical topics. These topics represent a collection of arguments or resources that chairs used to construct and express their identity in terms of role conflict and ambiguity. As a conclusion, chairs do different sorts of "work," using different constructions of reality in order to create an identity that temporarily manages or solves the problem at hand. Especially more experienced chairs seem better able to manage role conflict by creating specific realities that allow for multiple, intersecting, and flexible identities.

This dissertation has two main findings. First, to understand the development of chair identities it is necessary to adopt a new conceptualization of knowledge and learning, which assumes that learning is holistic, ongoing, improvisational, relational and distributed, open-ended, simultaneous, and conflictual. Second, this dissertation shows the creativity with which chairs seem to circumvent the limited and dichotomized repertoire of available "labels" (faculty member, chair, administrator) to express their identity; they created 'solutions' by experimenting with and widening the meaning of the underlying concepts. As part of the dissertation, a discourse and practice-based "working model" of chairs' identity processes was developed.

* Graduated in Fall 2005

FOSTERING AN INTEGRATED LIFE OF PURPOSE IN CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Kelli Jo Schutte

Committee Chair: Steve Weiland

This research study was conducted with faculty women at a liberal arts institution of higher education. The study focused on the choices that these women made in managing relations between work and life away from work. Through in depth interviews the various components that influence these choices were investigated. The study focused on cultural demands, organizational demands and personal influences. The findings stress the importance of an individual worldview in strategy formation for

work/life negotiations. Given that the study was done in a distinctively Christian environment the worldview development and expression was somewhat isolated and more accessible for exploration. The findings also confirm the importance of organizational climate in the attempts at balance. Finally, the study highlights the unique issues that arise for singles in their attempt to manage work and life. This study displays the need for a greater understanding of the individual and organization when designing and implementing work/life policies. The individual's unique views and issues along with their placement within an organizational context will significantly impact their ability to negotiate a satisfactory attempt at work/life management.

FACULTY UNIONS: THEIR INFLUENCE ON ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

Linda Seestedt-Stanford

Committee Chair: Marilyn J. Amey

Faculty unions have as their primary objective protecting and improving faculty life. Conversely, a senate, also a coalition comprised primarily of faculty, has as its charge supporting the goals of the institution through curricular initiatives and other designated responsibilities. Both the union and the senate represent a faculty voice and the political interplay between them can impact on institutional decision-making.

Through my research I discovered there is a blurring of lines between the senate and union's roles and responsibilities that causes recurrent confusion as to which group is accountable for particular issues and actions. Cross-over membership between the senate and union, the leadership of the union, and the formal and informal influences that the union exerts on the senate were other key areas identified in my research. These issues shape the relationship between the senate and union, and thus the political environment of the institution.

The findings of this study indicate that although senates are considered the governance body by which faculty provide input and participate in institutional decision-making, in reality the faculty union, through its surreptitious activities is very much a part of the governance of their institutions. The implications of these findings are significant and suggest a reconsideration of the role of the faculty union in academic governance.

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION REFORM: STATE POWER AND THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN NEW JERSEY

Eran Tamir

Committee Chair: Steve Weiland

This dissertation studies the politics of education reform and the struggles over educational policy in New Jersey during the 1980s. I identify the main participants (social agents) who operated in the field of education (teacher unions, the state and department of education, teacher educators, house representatives, and others), consider their interests, ideologies, and examine the strategies they were using to get hold of the positions of power in the field. I focus in particular on the constant attempts of these social agents to forcefully change the public sphere by proposing to reform educational policy in ways that would advance their interests and visions.

I have collected archival data from New Jersey State Archive, conducted semi-structured interviews with key players, and reviewed educational policy coverage in the mass-media. The data analysis has been guided by Bourdieu's notions of capital, social field, and habitus. These notions were then used to develop a viable alternative to the mainstream pluralist approach of John Kingdon to educational policy analysis.

Overall, the findings of this work suggest that New Jersey's governor and department of education were successful in increasing their control over the field of education. Nevertheless, a careful and comprehensive analysis of the findings reveals a more nuanced picture. When considering a broad array of educational policies, there are indications that policies concerning teacher certification and preparation (e.g., the alternate route to teaching) have been established and implemented by the state in a way that marginalized the authority of teacher educators and teacher unions in the field. Yet, the state failed to expand its authority on issues like merit pay which was a top priority for the governor. Thus, it becomes rather clear that the state had enhanced its control in some parts of the field, but failed to do so in other parts where other social agents, in particular the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), continued to hold key positions in the field.

**STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT: A STUDY OF THE
ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS THAT FOSTER OR INHIBIT PROGRESS IN
ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT WITHIN GRADUATE
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS**

John F. VerBerkmoes

Committee Chair: Ann E. Austin

Since the mid-1980's assessment of student learning has been a topic of significant and sustained focus within higher education. After some initial resistance to the student outcomes assessment movement, recent research indicates that postsecondary institutions are now engaging the activities of assessment. However, there is also evidence from the literature that institutions are failing to utilize the data collected in assessment for decision making and quality improvement, and failing to establish full cycle cultures of assessment. This is true of higher education in general and graduate theological education in particular. Virtually no studies have been conducted to look at assessment from the perspective of organizational design or organizational culture. The purpose of this study was to investigate "what" organizational factors fostered or inhibited progress in establishing a culture of assessment within a graduate theological school. Further, the study sought to determine "how" these key factors fostered or inhibited the work of assessment. Three bodies of literature informed this study: (1) The general literature on assessment within higher education laid the foundation for understanding the history, purposes, methods, and use of assessment of student learning; (2) The assessment literature within graduate theological education provided historical perspective on assessment within North American seminaries affiliated with The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and provided insight into the unique challenges and slow progress of assessment within graduate theological education; (3) The literature on organizational change provided concepts and frameworks related to cultural change, a perspective that invited the researcher to think about assessment of student learning in terms of organizational design and cultural change.

The study consisted of case studies of two graduate theological schools, one "exemplary" and one "compliant" in relation to the ATS standards of accreditation on the assessment of student learning. In addition to document review, eleven organizational participants were interviewed at each institution. Within-case and cross-case analysis was conducted. Findings from the study suggest that fostering a culture of assessment within a graduate theological school requires the alignment of a number of factors related to organizational design (i.e., mission/vision, strategy, structure, human resource systems, decision support systems, rewards systems, leadership behavior). The three most important of these organizational design factors appeared to be structure, human resource systems and leadership behavior. Beyond the factors related to organizational design, four additional factors emerged as important in fostering or inhibiting progress in establishing a culture of assessment. These other factors included accreditation, engagement in distance learning, participant understanding of assessment, and the use of data in decision making. The study concludes with implications for accrediting agencies,

academic leaders, and theological faculty members, as well as recommendations for future research.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN FULFILLING THE MISSIONS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES: PERSPECTIVES OF PRESIDENTS AND PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Wei-ni Wang

Committee Chair: Marilyn J. Amey

Community college have been regarded as a “most effective democratizing agent in higher education” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 6) because of their grassroots origin of standing for open admissions, geographic proximity, and financial affordability to the potential students from the community they served. Previous studies also provide evidence that the scope of the community education programs offered by the community college particularly highlights the institution’s unique position to demonstrate its awareness of community needs and its willingness to collaborate with various groups in meeting those needs. This empirical study provided data leading to a systematic understanding of how community education programs in American community colleges are delivered in the 21st century and how such programs assist their institutions to fulfill the needs of the surrounding communities.

A phenomenological approach was employed for this qualitative study. Five community college presidents and five community education programs were recruited to participate in this study. Interviews were used and analyzed to obtain participants’ perceptions of community college missions and their experiences of organizing community education programs to meet community needs.

The findings reaffirmed that community education programs nurture and sustain community colleges’ ties with their surrounding environments, given their flexibility to provide offerings that are less bound by institutional rules. More importantly, the data suggested that with restrained resources and multiple missions to fulfill, community college leaders could not always treat every mission within their comprehensive community college framework equally, and they had to prioritize the multiple needs of the community or even at least sometimes decline certain requests.

The study showed that sustainability is critical to community education programs since they are contextual. Relevant factors that influenced the sustainability of these programs are distinctive orientation, partnership, socioeconomic status of the community, balancing what the institutions can do and what the community wants, balancing advisory groups’ input and the leaders’ professional judgment, and balancing service quality and contract requirements. Entrepreneurship was the term that best captured what the practice of community education was in the community colleges. With the flexibility to take action on community requests, every aspect of the work in community education programs is being calculating, weighing cost-effectiveness, assessing true needs of the

community, and finding the appropriate resources to respond to them. The synergy created from the process and through the partnerships with different agencies seemingly adds sufficient reaffirmation of community colleges' historical reputation as the community's colleges.

The essences of the practice of these programs in community college through the eyes of community college leaders were also constructed, which contributes to the literature in understanding community education. An organizational model was proposed to capture the role of the community college as a key community resource that is adaptive to the changing contexts of its environment.