WHEN OPPOSITES ATTRACT: THE NATURE OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTINGS

by

NEEDHAM YANCEY GULLEY

(Under the Direction of Richard H. Mullendore)

ABSTRACT

Through engaging a constructivist worldview and interpretivist theoretical perspective this manuscript style dissertation explores the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community college settings. The three articles making up this dissertation explore this topic through three distinct qualitative analytic methods: discourse analysis, basic interpretive analysis, and comparative case study. These manuscripts correspond to the three research questions guiding this study: How do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units? How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different? How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?

In these settings, collaboration exists when individuals from each side engage in dialogue and practice, formally or informally, in an effort to meet the overall institutional mission of assisting students. Practitioners in these settings have a strong understanding of how their work...
contributes to the overall mission of the institution and are willing to execute their role without the insecurities and power plays that are historically associated with partnerships between these two units, as understood from studying such partnerships in traditional, four-year institutions. In the participating community colleges, collaborations manifested as one-on-one, one-time discussions between colleagues for the purpose of addressing individual student needs. This was more true the smaller the institution, as the decreased size allowed for practitioners to have closer interpersonal relationships with their colleagues due to more flat organizational charts. These findings add a unique perspective to the current scholarship on academic and student affairs collaborations by offering insights from a qualitative perspective and by setting this study in the community college setting, which has been previously unexplored.

INDEX WORDS: Collaboration, Partnerships, Academic affairs, Student affairs, Discourse analysis, comparative case study
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There have certainly been moments of this journey when I have walked alone, but these have been few and far between. One does not come to this place without the support of others, combined with a deep well of personal fortitude. As I reflect on the alignment of the many stars that has resulted in my ability to complete this educational milestone, I must first acknowledge those who, intentionally and inadvertently, gave me the drive for educational attainment. Consequently, these are the same people who unknowingly lead me to my chosen career path as an educator. From the day I was born and blessed with the name of my great-grandfather, I have been trying to live up to the heavy weight of his legacy. A great educator, revered speaker, and a passionate seeker of justice, his influence has always been a driving force in my life. My parents, through the basic act of naming me, the tradition of ancestral story telling, and by way of unaltering unconditional love (even, at times, without understanding) have in so many ways set me on this wonderful and challenging journey. To my parents - thank you for keeping old newspaper clippings in antique clocks and for letting a little boy play with gold-tipped canes in order to dream.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For decades student affairs practitioners have attempted to engage in the most central mission of higher education, education itself. The desire of student affairs practitioners to be seen as educators, beside faculty has been met with resistance as the gap between student affairs and academic affairs has persisted (Frost, Strom, Downey, Schultz, & Holland, 2010; Hirsch & Burack, 2002). Hirsch & Burack noted that the reason for this gap is rooted in how student affairs grew out of academic affairs, stating,

although originally, faculty members provided both academic and nonacademic support for students, disciplinary specialization and the growth of a higher education industry resulted in the division of these areas, with each functioning on either side of a widening chasm. Student affairs and academic affairs developed different understandings about the purposes of their work and how it should be measured. (p. 53)

Schroeder (1999), a prolific scholar in the area of student affairs and academic affairs collaboration, put the disconnect in a historic context when he wrote,

dis this persistent gap is evident in the historical separation of the formal curriculum from the informal cocurriculum as well as the prevailing view that the role of student affairs is ancillary, supplementary, or complementary to the academic mission of the institution. (p. 8)

The need to bridge this gap was one of the main themes of the 1939 and 1949 Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education). This document outlined the vision of
what is today known as the profession of student affairs and in doing so addressed the need for those in that professional area to create connections with the academic colleagues on campus. Since this time student affairs practitioners and their professional organizations have continued to call for partnerships through such documents as the *Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994), *Reasonable Expectations* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1995), and *Principles of Good Practice* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997). Bourassa & Kruger (2002) noted that “for the most part there has not been a comparable movement in academic professional associations” (p. 10). This one-sided call for collaboration has not meant that these collaborations have not been increasing in number and scope but that the desire and push to enact them has been systematically left to the student affairs professionals. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts that have been fostered traditionally focus on involving academic affairs professionals in student affairs activities without any reciprocal involvement of the student affairs professionals in academic activities (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002).

In 1998 the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) began a dialogue with an association of academic affairs professionals, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), regarding collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs. The result of this dialogue was their joint publication of *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning*. This document put into play a balanced call for collaborative efforts which resulted in a flurry of action, research, and practical application (Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Guarasci, 2002; Jacoby, 1999; Kellogg, 1999). The central theme of this document, as well as most of the student affairs driven publications which preceded it is how student affairs practitioners can contribute to
student learning. A survey of the literature surrounding collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs confirms that student learning is the focus of most collaboration that exists, as these two aspects of the campus community work together to better facilitate learning (American College Personnel Association, 1994; Guarasci, 2002; Hyman, 1995; Kuh, 1996; Schmidt & Kaufman, 2007). However,

learning communities and student and academic affairs partnerships struggle to become institutionalized because higher education institutions are generally organized in departmental silos and bureaucratic or hierarchical administrative structures. Even though there is great difficulty in implementing collaborative initiatives, the imperative to collaborate and logic supporting collaboration are very strong. (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 5)

Over the past few decades, the production of scholarship on the collaborative endeavors between student affairs and academic affairs has been steady, if not prolific. The research has focused, primarily, on three areas; describing collaborative programs that are in place at various institutions, defining best practices associated with such collaboration, identifying barriers to collaboration. Much of the data that has been presented on these topics has been assessment driven and in the cases where more stringent research methodologies have been used, the studies have, almost exclusively, been quantitative in nature. Nearly all of the existing research has analyzed data from traditional, four-year institutions; generally the data has come from the perspective of chief student affairs and chief academic affairs practitioners at the exclusion of other members of the campus community.

More work needs to be done in order to understand the nature of the collaborations in the community college setting, as well as an introduction of qualitative research on the subject. It is
also necessary to explore the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of those other than chief student affairs and academic affairs practitioners. Further, the current literature on the topic fails to define collaboration, making an assumption that all study participants and those who engage with the findings have a shared understanding of the concept and so, research needs to be done to define collaboration within the context of these settings.

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the experiences, influences, practices, and perceptions of academic affairs and student affairs professionals around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Further, the goal is to better understand the nature of collaboration in these settings versus offering descriptives on particular forms of collaboration. To this end three research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

1. How do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units?

2. How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different?

3. How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed by and situated in various bodies of literature. Drawing upon the work of different scholars, from multiple fields allows me to situate this study in the ongoing dialogue that exists between scholars. This chapter is a review of the literature that informs this study. The first section discusses the various definitions that have been proposed for the practice of collaboration, as well as the difficulty with such definitions. Following that discussion is a section on the research and writing around collaboration between academic and student affairs units in higher education. Then, an overview of the literature on such collaborations in the community college setting is presented. Finally, a bit of literature that problematizes the very idea of and assumptions surrounding the concept of collaboration. Most sections are arranged so that the literature is reviewed chronologically.

Collaboration (Un)Defined

There exist many definitions of what constitutes collaboration. Various scholars and practitioners from multiple disciplines have tackled the subject and attempted to conceptualize the nature of collaboration and pinpoint the ways in which it might be used. (Amy, 2006; Gray, 1989; Glaser, 2005; McGowan, 1990; Slater, 1996; Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009; Wood & Gray, 1991) In doing so, terms such as networking, teamwork, partnerships, and coordination are often used as touchstones of similarity and difference as they relate to collaboration (Amey, 2006). Despite this work, no one definition of collaboration has emerged as the predominant way of understanding the concept across disciplines, within the educational setting, or as it applies to collaborations within higher education. This section discusses the various understandings of
collaboration that exist, primarily in areas of educational research. These definitions each inform
the understanding of collaboration in the particular setting of academic and student affairs
partnerships.

Wood and Gray (1991) made an attempt to develop a common theoretical understanding
of collaboration and in doing so, challenged other scholars to clearly define collaboration when
investigating the phenomenon. Through an examination of the theoretical work that existed on
collaboration at the time, they came to the conclusion that all of the definitions for collaboration
were incomplete in some way, each falling short of a successful definition for varying reasons.
Since they believed no theorizing could be accomplished without a definition, they offered one;
providing extensive justification in hopes that it would become the common way of
understanding the concept. Their hope was that a theory of collaborative engagement would
emerge. While, their definition did not gain the agreement of the scholarly community, it did
start a dialogue that continues today. They purported that, “collaboration occurs when a group of
autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared
rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (p. 146).

Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) built on this work, indicating that scholarship around
collaboration lacks coherence of definition, especially across disciplines. They stated that,
although multiple conceptualizations of collaboration add richness to the research,
they often impede its rigor and cumulativeness. To put it simply, lack of
consensus among scholars on the meaning of collaboration makes it difficult to
compare findings across studies and to know whether what is measured is really
collaboration. (p. 23)
By comparing the theoretical presuppositions around the topic of collaboration in multiple disciplines these scholars attempted to determine the characteristics common among the various understandings of collaboration. Drawing primarily on literature from organizational development, organizational behavior, and business, five components of collaboration were identified: governance, administration, mutuality, norms, and organizational autonomy. From these components, the following definition of collaboration was coined,

Collaboration is a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions. (p. 25)

Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) then conducted a quantitative study, using structural equation modeling to test the definition. After providing questionnaires to over 1300 participants and analyzing the data, they found that the definition that they provided based on the literature, was, in fact, supported. These scholars went on to call for more research into the nature of collaboration. However, they seem to have a notable bias to quantitative veins of inquiry, pointing to the collection of quantitative data in all cases; past and future.

Some scholars approach collaboration as a reactive response to crisis (Gray, 1989; Glaser, 2005). In this sense collaboration is seen as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989; p. 5). Glaser (2005) shares a similar view on collaboration, assuming that partners in collaborative endeavors begin from a place of discord and must be thoughtfully transitioned to one of coherence. While
seemingly based on an assumption that discord is the starting place for all, he situates his position by indicating the “need for an aspiring problem-solving leader to manage the basic human instincts for fight or flight through responses that will be more conducive to producing agreements in groups” (p.1).

Other scholars take a more positive approach, indicating that collaboration comes from a place of intentional growth and sustains itself as a change agent without necessarily being rooted in problem-solving (Slater, 1996). While investigating collaborations between a college of education and a local school district, Slater indicated that collaboration is “culture creating and constructivist;... The need to work together is driven by the knowledge that what can be accomplished is more than that which is produced separately, making the results synergistic” (p.29). By this way of thinking, collaboration is intentional and systematic and in a successful collaboration, the partners fundamentally change into a new initiative. Slater also believed that such collaborative endeavors lead to long-term relationships with a focus on sustainability of that partnership.

McGowan (1990) offered nine elements that should consciously exist for any collaboration to flourish: time, perks or payoffs, administrative support, a core group, collegiality, a mission, a model, training, a sense of reality. He indicated that not only does it take a commitment of time to conduct collaborations through meetings and other formats but that it often takes time to see the results of such endeavors. Given the increased time commitment to participate in collaborative endeavors, McGowan suggested that leaders and supervisors provide appropriate support and compensation for participation and results. One example of the support that should be provided is administrative. In order to promote ownership of collaborative projects and to sustain buy-in, a core group of leaders should be named to each project. McGowan further
suggested that fostering a relaxed and collegial environment by reducing as much tension as possible will help the efforts to be successful. Likewise, tying any and all collaborative work to the core institutional mission can help to sustain the activity. While he acknowledged that it is not always possible to find an exact example of the collaborative environment being developed, McGowan noted that keeping members of the activity motivated can, in part, be accomplished by providing models of success that the group can try to emulate. As with all resource dependent tasks, he promotes providing the necessary tools to get the job done, including providing stakeholders and participants with the necessary training to accomplish the end results. Finally, McGowan cautioned that leaders and administrators should be realistic about the process, as well as the results.

Also at question is the reason for collaboration. Walsh and Kahn (2009) indicated that the benefits of collaborating as “more effective working; improved outputs, produced more quickly and more efficiently; and shared ideas and shared effort... Collaboration offers huge scope for delivering cost savings and efficiencies” (p. 4). They noted, however, that in some instances the process of collaboration is just as important as the collaboration itself. This claim is echoed by Amey (2010) who states, “partnerships are often more important for the relationships they facilitate, the values they symbolize, and the political alliances that can be banked for future use than for the measurable outputs they produce, especially in the short run” (p. 15). By this token the process of collaboration includes interwoven factors summarized by differentiation between formal and informal partnerships. Amey purported that formal partnerships are more structured and mandated by supervisors, or outside regulatory agencies through grants or bureaucratic authority while, informal partnerships are less regulated. Noting the propensity for public discussions and research to be focused on the formal, Amey added that,
partnerships that are loosely coupled with informal structures may, in fact, be far more common and an outgrowth of formal associations or personal relationships between individuals. Yet, almost by definition, these arrangements are less likely to be written about and understood; it seems as if capturing them in print somehow moves the partnership toward more formalization. (p. 14)

She concluded that the most beneficial and impactful partnerships are the typically the most beneficial because of their ability to fly under the bureaucratic radar.

**Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Collaborations**

**Popular Types of Collaborations**

The literature that exists on student and academic affairs collaboration can be divided into groups based on the types of goals those partnerships hope to accomplish. Current and historical collaborations have been focused around areas such as seamless learning environments, service learning, freshmen and first year experiences, faculty involvement in residence halls, learning outcomes, and scholarship production. It is important to remember that this literature is predominantly based in research and assessment data collected in traditional, four-year institutions using quantitative methods.

Seamless learning environments have been the subject of several research projects and the recommendation of several publications as a method for how academic affairs and student affairs units can collaborate to enhance student learning (Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). Seamless learning is a concept that fosters connections between students in and out of class experiences in order to facilitate learning. “In a seamless learning environment, students will have opportunities for learning both in the classroom and out-of-the classroom through co-curricular activities. Students will work with and
get to know faculty and staff while taking courses and participating in non-classroom learning activities” (Kellogg, 1999). In order for this to happen, planners must be intentional about coordinating the curriculum from both the student affairs and academic affairs perspective.

The concept of service learning encompasses programs and opportunities that foster students’ engagement with the community by addressing community needs while simultaneously supporting their learning (Jacoby, 1999). Jacoby goes on to note that for students the benefits of participation include,

- developing the habit of critical reflection;
- deepening comprehension of course content;
- integrating theory with practice;
- increasing understanding of the complex causes of social problems;
- strengthening one’s sense of social responsibility;
- enhancing cognitive, personal, and spiritual development;
- heightening understanding of human difference and commonality, and sharpening abilities to solve problems creatively and to work collaboratively. (19)

Service learning is an area that is often seen to be the start of collaboration on campuses. However, the form it takes can be viewed as one sided, as the student affairs partner is often seen as a resource used to help the academic affairs counterpart to achieve their goals. The structure is often designed so that student affairs manages a service learning center that faculty come to in order to have a service learning component created for their course (Jacoby, 1999). This may mean that there has not been full collaboration on the learning outcomes of that course.

Freshmen and first-year experience programs have been noted as easy places for collaboration to exist as the institution attempts to make connections with students as they enter the community (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). The concept of first-year experiences being an integral part of creating a compelling situation for
student learning is central to the call made in *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998). These collaborations often manifest as student and academic affairs professionals facilitate courses for freshmen in various interest areas.

Bourassa & Kruger (2002) indicated that, “the residential experience provides limitless opportunities for integrating the student academic experience with out-of-class experience” (11). The literature points to several examples of such collaborations, including faculty-in-residence programs that promote faculty living in the residence halls with students. Other forms of residence hall based collaborations are brown-bag lunch series which invite the faculty into residence halls along with student affairs practitioners to eat and share with students. Book clubs are also a way of connecting faculty, student affairs practitioners, and students in residence facilities. These types of programs are popular because of the ease of access to a captive audience.

The desire for institutions of higher education to create learning outcomes that are more meaningful for students has driven many of the collaborations between student and academic affairs. These collaborations have focused on curriculum development, educational assistance, and the reinforcing of instructional concepts outside of the classroom (Guarasci, 2002; Larrey & Estanek, 1999; Schroeder, 1999; Schuh, 1999). Guarasci (2002) noted that student success, “requires delicate work, carefully orchestrated to support students, placing learning at the center of campus life. Without an alliance for learning between academic and student affairs, the institutional commitment to student achievement remains disjointed…” (p. 101). All of the seminal documents mentioned earlier, *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994), *Reasonable Expectations* (NASPA, 1995), *Principles of Good Practice* (NASPA, 1997), and *Powerful
Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998), note the focus for collaborations to be student learning.

A more recent discussion regarding the possibilities of individuals working in student affairs and academic affairs to collaborate is around the production of scholarship. White (2002) pointed out that in order for the field of student affairs to be viable and research in the area to be valid, collaboration at all parts of the scholarly process must be sought, from the development of research questions to the dissemination of findings. She stated that such scholarly collaboration encourages mentorship opportunities, relationship building, and is a way for us to model productive collegial relationships for our students and younger professionals. In this way, collaboration is essential to the individual, the field of student affairs, and the larger academic community. Scholarship that values the contribution of collaborative efforts also sees renewed interest in the process (versus outcomes only) of scholarly activities and ensures these activities are liberating in their approach to hearing and honoring multiple voices. (164)

While the push for developing learning outcomes is a stand-alone category of types of collaborations often seen on the college campus, it is also at the root of all of the other types mentioned above. It is at the crux of most literature that exists on the topic of student and academic affairs collaborations. The majority of scholars and practitioners that discuss these collaborations continually refer to them as an imperative for the creation and attainment of learning outcomes. Recalling the historical context for such collaborations, White (2002) one professional recalled the intentionality needed to create opportunities for teamwork between the two units in order to foster learning outcomes.
The paradigm shift away from othering and toward collaborative and respectful partnerships involved a greater sense of professionalism on the part of the faculty member as well as the staff member. However, it took a creative approach from the student affairs professional to show the professor how the two cultures could be integrated into an expanded learning environment. When both individuals saw that cooperation would lead to enhanced student learning they were able to create an academic environment that extended beyond the classroom. (Blake, 2007, p. 71)

Given this, there seems to be a need to explore what other reasons and motivations may exist for developing such collaborations or what outcomes of such collaborations may be, beyond student learning.

**Best Practices and Barriers**

Much of the literature around issues of collaboration in student and academic affairs can also be divided into two sub-categories: the cultural attributes that foster strong collaborations, sometimes referred to as ‘best practices’, and the attributes that serve as traditional barriers to those collaborations. The literature that examines the ‘best practices’ is often framed as a guide for how to develop collaborations where they do not currently exist (Dale & Drake, 2005; Eickmann, 1989; Hyman, 1995; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, Hirsch, & Burak, 2002; Kuh, 1996; Martin & Samels, 2002; Schuh, 1999). One example of these guides to success was developed by Martin and Samels (2002) as they described eight best practices, to build, or rebuild, a successful partnership: (1) be opportunistic, (2) control the budget, (3) capitalize on turnover, (4) avoid collisions of culture, (5) design links to ongoing institutional assessment initiatives, (6) get press, and then get more press, (7) develop board awareness and support, and (8) don’t become attached. (89)
Others have taken another approach to facilitating collaboration between these two units, suggesting that they actually merge into one functional area. Price (1999) notes that having student affairs report to chief academic officers encourages interaction between the various players and thus, “can be a catalyst for developing effective partnerships on a variety of worthwhile learning ventures, such as teaching, research, curriculum development, and creation of learning communities” (p. 76).

Even more prevalent than literature on the ways to successfully develop collaborations is the literature that addresses the barriers to doing so. Whether it be a case study, a synthesis of prior literature, a best practice piece, or a research study on factors that influence collaboration, a plethora of the published work around collaborations include some discussion of the barriers that exist to having such successful partnerships (Astin, 1996; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999).

These obstacles have primarily been seen as cultural differences, the historical separation between the formal curriculum and the informal curriculum, the perception of student affairs as an ancillary function to the academic mission, competing assumptions about the nature of student learning, and differential reward systems for faculty and student affairs professionals. (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002, p. 9)

The Community College Setting

Though much has been written about collaborations between academic and student affairs, the literature that exists has, until recently, had little to say about those collaborations in the context of community colleges. Bourassa and Kruger (2002), pointing to a Dissertation by Craig Kolins, published in 1999, which focused on collaborations in the community college
setting, noted this gap in the literature and called for more research in this area. Given the findings of Kolins’ study, Bourassa and Kruger (2002) stated that,

The entire higher education community should keep track of factors within the community college sector that cultivate successful partnerships that are easily adapted by either community colleges or four-year colleges and universities. For example, the community college sector is leading the way in the formation of strong, vibrant student and academic affairs partnerships as well as partnerships with external constituencies in the development and advancement of educational outcomes tied to service learning. (p. 15)

The lack of literature on this topic within the community college arena is not surprising given the divide between the community college system and the larger research institutions that often conduct such research. Levinson (2005) noted that the rise of research-focused institutions not only changed the nature of community colleges but the way they were perceived as well. He pointed out that research institutions are often insular in areas of scope, including educational research.

There are three significant studies that have explored the topic of collaborations on the community college campus. The first of these studies being the work of Craig Kolins in 1999 which earned the NASPA Dissertation of the Year Award in 2000. In this work, Kolins investigated the perceptions of chief academic affairs officers and chief student affairs officers at two-year public institutions as they related to collaborations of those two divisions.

Another study, which addressed the community college perspective on this topic, was published by Kezar (2002). This work, “Documenting the landscape: Results of a national study on academic and student affairs collaborations,” included several types of institutions in its
sample but had some interesting findings around the particular nature of collaboration at community colleges. The most significant of these findings was that community colleges had fewer structural obstacles to collaboration than any other institution type (Kezar, 2002). Kezar further indicated that “community colleges excelled in academic advising, academic integrity, career development, counseling, diversity, and faculty development” (p. 42). Kezar calls for more research in order to find exactly why community colleges are better equipped to collaborate and how those factors may be translated to other settings.

In 2004, Mary Lou Kennedy began to answer part of this call with the publication of her dissertation, entitled, “Variables that affect collaboration among academic and student affairs administrators in community colleges.” Kennedy explored what chief student and academic affairs professionals saw as the most important variables when engaging in collaboration at the community college campus. She found that, “collaboration by institutional leaders, positive personal relationships among Chief Academic and Chief Student Affairs Officers, and Student Affairs personnel taking the lead in initiating collaborative activities are three areas for community college administrators interested in promoting collaboration to consider” (Kennedy, 2004, p. iii).

In more recent years the collaborations in community college settings have been gaining interest, with more articles being published on the topic. However these articles typically lack any form of empirical originality, relying instead on the work of others to promote what are framed as best practices (Amey, 2010; Dale & Drake, 2005; Frost & Associates, 2010). Frost and associates (2010), for example, offered a review of traditional collaborations in community college settings, pointing to the same body of literature that has been informed by such collaborations in other educational settings. Dale and Drake (2005) translated the concept that
learning-centered educational systems cannot exist without partnerships and collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs into the community college setting. Here, again, however, the authors offer a list of best practices and report on successful strategies for collaboration, summarizing rather than offering any new perspectives on the topic.

Amey (2010) offered the competencies and considerations needed in order to effectively engage in collaborative efforts in the community college setting. She noted that in an environment of scarce resources, collaborative partnerships are often seen as feasible options for individual goal attainment with shared responsibility. Noting that in such situations, as in most top-down collaborative efforts, the outcomes of such endeavors are the most common focus but that the process is the most beneficial for the stakeholders, she stated that, “partnerships are often more important for the relationships they facilitate, the values they symbolize, and the political alliances that can be banked for future use than for the measurable outputs they produce, especially in the short run” (p. 15).

Troubling the Waters

While academic and student affairs collaborations have been a topic of much scholarship and interest in recent years, not everyone is convinced that such efforts are worth the reward. Magolda (2005) warned that partnerships, while potentially beneficial, should not be entered into lightly or without a strong purpose. He noted that because these partnerships bring together fundamentally different players, care must be taken to foster success. His conclusion simultaneously serves as a call to action and a warning:

In most instances, collaboration is virtuous; still, problematize collaboration and do not blindly accept it as good. Dialogues are essential, and these discussions must extend beyond discussing management techniques to include sociocultural
and moral discourses. Partnerships must be meaningful, reciprocal, and responsive. Partners must strive to be cultural workers who have the capacity to understand the culture of others as well as their own culture. Simply getting along is insufficient. Partners must become more comfortable with difference and conflict, recognizing that, in the end, avoiding conflict does more harm than good.

The goal in all of this is to approach these initiatives more cautiously, purposefully, and honestly. (p. 21)

Other scholars have questioned the blind faith with which the academic community has been entering into collaborations between academic and student affairs divisions. Noting a lack of empirical data on the subject, Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, Wells, and Whitt (2007) conducted a research project to examine the actual outcomes of these collaborations for students. The results of their study indicated that there are four categories of student outcomes from academic and student affairs collaborations: acclimation to the institution, engagement, student learning, and academic and career decisions. “Results of this study support the exhortations of the effectiveness of academic and student affairs partnerships… Programs arising from collaboration between academic and student affairs units play an important role in helping institutions achieve desired outcomes for students” (p. 450). Kezar and Lester (2009), who are strong proponents of collaboration in the setting of higher education, even caution against over collaboration. They stated that, “there is nothing worse than people forcing collaboration on a situation that simply does not require it” (p. 8).
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units is a predominant topic in the higher education arena. The topic is frequently discussed in conference presentations, journal articles, news stories, professional organization monographs, and in other platforms. (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Magolda, 2005; Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, Wells, & Whitt, 2007) Most of the scholarly research on the topic has been focused on naming best practices or defining barriers to collaboration so that those barriers might be avoided (Amey, 2010; Astin, 1996; Dale & Drake, 2005; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). The studies informing the current understanding of this topic have almost exclusively been framed in investigations of traditional, four-year, bachelor degree granting institutions and have been grounded in quantitative methodologies. More work needs to be done to understand the nature of the collaborations in the community college setting, as well as an introduction of qualitative research on the subject. It is also necessary to explore the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of those other than chief student affairs and academic affairs practitioners.

The purpose of this study, then, was to examine the experiences, influences, practices, and perceptions of academic affairs and student affairs professionals around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Further, the goal was to better understand the nature of collaboration in these settings versus offering descriptives on particular forms of collaboration. To this end three research questions were developed to guide this study:
1. How do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units?

2. How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different?

3. How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?

My interest in looking at multiple perceptions and experiences in order to understand the topic of academic affairs and student affairs collaboration within the specific context of community colleges situated this study within a constructionist epistemological position. Crotty (1998) indicated that constructionism is rooted in the assumption that “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world… it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (p. 8). In direct correlation with this epistemological stance is my theoretical perspective as an interpretivist; thus allowing myself to make meaning of data by interpreting it in relation to my own experiences and background, as well as my interactions with the ways in which the data were collected (Creswell, 2007). Creswell outlined various reasons why a qualitative methodology may be the best fit to answer research questions where in depth analysis of participants’ experiences, beliefs, and practice is necessary. He indicated, in part, that, “we… conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issues…[and] because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40). His list and Roulston’s (2010) work on qualitative
interviewing affirms that this type of qualitative study was necessary to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs on the community college campus, since the research questions sought a deep understanding of those issues as they relate to a particular setting.

The following definition of qualitative research further highlights the appropriateness of this approach for this particular study,

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations… qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4)

Merriam (2009) iterated that in qualitative research, researchers are not attempting to predict, replicate, or hypothesize about some distribution but instead are attempting to discover the meaning of an experience for those engaged in it. She also acknowledged the difficulty in having one definition for this area of research given the breadth of intentionalities and methodologies associated with it. After offering multiple interpretations of qualitative research, she concluded that, “basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13).

Further justification for the appropriateness of a qualitative design is provided by Marshall and Rossman (2006) who noted that qualitative studies are necessary for
research that elicits multiple constructed realities, studied holistically; research that elicits tacit knowledge and subjective understandings and interpretations;… research that seeks to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds; research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations. (p. 53)

This is exactly the type of understandings that I hoped to gain by engaging in this project. These presumptions are reflective of the aforementioned research questions, which aim to get a real sense of the overall nature of collaboration in the community college setting. Specifically, this study used a qualitative case study design as a framework for the research design.

A case study approach is appropriate when the “research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases with a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). For this study, I examined the nature of collaboration within one community college system in the southern United States, separately and collectively reflecting upon three individual institutions within the system as well as the system as a whole. Thus, I created four distinct cases for a multiple case study approach. Yin (2009) further supported the use of case studies when research questions are seeking to understand the ‘how’ or ‘why,’ as is the situation with this particular research project.

What follows here is an exploration of my epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives as they relate to this study. Followed by a detailed explanation of the methods I used in data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Constructionism**

Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as,

the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings
and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

Since the inception of the term in the 1960s and through the development of this epistemological stance, constructionism has been under intense scrutiny. Pundits and non-subscribers have called it “radical and conservative; liberating, managerial, and oppressive; relativist, revisionist, and neo-objectivist; cancerous, pernicious, and pandemic; protean, faddish, trendy, and dull” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 3). Despite such criticisms, considerable constructionist work has been accomplished in a variety of disciplines, which have led to increased understandings of the world in which we operate and operationalize our own existence.

The movement away from hypothesis-driven, postpositivist inquiry to question-centered study that focuses on inductive findings that is at the root of constructionism is appropriate for my research given the in-depth understanding sought. “Constructionism is not subjectivism. It is curiosity, not conceit” (Crotty, 1998, p. 52). It is this curiosity about how individual players, settings, and conditions affect collaboration and impact the value-bound investigations of the research questions that led me to this epistemological stance. Constructionist researchers acknowledge that not only are the study participants a part of the understanding gained but that the researchers themselves bring experience, knowledge, values and their own positionality to the project (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

**Interpretivism**

Creswell (2007) defined the interpretivist theoretical perspective by saying that,

In this worldview [theoretical perspective], individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences… These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity
of views… Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. (p. 20)

Interpretivism, “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). This theoretical perspective is foundationally situated in the work of Max Weber who called for scholarship in the human sciences to be focused on understanding experiences and situations and less concerned with the positivist approach of explaining them (Crotty).

In a pragmatic sense, interpretivism indicates “those strategies… which interpret the meanings and actions of actors according to their own subjective frame of reference” (Williams, 2000, p. 210). Generally, then, the overall goal of interpretivist research is to understand the phenomenon being studied in the particular context it is being studied, through the lens of those being studied, as well as those doing the studying. This understanding of interpretivism supported the use of this theoretical model for this particular study as I attempted to understand the nature of collaboration in three particular settings as understood by those participating in the reality formed in those settings.

**Case Study**

Yin (2009) stated that one would use case study research when interested in the contextual conditions that might impact the phenomenon being studied. He further indicates that “case study as a research strategy comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 18). Stake (1998) argued a somewhat contradictory stance, saying, “case study is not a methodological
choice, but a choice of the object to be studied” (p. 86). Regardless of this difference, both agree in the value of investigating individual cases.

Stake (1998) operationalized several forms of case study research. This particular study will encompass an instrumental case study as well as collective case study as I seek to understand the larger issue of academic affairs and student affairs collaboration by investigating particular cases. Stake argued that in order to maximize learning from a case study,

the case is expected to be something that functions, that operates; the study is the observation of operations. There is something to be described and interpreted. The… case studies emphasize objective description and personalistic interpretation, a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena, and empathic representation of local settings – all blending (perhaps clumped) within a constructivist epistemology.

(p. 98)

Some research studies include multiple cases that are investigated, analyzed, and presented individually, as well as in comparison to each other (Stake, 2006). In order for such cross-analysis to occur the cases must be similar enough for comparison yet different enough to warrant that there inclusion is not overly similar to any other individual case. Stake (2006) purported that using multiple case study is beneficial when seeking to understand what he coins the “quintain.” He defined the concept as the overall understanding of a phenomenon by the investigation of its manifestation in particular cases. For this study then, the quintain was located in seeking to know the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units within community colleges by examining particular institutions.
While not all case study work is interpretivist, I did frame this particular study in that manner. Basic interpretivist inquiry is a very common form of qualitative research in the social sciences (Merriam, 2009). Researchers conducting this type of study are interested in how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences... In summary, all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings. (Merriam, 2008, p. 23)

In order to understand the nature of collaboration in these settings, collectively and individually, I needed to be able to examine the settings in an interpretive manner, as Merriam described it above. This added a richness and depth to the analysis available beyond the basic exploratory nature of traditional case study.

**Structure & Methods**

This project was an extension of the research agenda that began with my publishable paper. My goal was to follow-up on some of the recommendations for future research and to more deeply investigate the nature of collaboration in these settings. The purpose of this study, then, was to examine the experiences, influences, practices, and perceptions of academic affairs and student affairs professionals around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. This plan to build upon my earlier work (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming), included securing additional interviews and observations and then analyzing that data through the various strategies of discourse analysis, basic qualitative inquiry, and multiple case study research.
The following sections outline the specific methods used for this multiple case study, always accounting for the necessary flexibility to conduct qualitative research (Creswell, 2007).

**Sample Selection**

In order to most effectively gain data that would yield answers to the research questions, participants were chosen intentionally through purposeful sampling. Merriam (2002) stated that since, “qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 12). As indicated this study was an extension of previous work and so I revisited the same locations to collect additional data that will allow for greater analysis and understanding. In the original project, only chief academic and student affairs officers participated. For the current study, I engaged with other staff persons in those two functional areas in order to gain insight from a broader perspective. Specifically, interviewed individuals from each unit at the mid-level manager (dean/director) level at each institution. A total of 11 additional interviews were obtained (Appendix A).

Additionally, sites were chosen based on the desired goal of maximum variation, which is a strategy for diversifying sites or participants in a way that produces results that are applicable to a wider range of arenas (Merriam, 2002, 2009). For the original study and this one, the three sites were chosen based on diversity of size (small, medium, and large student body). Institution one is a small community college with approximately 1,949 credit students annually. It is located in a rural setting providing primary instruction in technical education arenas. Participants from this institution will be chosen from 4 academic deans and 3 student affairs directors. Institution two is a medium sized community college with approximately 6,295 credit students annually. Located in a semi-rural setting, the primary educational focus is on a mix of technical education
and liberal arts studies. This institution will provide 3 academic deans and 6 student affairs directors to choose from for this study. The last institution is considerably larger with 21,193 credit students annually and is located in a major metropolitan area. The educational focus of this institution is liberal arts training for the purpose of transfer to 4-year institutions. Participants from this college will be chosen from the 7 academic deans and 7 student affairs professionals employed at the institution.

In order to gain reentry to the sites, I contacted my initial participants and other offices for approval. Then, I randomly selected qualified participants form each division of each institution and emailed a request that they participate in the study. Face-to-face appointments for interviews were set up for data collection.

**Data Collection**

The main data collection method for this study was semistructured interviews. Interviews were conducted individually in order to gain a full understanding of the participant’s insight into the research questions guiding this study. “In a semistructured interview, the interviewer has a guide (with topic areas and questions) to provide some structure to the interview but there is freedom to vary the course of the interview based on the participant’s answers and the flow of the interview” (Cooper, 2009, p. 66).

In order to facilitate the interviews, a basic interview protocol was established (Appendix B). This protocol included an introductory statement used to begin each interview, as well as the questions that guided the interview. Questions were developed based on the larger research questions and included the following areas: Explain the nature of collaborations between student affairs and academic affairs at this institution. What is your role in these collaborations? What is
the role of the other administrators in these collaborations? Discuss the support that exists for such collaborations. Discuss the barriers or deterrents to such collaborations.

Interviews were recorded with the use of a digital audio recorder. These recordings served as a record of the conversation, along with my field notes. Creswell (2007) supported this practice, indicating that it is essential in order to accurately conduct analysis of the data. After each interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim to provide transcripts from which data analysis can be conducted. As previously indicated, a total of eleven additional interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted no longer than 70 minutes.

Observation was also employed as a method of data collection. While on site for the interviews, I observed the campus community, including physical space allocation in order to gain insights that were to enlighten some findings from the interviews. My primary interests during observations were focused on territoriality as framed by Kuh, (2010). He noted that understanding who has actual or perceived control over particular spaces is helping in understanding underlying power dynamics. I was interested in seeing where collaborative engagements occur and which division controls those spaces. Such investigations into who controls space, what cross promotion of activities are present in spaces of control, and where on campus particular offices are located are also supported by the work of Strange and Banning (2001). As suggested by Cresswell (2007), I develop descriptive and reflective notes both while in the setting, as well as upon departure. This allowed me to capture initial facts about the campuses, as well as more thoughtful observations about how those facts could impact collaborative relationships.
Data Analysis

While the overall design of this study was a multiple case study, data will be analyzed in a variety of ways based on the research questions. The goal of this design was to produce three publishable manuscripts, one framed for each research question using multiple case study design and a particular analytic method. The first article addressed the first research question through discourse analysis. The second article used a basic interprevitist approach to understand the second research question. The final research question was addressed in an article framed as a multiple case study analysis. Below is an overview of the various data analysis techniques that employed in this manuscript-style dissertation.

Discourse Analysis. In my first article, in which I responded to the first research question, I employed discourse analysis methods. Discourse analysis has a strong tie to constructionist epistemological stances and considerations (Nikander, 2008). Discussions of discourse analysis are intrinsically tied to discussions of ideology, both fundamentally indicating that the world is defined through hegemonic understandings based on referential and interactive conditions of individual and collective existence (Mills, 2004; Purvis & Hunt, 1993). Purvis and Hunt frame the concepts of ideology and discourse by saying that it is,

the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved; a conception of the social that has a hermeneutic dimension, but which is not reducible to hermeneutics. This consciousness is borne through language and other systems of signs, it is transmitted between people and institutions and, perhaps most important of all, it makes a difference; that is the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. (p. 474)
While both ideology and discourse are linked to Marxist views, discourse is also informed by Foucauldian understandings of power. “For Foucault, all knowledge is determined by a combination of social, institutional and discursive pressures, and theoretical knowledge is no exception” (Mills, 2004, p. 29). Discourse analysis, in this sense is used to gain understandings of how language, commentary, and rhetoric provide insight into development of common realities. Within discourse analysis some scholars prefer to take a descriptive, linguistic approach to this understanding and other a more critical or cultural approach. For the purposes of this study, the critical analysis as argued by Gee (2011) was key;

All discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is… political. I have argued that any use of language gains its meaning from the “game” or practice of which it is a part and which is enacting. I have argued, as well, that all such “games” or practices inherently involve potential social goods and the distribution of social goods… Beyond this general point, language is a key way we humans make and break our world, our institutions, and our relationships through how we deal with social goods. Thus, discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world. (p. 9)

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) suggested that the first phase of discourse analysis is gaining a deep familiarity with the data. I followed this instruction as well as their second suggestion that a good way of,

building an impression of the nature of a text is to compare it with other texts. The strategy of comparison is based theoretically on the structuralist point that a statement always gains its meaning through being different from something else which has been said or could have been said. (p. 149)
Based on this, I not only compared the interviews with various participants from within the same institutions but then collectively among the institutions, individually and as a group. All the while, I was looking critically, as Gee (2011) suggested, at how the participants, settings, and cases define collaboration, as well as how that definition came into being and was perpetuated. This analysis was key in anchoring this study to such critical interpretations while understanding the individual cases; going beyond strictly representative forms of scholarship.

**Basic Interpretive Inquiry.** For the second article, focusing on research question number two, the main method of analysis followed an interpretive qualitative design.

“Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 154). This was the goal for this article, to investigate the overall nature of collaboration in the community college setting. Given that this topic has not been addressed within this setting, in a qualitative manner, some general findings can move the body of knowledge to a place where other scholars can indulge in more in-depth projects. Merriam (2002) indicated that in the basic interpretive projects, such as this one, “the analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns (presented as categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data” (p. 38). In other words, the data were reviewed in an attempt to find commonalities and contradictions between the participants, as well as patterns associated with their positions and institutional type. This constant comparative method is further supported by Schwandt (2001) who described this analysis as a multi-step process of coding and recoding based on similarities and trends found within and amongst individual interviews. Initial coding was done inductively, with the research question in mind, while being open to other findings. Then, the data codes were “(a) compared to one or more categories to determine its relevance
and (b) compared with other segments of data similarly categorized” (p. 30). In making such connections, meanings emerged from my interaction with the data.

This type of analysis is highly interpretive and relies heavily on the researcher’s ability to understand and extrapolate meaning from the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described the process the following way, situating the researcher as central mode of analysis:

The analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life… Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, the researcher engages the ideas and the data in significant intellectual work. (p. 158)

Focus of this article and this form of analysis were given to the research questions and their original intent: to examine the experiences, influences, and perceptions of chief student affairs and academic affairs officers around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Thus, the focus was on the larger case of the combined community colleges.

**Multiple Case Study.** The third article followed a multiple case study design in order to answer the final research question. Yin (2009) asserted that analyzing case studies can be done in several ways based on the intended use of results. In this case, I analyzed the data by developing case descriptions informed by the original research questions in order to compare and contrast results. In doing so, I followed the suggestion of Stake (2006) when looking for naturalist generalizations within each case, as well as across them. I was always looking for categorical aggregation in which “the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (Creswell, 2007, p. 163).
Specifically, then, I built on the analytic practices and findings within the second article and analyzed the results from the individual cases to see where the results are similar or different from each other and from the overall findings. Analyzing the data, individually from each institution through the basic interpretive methods described above allowed me to paint a picture of the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units at each institution separately for ease of comparison. I was clear to frame the cases as these two units at each institution and not the entire institution itself.

I then took this a step further in order to enter a process of case study analysis that Yin (2009) referred to as explanation building. In this analytic method, patterns were found in the data within or amongst each case and then the researcher attempts to make some explanations of the similarities or differences of these patterns. This was an iterative process that was repeated for each of the multiple cases before being analyzed across the cases. Yin suggested that as a practical matter, when analyzing cases, that:

First, your analysis should show that you attended to all the evidence… Second, your analysis should address, if possible, all major rival interpretations… Third, your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your case study… Fourth you should use your own prior, expert knowledge in your case study. (p. 138)

The employment of this analytic technique allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units within each institution, comparatively and collectively.

Validity and Reliability

I feel that I must address my own subjectivities as they related to this project. This is especially true given my interpretivist orientation and my closeness to the topic. Having worked
in the community college setting for 9 years and having had primary responsibility for partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs units, I was in a unique position to conduct this study. This position had both positive, as well as the possibility of negative consequences on the overall research. It is certainly possible that I could have focused my research and findings on my personal feelings about collaboration and thus, have missed the true essence of the findings. By being aware and open about the possibility of interpreting the findings through the lens of my own experience I attempted to keep me from doing so to some extent. Further, it is important that I acknowledge the potential bias caused by my immersion in the research itself. Having spent considerable time involved in examining the literature that exists on collaborations in general and as they relate to academic and student affairs, it is only fair to assume that, not only have I gained a better understanding of the research that exists on the topic but also created opinions and assumptions based on these studies. So, in order to facilitate solid and ethical research, I employed techniques associated with validity and reliability.

Trustworthiness regarding data collection, analysis, and reporting is central to a quality and ethically sound research project (Merriam, 2002). Patton (1990) noted, “the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 11). Bound in the discussions of validity and reliability is the intentional means by which the researcher must address ways to make sure that the research is both valid and reliable. For this study, I employed several methods for ensuring validity and reliability: member checks and audit trails. Member checks allowed me to be sure that I was accurately deriving findings by going back to the participants and having them review those findings. Additionally, I employed the use of an audit trail; keeping research notes of “how data
were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27) throughout the research process. This allowed others (and myself) to follow my logic should questions arise.
CHAPTER 4

COLLABORATION DEFINED (?): A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTINGS

1 Gulley, N. Y. To be submitted to Community College Review
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units in the community college context from a qualitative perspective. Specifically, how do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units? In order to investigate this question, a discourse analysis was used to explore the ways in which collaborative practice was discussed and understood by chief and mid-level academic and student affairs practitioners in three different community college settings. Participants valued formalized and ongoing collaborations as the most beneficial type of collaboration. However, they were most often practicing collaboration as an informal engagement for the purpose of individual student success. By using their actual practice and desired practice to understand collaboration in this setting, this article offers a definition for academic and student affairs collaboration that has been absent from most literature on the topic.
Introduction

Collaboration between academic and student affairs units has been a much researched topic over the past several decades (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Magolda, 2005; Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, Wells, & Whitt, 2007). A review of the literature on the topic reveals that the vast majority of studies have been conducted at traditional research intensive institutions employing quantitative methodologies representing, primarily the voices of the chief officers of the academic and student affairs units and focused on examining and offering best practices (Amey, 2010; Astin, 1996; Dale & Drake, 2005; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). When reviewing this literature I was immediately struck by the lack of diversity in terms of methodology and sample. Having a background in community college settings and being a middle-level manager in student affairs, and a qualitative researcher, I went back to the literature to search for representation of my experiences (as well as those with similar backgrounds) in these studies. I wanted to understand the experiences of those working in community colleges and smaller institutions. Not finding the answers to the questions I had, I conducted a preliminary study on how chief officers of these units in community colleges understand and operationalize collaboration between the units (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming). As is often the case with research studies, I was left with more questions than answers and conducted more research to understand the very nature of this form of collaboration in the community college settings.

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units in the community college context from a qualitative perspective. Specifically, how do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college
settings define and discuss collaboration between their units? In this, I am less interested in how they actually collaborate than how they talk about it and how that impacts their actual collaborative endeavors.

**Review of Literature**

Two areas of literature on collaboration between academic and student affairs help to guide this study. The first is literature on the various aspects of collaboration that offer definitions of collaborative practice. The second is literature specific to collaboration as practiced in the community college setting.

**Collaboration (Un)Defined**

Even with the significant amount of scholarship that exists on academic affairs and student affairs collaboration, there has been little success in creating a definition of what the term ‘collaboration’ actually means in these settings, though some have attempted to do so (Amey, 2006; Gray, 1989; Glaser, 2005; McGowan, 1990; Slater, 1996; Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009; Wood & Gray, 1991). In order to determine a definition, terms such as networking, teamwork, partnerships, and coordination are often used as touchstones of similarity and difference as they relate to collaboration (Amey, 2006). Despite a variety of efforts, no one definition of collaboration has emerged and those that have been put forth have not addressed the particular uniqueness of the community college setting. This lack of consistent understanding presents difficulty in understanding how collaborative relationships manifest themselves. The following is a discussion of some of the literature that attempts to address the issue of defining collaboration.

Wood and Gray (1991) made an attempt to develop a common theoretical understanding of collaboration and in doing so, challenged other scholars to clearly define collaboration when
investigating the phenomenon. They purported that, “collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (p. 146). While their definition was not adopted by all scholars, their call for others to conceptualize the term ‘collaboration’ when studying the phenomenon was heard by many. Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) built on this work, indicating that scholarship around collaboration lacks coherence of definition, especially across disciplines. They stated that,

although multiple conceptualizations of collaboration add richness to the research, they often impede its rigor and cumulativeness. To put it simply, lack of consensus among scholars on the meaning of collaboration makes it difficult to compare findings across studies and to know whether what is measured is really collaboration. (p. 23)

Herein lies a problem: If there is not consistency in term usage, it is difficult to come up with scholarship that is consistently helpful across settings. In order to assist with this dilemma these authors offered a definition of collaboration that drew on literature from organizational development, organizational behavior, and business; addressing what they found to be five components of collaboration: governance, administration, mutuality, norms, and organizational autonomy.

Some scholars approach collaboration as a reactive response to crisis (Gray, 1989; Glaser, 2005). In this sense collaboration is seen as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989, p. 5). Other scholars take a more positive approach, indicating that collaboration comes from a place of intentional growth and sustains itself as a change agent without necessarily being rooted in problem-solving
(Slater, 1996). While investigating collaborations between a college of education and a local school district, Slater indicated that collaboration is “culture creating and constructivist;... The need to work together is driven by the knowledge that what can be accomplished is more than that which is produced separately, making the results synergistic” (p. 29). By this way of thinking, collaboration is intentional and systematic and in a successful collaboration, a new product or success is accomplished that neither party could have achieved without the impact of the other.

Other scholars have not offered direct definitions but discussed aspects of collaboration which help to identify aspects of collaborative relationships. McGowan (1990) did not necessarily offer a definition of collaboration but he did offer nine elements that should consciously exist for any collaboration to flourish: time, perks or payoffs, administrative support, a core group, collegiality, a mission, a model, training, a sense of reality. Also at question is the reason for collaboration. Walsh and Kahn (2009) indicated that the benefits of collaborating as “more effective working; improved outputs, produced more quickly and more efficiently; and shared ideas and shared effort... Collaboration offers huge scope for delivering cost savings and efficiencies” (p. 4). They noted, however, that in some instances the process of collaboration is just as important as the collaboration itself. This claim is echoed by Amey (2010) who states, “partnerships are often more important for the relationships they facilitate, the values they symbolize, and the political alliances that can be banked for future use than for the measurable outputs they produce, especially in the short run” (p. 15). By this token the process of collaboration includes interwoven factors summarized by differentiation between formal and informal partnerships. Amey purported that formal partnerships are more structured and
mandated by supervisors, or outside regulatory agencies through grants or bureaucratic authority while, informal partnerships are less regulated.

Another study that has attempted to understand the concept of collaboration as it relates to academic and student affairs, while getting to the root of a definition was conducted by Richard Mullendore and myself (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming). It was difficult to determine a definition of collaboration but, “from the data collected, it is clear that the participants see collaboration as committees, meetings, and consultation with those in other units in order to gain multiple inputs with the desired outcome of student success” (Forthcoming).

This study, which focused on the experiences of chief academic and student affairs officers in community college settings, found that other than committee work, collaboration between the units mainly occurred in informal ways such as phone calls and impromptu meetings regarding individual student needs. Collaboration, in this sense, was reactive and built on the personal relationships of those engaging in it.

The factors that hinder collaboration can also give insight to what collaboration actually means in the higher education setting. Several studies have explored such barriers and the ways to overcome them (Astin, 1996; Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). When investigating the literature on how academic and students affairs units partner to create successful learning environments, Bourassa & Kruger (2002) noted that one theme of the literature is that, “the obstacles and opportunities are still largely enmeshed in the necessity of each entity to deepen their understanding of the other’s culture” (p. 13). Building on and echoing this work, Gulley & Mullendore (Forthcoming) found that the, “The primary
hindrances to collaboration discussed by participants are time constraints and a lack of knowledge regarding decision-making factors of the other units.”

**Community College Settings**

Though much has been written about collaborations between academic and student affairs, the literature that exists has, until recently, had little to say about those collaborations in the context of community colleges. Bourassa and Kruger (2002) noted this gap in the literature and called for more research in this area. The lack of literature on this topic within the community college arena is not surprising given the divide between the community college system and the larger research institutions that often conduct such research. Levinson (2005) noted that the rise of research-focused institutions not only changed the nature of community colleges but the way they were perceived as well. He pointed out that research institutions are often insular in areas of scope, including educational research. This, then, is a way of understanding why so little research has been conducted in the community college setting on a variety of topics, including the collaborations in question as part of this study.

A few studies have been conducted which investigated collaboration in the community college setting. The first of these studies being the work of Craig Kolins in 1999 which earned the NASPA Dissertation of the Year Award in 2000. In this work, Kolins investigated the perceptions of chief academic affairs officers and chief student affairs officers at two-year public institutions as they related to collaborations of those two divisions. Another study that addressed the community college perspective on this topic was published by Kezar (2002). This work included several types of institutions in its sample but had some interesting findings around the particular nature of collaboration at community colleges. The most significant of these findings
was that community colleges had fewer structural obstacles to collaboration than any other institution type (Kezar, 2002).

In 2004, Mary Lou Kennedy began to answer part of the call to include community colleges in research projects with the publication of her dissertation. Kennedy explored what chief student and academic affairs professionals saw as the most important variables when engaging in collaboration at the community college campus. She found that, “collaboration by institutional leaders, positive personal relationships among Chief Academic and Chief Student Affairs Officers, and Student Affairs personnel taking the lead in initiating collaborative activities are three areas for community college administrators interested in promoting collaboration to consider” (Kennedy, 2004, p. iii).

In more recent years the collaborations in community college settings have been gaining interest, with more articles being published on the topic. However these articles typically lack any form of empirical originality, relying instead on the work of others to promote what are framed as best practices (Amey, 2010; Dale & Drake, 2005; Frost & Associates, 2010). These scholars have, primarily, reframed research conducted in other settings to posit suggestions for practice in community college settings. Such suggestions may not be applicable given that the research informing the suggestions is situated in such vastly different contexts.

Given the lack of agreed upon definition for collaboration and the absence of substantial research on academic affairs and student affairs collaboration in the community college setting, this study sought to conceptualize the meaning of collaboration in that setting.

**Research Design and Methods**

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning(s) of collaboration as a term and concept in reference to the academic and student affairs settings of community colleges. Given
the lack of a solid definition of the term and the difficulty in understanding the nature of collaboration without first understanding what collaboration is within these settings, I set out to understand how participants conceptualize the term. Further hindering scholarly progress on the topic of academic and student affairs collaboration is the difficulty of comparing studies on the topic because of a lack of terminological understanding. In order to explore this, I employed a qualitative research methodology known as critical discourse analysis. By conducting a critical discourse analysis, I was able to compare how participants discussed collaboration with how they defined it and how their discourse informed their practice and how their practice informed their discourse.

To understand the nature of discourse analysis it is important to understand the nature of discourse or to at least define this term. And as is often the case in issues of scholarship, this is not a simple task as a variety of theorists, scholars, and academicians have defined discourse differently. In a general sense “‘discourse’ is use of language seen as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 7). Discourse encompasses individual statements, the meaning of several statements, and the collective meaning of all statements (Foucault, 1972). It is how people say what they say, as well as what they are actually saying. Further, “discourses do not merely reflect reality… Without discourses, there would be no reality” (Jager & Maier, 2009, p. 36).

Discourse analysis has a strong tie to constructionist epistemological stances and considerations (Nikander, 2008). Discussions of discourse analysis are intrinsically tied to discussions of ideology, both fundamentally indicating that the world is defined through hegemonic understandings based on referential and interactive conditions of individual and collective existence (Mills, 2004; Purvis & Hunt, 1993). Purvis and Hunt frame the concepts of ideology and discourse by saying that discourse is,
the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved; a conception of the social that has a hermeneutic dimension, but which is not reducible to hermeneutics. This consciousness is borne through language and other systems of signs, it is transmitted between people and institutions and, perhaps most important of all, *it makes a difference*; that is the way in which people comprehend and make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction. (p. 474)

I have also used Foucauldian understandings of power to inform this study. Foucault posited that power is inherent in all interactions and relationships and that it should be understood as not necessarily positive or negative but investigated for its role in such interactions and relationships. “For Foucault, all knowledge is determined by a combination of social, institutional and discursive pressures, and theoretical knowledge is no exception” (Mills, 2004, p. 29). Discourse analysis, in this sense is used to gain understandings of how language, commentary, and rhetoric provide insight into development of common realities. Put another way, discourse analysis attempts to dismantle what we know about a subject by examining how rhetorical practices of others and ourselves (intentional or otherwise) have contributed to that understanding and continue to perpetuate or alter that reality. Within discourse analysis some scholars prefer to take a descriptive, linguistic approach to this understanding and others a more critical or cultural approach. I am most drawn to these critical forms of analysis because of my own bent toward Foucauldian interpretations of power and politics, as well as the ability of such critical forms of analysis to break through assumptions about topics and to really understand what is happening in particular settings. Given the research question guiding this study and the desire to fully understand the nature of collaboration, such a critical lens was appropriate. Within
the context of critical discourse analysis various scholars take a variety of stances on the purpose of such analysis. Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak are both prolific scholars engaged in critical discourse analysis and write about it as a methodology. Critical discourse analysts are also interested in understanding how discourse serves to dominate others and use this methodology to seek ways to emancipate the dominated (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

For the purposes of this study, I have employed the strategies associated with critical discourse analysis as conceptualized by Gee. Gee has been a prolific scholar in the area of discourse analysis and has sometimes been faulted for not being as critical as other theorists in this area. However, his later work introduces a more critical lens, borrowing on the work of some of the aforementioned scholars. Gee (2011a) argued fundamentally there has not be a difference between discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, saying that;

All discourse analysis needs to be critical, not because discourse analysts are or need to be political, but because language itself is… political. I have argued that any use of language gains its meaning from the “game” or practice of which it is a part and which is enacting. I have argued, as well, that all such “games” or practices inherently involve potential social goods and the distribution of social goods… Beyond this general point, language is a key way we humans make and break our world, our institutions, and our relationships through how we deal with social goods. Thus, discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world. (p. 9)

In this way, critical discourse analysis does not necessarily seek to be justice oriented but to offer descriptive understandings of how the contextualized discourse develops and maintains relationships and situations where power is present.
Just as there are a variety of theoretical approaches to understanding critical discourse analysis, there are a number of analytic methods for conducting this form of analysis. Gee (2011b) noted that each theoretical perspective on the topic has its own methodological tenets and that ultimately a researcher’s particular research questions and data will determine the methods of analysis. He argued that researchers must situate themselves theoretically and methodologically but because of the overlap in the tools of analysis within the larger context of critical discourse analysis, these two items are not exclusively tied.

**Study Format**

From the data of a preliminary study (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming), which offered initial understandings of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community college settings, it became clear that more research needed to be done in this area. Based on this study, a need to understand the nature of collaboration as experienced by and known to those practicing it in the community college setting was evident. In order to further this line of inquiry, a case study project was designed and implemented in a way that allowed the data to be collected, analyzed, and interpreted in a number of ways based on overarching research questions, including through critical discourse analysis. Data for the initial study came from interviews with chief academic affairs and student affairs officers in three distinct community colleges (distinct by size) within the same collegiate system. In order to strategically enrich the data from the preliminary study, I added data from semi-structured interviews with mid-level administrators in the two divisions. In total, 17 interviews were conducted: three with chief academic affairs officers, three with chief student affairs officers, six with mid-level academic affairs managers, five with mid-level student affairs managers.
Analytic Method

For this analysis, I am primarily employing the analytic tools for critical discourse analysis as outlined by Gee (2011b) but also engaging with other scholars’ practices, as well as my own understandings of process.

Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) suggested that the first phase of discourse analysis is gaining a deep familiarity with the data. I followed this instruction as well as their second suggestion that a good way of,

building an impression of the nature of a text is to compare it with other texts. The strategy of comparison is based theoretically on the structuralist point that a statement always gains its meaning through being different from something else which has been said or could have been said. (p. 149)

Based on this, I have compared the interviews of all participants from within each institution, I then compared interviews across institutional type, creating a comparative case study using critical discourse analysis. I looked critically, as Gee (2011a) suggested, at how the participants and settings define collaboration, as well as how that definition came into being and is perpetuated. I am interested in not only the forms that collaboration takes in the setting, as described by the participants, but how they conceptualize the actual concept of collaboration.

This analysis of text and context is key to going beyond strictly representative forms of scholarship.

I have employed two specific approaches to discourse analysis that Gee (2011b) outlines; the first being the situated meaning tool and the second being the intertextuality tool. Both of these are categorized by Gee as theoretical tools.
The Situated Meaning Tool tells us to ask what words and phrases mean in specific contexts… we want to be on the watch for cases where words and phrases are being given situated meanings that are nuanced and quite specific to the speaker’s worldview or values or to the special qualities of the context the speaker is assuming and helping to construe or create. (p. 154)

Using the situated meaning tool is about attempting to understand the meaning of words used by not just the context of their use but the assumption of the speaker that the listener will understand. It is not enough to simply “fill-in” the definition by how the word was used but the researcher must look to himself to see why the speaker chose to express the idea in those terms to the researcher and not in some other phrasing. For example, one of my participants, Dean, a mid-level student affairs practitioner talked about how he defined collaboration in the setting and one of the ways he framed it was by saying, “anytime a group of people, two people, could get together and have a positive outcome, you’ve met your collaboration.” When using the situated meaning tool, I asked many questions about the use of the phrase positive outcomes. That may seem like a base enough phrase but how does this participant define positive outcome and could that be differently from how I define that or how other participants do? Looking at the rest of the interview for clues helps to situate that meaning and why he chose to express this as a part of his understanding of collaboration.

The intertextuality tool helps the researcher to understand the meaning generated when one person refers to something someone else has said or to another text. This reference can often take the place of a direct quote but could also be a general sense of how another individual or text has or would contextualize something. Sometimes, such references are done through the use of mimicry. Gee (2011b) stated the following about using the intertextuality tool,
For any communication, ask how words are grammatical structures (e.g. direct or indirect quotation) are used to quote, refer to, or allude to other ‘texts’ (that is, what others have said or written) or other styles of language (social languages). Does intertextuality go so far as to be an example of mixing or switching between voice or styles of language (social languages)? (p. 166)

For example, one of the chief academic affairs officers, Bill, was discussing times that his area partners with student affairs around course registration and curriculum. He told a story about working advisors from student affairs to understand the difference between two courses, saying, “Even if they say, ‘well one’s for credit and one’s non credit’- and that distinction maybe doesn't mean anything. And sometimes we get into, we don't ask them the question that we should be asking them which is you know ‘what do you want.’” He has quoted, however, indirectly the student affairs practitioners, as well as his own colleagues that as a researcher using the intertextuality tool, I must examine the ways that he has represented others in his own speech. Does he represent them strictly factually or with judgement? Answering such questions helps me to get at the root of his feelings about the collaborative relationship.

For this project, I reviewed transcripts using both tools and then generated findings around the analysis. Special attention was paid to participants’ discourse around the conceptualization of collaboration in the setting. This structure of analysis was adopted in order to examine how participants’ discourse shapes their realities around collaboration, as well as how their realities shape their discourse. Intentionally engaging with questions of intent, extent, and reality through critical analysis of discourse, allowed me to go beyond a simple thematic analysis to better understand the subtleties of meaning at play in these settings.
As with most techniques, the ones employed for this discourse analysis have both strengths and limitations. The primary strength of the analysis as it contributed to this article is the way that such analytic practice led to my ability to get beyond an understanding of what the participants said but what that meant. It was helpful to gain meaning from the words used and not always take those words at face value. The difficulty of using such techniques is that interpretation of language and meaning necessitates interpretation by the researcher at a level that can be uncomfortable given our current understandings of reliability and validity.

Findings and Analysis

What follows is a representation of findings, organized by themes in the analysis of the data. The section is organized around the research question guiding the study, which (to reiterate) is ‘how do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units?’ This question is addressed through discussions of what constitutes collaboration in practice, what defines collaboration in theory, and where the (dis)connections between practice and theory exist. A discussion of the impact of position and power dynamics is also included here. It is important to note that while there were differences in the ways that these areas of focus were experienced at each of the three institutions, for the purposes of his article those experiences are taken collectively. This collective approach to analysis and presentation is important as part of the intent of this particular research question is to understand the community college experience as a whole as it might be similar or different to the current literature, based in traditional, four-year settings. For more on the similarities and differences among the three institutions participating in this study, see the comparative case study written on this topic (Gulley, in process).  

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2 This citation reflects the third article in this dissertation.
Collaboration in Practice

From the interviews, it was very clear to see the ways in which collaboration was taking place between the academic and student affairs units. For both sides, these included: formal and informal phone conversations and face-to-face interactions, and formal committee meetings. Participants indicated that the first two of these interactions were generally reactive to student needs and fostered by a desire to resolve some student issue. The committee meetings, however, were framed as intentional gatherings in order to facilitate collaborative engagements for future planning and big picture endeavors.

One mid-level academic affairs administrator, Jane, stated that,
First of all it’s not on a daily basis; it’s more of as a needed basis… I don’t talk to them on a regular basis unless there’s a student issue. And that’s primarily what it’s about, a student, you know, that may be having trouble in the classroom or students that’s concerned about one of my instructors or has gone over there and complained. Yeah, you know, because they don’t know the chain of command.

The chief student affairs officer at the same institution, Gary, also discussed this issue. He noted that when a student brings up a concern about the other division, he picks up the phone to discuss the student concern with his contemporaries, further explaining that,
in student affairs we hear from students about a lot of faculty, we know a whole lot about some people based on what we hear. We recognize some of it is--in some cases, students’ displeasure, and their frustrations with--they didn't get something done on a form the way they should have. But over time you start to develop patterns and come to believe that certain things may not be as exaggerated as some make it out to be, but certain smoke--fire where there’s smoke sometimes. And that’s a fine line sometimes that I find is to try
to communicate certain negatives about faculty—that’s [the academic affairs officer’s] turf, that’s her responsibility, only on some level is it my concern. But at the same time you don't always know what she knows and she may or may not have knowledge of certain things.

These two excerpts highlight, not only that collaboration between the units is informal by practice but that it can be troublesome as practitioners walk a line of turf sensitivity and perspective empathy. It is interesting to note that the student affairs officer, Gary, states that it is a fine line to discuss the difficulties students have with faculty and assuming that the students are accurate in their characterization of faculty. He indicates, however, that while wanting to support his colleagues, he errs on the side of caution and of validating the students’ claims by noting the adage, ‘where there’s smoke, there’s fire.’ How, then, does the academic affairs practitioner take this taking of the students side of an issue without fully vetting the evidence? Jane noted that these are the times that student affairs approaches her for collaboration; when there is an issue. I gather that she does not enjoy that the students confide such concerns in student affairs, given her tone when stating that they must do so because they do not know the ‘chain of command.’ Here, she is implying that student affairs has no real power to help the situation but can only relay the messages.

However, it is the relaying of messages that seems to be at the root of most of the collaborative practice highlighted by participants. By this, I mean that these participants did not necessarily discuss collaboration as ongoing, long-term, and programmatic engagements but as communicating on particular issues in the short-term. Even the reverse of the above situation is true. For example, one chief academic affairs officer, Allison, told a story of having students enter her office in tears because their financial aid was short and they needed tuition funds. This
administrator recognized that the student had come to the wrong place to get assistance for this but felt obligated to assist them, saying, “I call them up and say ‘look 40 bucks--I got 20, you got 20?’ —That’s the kind of collaboration we have and I think that’s the kind of relationship that we have built.” So, collaboration in this sense was about problem solving for a student and communicating with colleagues in the other division for that purpose. It was a one-time connection for a specific reason. When comparing this story with the one presented earlier it is interesting to note in her rhetoric that she indicates that she offers a solution to the student affairs problem whereas the student affairs officers are more careful with their language of suggesting student concerns about the other division may or may not be their territory. The academic affairs person accepts the problem without such caution of understanding it.

Beyond these informal collaborations, participants discussed that more formal collaborative practice occurred during committee meetings, which bring both divisions to the table. Further, while participants did not directly state that their informal telephone calls, emails, and walk-in meetings were problematic, they did indicate a sense of urgency and hectic-ness about them, whereas they indicated that the planned meetings were more productive long-term. One of the mid-level student affairs managers, Barbara, discussed that committee work with those in the academic affairs division was rewarding for both sides because it was easy to see the impact of the work on the larger institution through the relationships built and sense of collegiality gained through such experiences. She noted that because other collaborative efforts were often problem based that working on longitudinal projects and committees brought out the best in people as they formed relationships that would extend their practice beyond the committee work and into the every day. She shared a story of how one of her academic affairs colleagues was often unengaged until serving on such a committee, saying
So that committee work clicked with him and got him to a level of involvement that he hadn't been involved in before. So I think that's a good thing. And when you have positives in that kind of committee work, that carries over into your other jobs. You know that same faculty member who might be someone who otherwise stays fairly disconnected is then more likely to ask questions about how do I withdraw the student or how do I this or how do I fix this or how that -- it just fosters communication and collaboration in general because you serve on that committee together.

One of the mid-level academic affairs officers also noted that committee work was a common form of collaboration between the two units. He also had positive things to say about the indirect outcomes that committee work had on engaging those within the institution while introducing them to other individuals on campus. He stated,

So, I think that familiarity eases the process [of collaboration] quite a bit and we get a lot of that, because we have an awful lot of standing committees at this college and, of course, the committees are well represented with the various functional areas of the college. So, we have an opportunity to mix with the folks in the other functional areas… we get a chance to work with them, with the challenges and issues and become familiar.

Both of these participants, as well as others, indicated that committees were helpful in connecting on not only the issues at hand for the committees but for creating relationships for future collaborations, even the less formal.

**Collaboration in Theory**

Near the end of the interviews, after having discussed the collaboration between academic and student affairs at their institution at length, providing examples and telling stories, I asked participants to define collaboration for the academic / student affairs setting. Their
definitions were interesting. Definitions by those in both the academic and student affairs units tended to be focused on common goals and resources, and deliberate purposes. There were differences, however, in the tone of the language used by participants from each unit when defining collaboration. Participants from student affairs tended to define it by what it was not and often mentioned the challenges associated with it. The academic affairs participants usually framed their definitions in terms of the positive outcomes associated with such collaboration.

One of the mid-level student affairs practitioners, Barbara, was an exception to this trend. She defined collaboration by stating,

I see it as a deliberate attempt to cooperate in our planning, in our functioning, in our goal setting as to how our goals and their goals - where they intersect -- to meet as best we can in the needs of our students… It's got to be a united voice. You know, it's got to be united set of goals.

She notes that the overarching institutional goals and the individual divisional goals are not correctly aligned, that students are not well-served and may receive varied information from different areas of the campus, which is not helpful. She has focused on the problems that exist and not the good that can come of collaboration. For her the unification of goals is the primary function of collaboration. Such unification can, for her, lead to positive outcomes but her language is not based in those outcomes but in the struggle. It gives the sense that she believes collaboration to be a struggle.

Leslie, a mid-level academic affairs participant, noted that collaboration is, “sort of sitting down together, figuring out what needs to be done, what barriers have to be removed, you know, how to facilitate whatever needs to happen, what staff needs to be involved, you know, looking at timelines.” Here, she is focused on the negative barriers to collaboration and she went
on to talk about the troubles of working together but that collaboration helps to alleviate those troubles. The barriers she referred to were not the barriers to student success but barriers to collaborative practice.

To further emphasize this trend, another mid-level student affairs participant, Dean, offered the following definition. He indicated that collaboration in these settings was about working together to meet the student goals as well as the goals of each office, stating that, “Any time that a group of people, two people, can get together and have a positive outcome, you’ve met your collaboration.” This is a very positive definition in terms of language. He brings in only supportive language here and stays away from defining collaboration by how it might fail but how it succeeds. One of the academic affairs counterparts at the same institution, Megan, also offered up a definition that focused on meeting the goals of students but added that collaboration is about common mission. She provided a metaphor that collaboration was like getting on a bus with the driver being the central mission of the institution. Her analogy continued by stating that different members of the community may get on board but sit in different areas and not interact much depending on their role in meeting that mission. She stated that, “if we are all on that same bus, being driven by that same mission, then we are collaborating… how much we interacting we do can obviously impact how smoothly that goes or how quickly it happens.”

So, while participants offered definitions of collaboration, which tended to focus on common goal achievement, the way that they framed their definitions was different. The academic affairs practitioners tended to discuss collaboration from a deficit model, framing what collaboration is not in order to define what it is. Meanwhile the student affairs practitioners leaned toward painting more hopeful pictures of collaboration by discussing its possibilities and intrinsically positive attributes.
**Practice Versus Theory**

There were rather stark differences in the way that participants discussed collaboration and the ways in which they defined collaboration. When describing how they collaborated with the other division, participants most frequently discussed informal methods of resolving immediate student concerns, adding that assignments to cross-campus committees as an additional example of collaboration. When asked to define the term for their setting, participants painted a very different picture. Here, they noted that collaboration was intentional, goal-oriented, reciprocal, and planned. I asked participants what they had to say about them defining collaboration as intentional seemingly long-term focused but practiced collaboration as immediate short-term engagements. One of the mid-level student affairs practitioners, John, who had indicated earlier in the interview that he and his academic affairs colleagues collaborated well, defined collaboration as goal oriented and then upon evaluation of his practice felt unable to characterize their success at meeting that definition. He stated that since he couldn’t clearly define the goals and mission of the academic affairs division, nor could they define those of his area, then he couldn’t evaluate the success based on his definition. I would argue that his lack of ability to articulate the commonalities of the goals is a clear indication that they failed at meeting his definition of shared goal and shared goal achievement.

Other participants thought they did a marvelous job at collaborating based on the definition that they provided. These were usually individuals who had, for a variety of reasons, long-standing interpersonal relationships with their colleagues in the other division. In these cases, the definitions tended to not focus on divisional goals but institutional goals, often referred to as mission. One of the mid-level student affairs practitioners at another institution, Henry, noted that collaboration is, “whenever two or more groups are coming together for a common
goal, bringing their resources and expertise in, sharing them and willing to do the work that's necessary, willing to let others do the work that's necessary, willing to listen, to compromise.”

He went on to say that knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are, as well as those of the people you work with is a benefit to collaboration. His evaluation of their ability to accomplish collaboration effectively based on this definition was high and his examples throughout the interview supported that assertion. His language here is one that recognizes that each division has its expertise and that when working together people must allow others to do what they need to do in order to support the common good.

When asked about how they defined collaboration and then prompted to assess well they collaborate based on that definition, participants across the board were taken aback. In most cases participants had, throughout the interview, talked about how well they collaborated and how readily people within their institution entered into partnerships. When faced with evaluating their practices against their own definition, however, they were much less complimentary of their accomplishments around collaboration. Each participant who noted this difference indicated that seeing this disconnect, they would change their practice to be even more intentional about collaborative engagements.

**Power and Position**

As discussed in the previous section, relationships and discourse are laced with issues of power. The extent to which those power dynamics play out and affect given situations, however, is up for investigation. When analyzing the data for this project and against the themes presented above, I was struck to find very little of the negative power deferential that has been highlighted in the previous scholarship on academic and student affairs collaborations. In those cases, academic affairs practitioners are seen as having more institutional power and influence than
their student affairs counterparts. This has come from the traditional understanding of the academy and the valuing of classroom learning over other forms of student development. In the community college setting, though, participants did not allude to one division having more power than the other. They, in fact, were complimentary of each other and many used language that valued the work that was being done both in their own division and in the other one in question. I attribute this to the fact that these institutions were not managed by a faculty-of-governance model as is the case at many traditional, four-year institutions. In these settings the faculty and staff have the same level of rights when it comes to institutional decision-making. This leveling of the playing field helped drive collaborations that were mutually beneficial and equally entered into.

Positional authority did come into play in the sense that many participants felt that the push for collaborative practice came from the top down. One chief academic affairs officers, Allison, pointed this out when she talked about how the president of her institution supported partnerships both implicitly and explicitly. She said that people knew the administration was encouraging of collaborations because, “I think they see it as important--to the overall effectiveness of the institution.” She also discussed how much she encouraged her staff to collaborate across divisions without worrying about coming up the chain of command. She indicated that she trusted her people to partner where they needed to in order to accomplish their goals and that only in circumstances when something might become an issue did she need to be in the loop. This ability to reach across divisions with the support of the administration and without fear of being reprimanded for not following traditional organizational communication structures, allowed for greater collaboration between academic and student affairs divisions within these community colleges.
Conclusion

While there was not one singular way that all participants discussed or defined collaboration, there was certainly consistency of practice and definition. It is clear that collaboration for these participants was both informal and formal. Those informal collaborations, primarily, took place around particular student issues and with those individuals with whom the practitioner had built a relationship. The formal collaborations were more focused on long-term planning for institution-wide goal achievement. Consistency in how participants’ defined collaboration existed around their attributing goal focused work for a common good, for a positive outcome. Overall, the primary forms of collaboration occurring in these settings were informal one-on-one interactions based on the need to problem-solve a particular situation. These forms, however, were not highlighted by participants as optimal as they preferred to define collaboration as less chaotic partnerships that worked across individual problems to larger perspectives.

Based on these findings and my analysis, I submit the following working definition of collaboration in the settings. Collaboration between academic and student affairs in the community college setting exists when individuals from each side engage in dialogue and practice, formally or informally, in an effort to meet the overall institutional mission of assisting students. This definition is consistent with the assumptions that Bourassa and Kurger (2002) posited about collaboration in community colleges; that in these settings collaboration would occur more easily and consistently because of student focused orientation of such institutions.

My hope is that this definition can be used to further explore the practice of collaboration in the community college setting to gain a more full understanding of the practices that enable such collaboration to exist. Additionally, this definition could be used to better understand
existing literature and the nature of the discourses in play by those who participated in those studies. I would recommend that other scholars who are engaging in work around collaboration in other institutional settings work on defining the terminology for their settings as well. Practitioners in both academic and student affairs would be well served to give thought to how they understand collaboration and how their discourses can foster or impede such activities (most of my participants had not) in order to facilitate smooth collaborative relationships when advantageous to do so.

Given that this line of inquiry moves scholarship on collaborations between academic and student affairs units to focus on the nature of those particular settings, I challenge scholars to further investigate the collaborative nature of the mission-focused work of these units in community college settings. Researchers should investigate how institutional mission and divisional mission alignment contribute to collaborative engagements. It is imperative that research sites be expanded into community college settings, as well as other less investigated locations. Further, academic scholars and student affairs practitioners would do well to move this area of research forward by coming together to conduct research on the collaborative nature of the work of higher education as a whole in order to better understand not just the outcomes of such collaborations for students but the sociological and psychological impact on those participating in the collaborative endeavors. Such studies should include investigations into the role of organizational structure and power dynamics have on collaborative practice. By conducting such investigations, strategies for improving current collaborative climates or introducing collaborations into new areas could be developed.
References


CHAPTER 5

PROBLEM SOLVING PARTNERSHIPS: A BASIC INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY OF THE NATURE OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

3 Gulley, N. Y. To be submitted to *Journal of Community College Research and Practice*
Abstract

Through the use of basic interpretivist qualitative practices, the purpose of this study was to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units in the community college context from a qualitative perspective. That is to say that the aim was to examine the experiences, influences, and perceptions of mid-level and chief student affairs and academic affairs officers around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Based on this research with three institutions within a single community college setting, it was found that collaboration in the community college setting was most often based in practices around admissions, academic advising, and registration. Participants found collaboration to be fostered on their campuses and I found that this ease of collaboration comes, at least in part, from the participants clear understanding of how their particular role plays into the mission of their division as well as the mission of the institution.
“So for the relationships that worked really well, yes, there's a lot of sense of shared vision and shared responsibility toward the end result that we're striving for, which is I see as [students] completing and getting some type of credential.” – Keith, a mid-level student affairs officer

**Introduction**

While there has been and continues to be substantial scholarship focused on collaboration between academic and student affairs units in the academy, few have addressed those collaborations in the community college setting. Those who have studied such collaboration in this area are finding this setting informative (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Gulley & Mullendore, forthcoming). When synthesizing findings from various studies on collaboration between academic and student affairs units and writing up the findings of their own study on the topic, Bourassa and Kruger (2002) asserted that given the barriers to collaboration found in the literature, such partnerships might be more easily accomplished in the community college setting based on their smaller enrollments and more flat organizational structures. Encouraging research on the topic, they stated,

The entire higher education community should keep track of factors within the community college sector that cultivate successful partnerships that are easily adapted by either community colleges or four-year colleges and universities. For example, the community college sector is leading the way in the formation of strong, vibrant student and academic affairs partnerships as well as partnerships with external constituencies in the development and advancement of educational outcomes tied to service learning. (p. 15)

The lack of literature on this topic within the community college arena is not surprising given the divide between the community college system and the larger research institutions that
often conduct such research. Levinson (2005) noted that the rise of research-focused institutions not only changed the nature of community colleges but the way they were perceived as well. He pointed out that research institutions are often insular scope, including educational research, so it stands to reason that since the research institutions are the ones producing scholars who conduct the studies, those scholars tend to look at their own educational scenarios.

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units in the community college context from a qualitative perspective. That is to say that the aim was to examine the experiences, influences, and perceptions of mid-level and chief student affairs and academic affairs officers around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Building on the work of Gulley and Mullendore (forthcoming) on the nature of collaboration between these units, which focused on the voices of chief level officers, this project moves to include the perspective of the mid-level managers in these settings, as well as to expand the scope of exploration. Specifically, the research questions guiding the study were: how do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different?

**Review of Literature**

Collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units is a predominant topic in the higher education arena. It is frequently discussed in conference presentations, journal articles, news stories, professional organization monographs, and in other platforms (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Magolda, 2005; Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, Wells, & Whitt, 2007). Much of the scholarly research on the topic has been focused on naming best practices or defining barriers to collaboration so that those barriers might be avoided (Amey, 2010; Astin, 1996; Dale &
Drake, 2005; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). Significant amounts of the research on collaboration between academic and student affairs has been focused on the types of collaborations that are occurring (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Guarasci, 2002; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Larrey & Estanek, 1999; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Schuh, 1999; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994; Westfall, 1999). This literature review offers highlights of the current literature regarding collaborative endeavors between academic and student affairs units within the college and university setting, as well as insight into how each area of the literature have informed this study design and analysis.

I would like to begin by framing the review of this literature with a critical lens. While academic and student affairs collaborations have been a topic of much scholarship and interest in recent years, not everyone is convinced that such efforts are worth the reward. Magolda (2005) warned that partnerships, while potentially beneficial, should not be entered into lightly or without a strong purpose. He noted that because these partnerships bring together fundamentally different players, care must be taken to foster success. His conclusion simultaneously serves as a call to action and a warning:

In most instances, collaboration is virtuous; still, problematize collaboration and do not blindly accept it as good. Dialogues are essential, and these discussions must extend beyond discussing management techniques to include sociocultural and moral discourses. Partnerships must be meaningful, reciprocal, and responsive. Partners must strive to be cultural workers who have the capacity to understand the culture of others as well as their own culture. Simply getting along is insufficient. Partners must become more comfortable with difference and
conflict, recognizing that, in the end, avoiding conflict does more harm than good.

The goal in all of this is to approach these initiatives more cautiously, purposefully, and honestly. (p. 21)

Other scholars have also questioned the blind faith with which the academic community has been entering into collaborations between academic and student affairs divisions. Noting a lack of empirical data on the subject, Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, Wells, and Whitt (2007) conducted a research project to examine the actual outcomes of these collaborations for students. The results of their study indicated that there are four categories of student outcomes from academic and student affairs collaborations: acclimation to the institution, engagement, student learning, and academic and career decisions. “Results of this study support the exhortations of the effectiveness of academic and student affairs partnerships… Programs arising from collaboration between academic and student affairs units play an important role in helping institutions achieve desired outcomes for students” (p. 450). Kezar and Lester (2009), who are strong proponents of collaboration in the setting of higher education, even caution against over collaboration. They stated that, “there is nothing worse than people forcing collaboration on a situation that simply does not require it” (p. 8). These scholars caution that collaboration should be purposeful and entered into intentionally and thoughtfully. This being said, collaboration is certainly occurring in a number of ways.

For this study, I engage with the previous literature and current findings, critically, in order to most fully examine the actual reality of collaborative practice. I have been careful to not assume that any particular motivation for or form of collaboration is ‘good’ or ‘right’ but to understand the nature of such practices in the community college setting. Taking these scholars
warnings into account will also add to my ability to defend against my own subjectivities on the subject.

**Popular Forms of Collaboration**

The literature that exists on student and academic affairs collaboration can be divided into groups based on the types of goals those partnerships hope to accomplish. Current and historical collaborations have been focused around areas such as seamless learning environments, service learning, freshmen and first year experiences, faculty involvement in residence halls, and learning outcomes (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Jacoby, 1999; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994; Westfall, 1999). It is important to remember that this literature is predominantly based in research and assessment data collected in traditional, four-year institutions using quantitative methods.

Seamless learning environments have been the subject of several research projects and the recommendation of several publications as a method for how academic affairs and student affairs units can collaborate to enhance student learning (Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). Seamless learning is a concept that fosters connections between students in and out of class experiences in order to facilitate learning. “In a seamless learning environment, students will have opportunities for learning both in the classroom and out-of-the classroom through co-curricular activities. Students will work with and get to know faculty and staff while taking courses and participating in non-classroom learning activities” (Kellogg, 1999). In order for this to happen, planners must be intentional about coordinating the curriculum from both the student affairs and academic affairs perspective.
The concept of service learning encompasses programs and opportunities that foster students’ engagement with the community by addressing community needs while simultaneously supporting their learning (Jacoby, 1999). Jacoby goes on to note that for students the benefits of participation include the ability to think critically, understand civic engagement and responsibility, and develop problem-solving skills.

Service learning is an area that is often seen to be the start of collaboration on campuses. However, the form it takes can be viewed as one sided, as the student affairs partner is often seen as a resource used to help the academic affairs counterpart to achieve their goals. The structure is often designed so that student affairs manages a service learning center that faculty come to in order to have a service learning component created for their course. This may mean that there has not been full collaboration on the learning outcomes of that course. Many of the student affairs practitioners who are involved in such efforts report feeling less than equal to faculty, as they provide such services (Jacoby, 1999).

Freshmen and first-year experience programs have been noted as common places for collaboration to exist as the institution attempts to make connections with students as they enter the community in order to foster long term engagement and retention (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). The concept of first-year experiences being an integral part of creating a compelling situation for student learning is central to the call made in Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998). These collaborations often manifest as student and academic affairs professionals facilitate courses for freshmen in various interest areas.

Bourassa & Kruger (2002) indicated that, “the residential experience provides limitless opportunities for integrating the student academic experience with out-of-class experience” (11).
The literature points to several examples of such collaborations, including faculty-in-residence programs that promote faculty living in the residence halls with students. Other forms of residence hall based collaborations are brown-bag lunch series, which invite the faculty into residence halls along with student affairs practitioners to eat and share with students. Book clubs are also a way of connecting faculty, student affairs practitioners, and students in residence facilities. These types of programs are popular because of the ease of access to a captive audience.

The desire for institutions of higher education to create learning outcomes that are more meaningful for students has driven many of the collaborations between student and academic affairs. These collaborations have focused on curriculum development, educational assistance, and the reinforcing of instructional concepts outside of the classroom (Guarasci, 2002; Larrey & Estanek, 1999; Schroeder, 1999; Schuh, 1999). Guarasci (2002) noted that student success, “requires delicate work, carefully orchestrated to support students, placing learning at the center of campus life. Without an alliance for learning between academic and student affairs, the institutional commitment to student achievement remains disjointed…” (p. 101). All of the seminal documents mentioned earlier, Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1994), Reasonable Expectations (NASPA, 1995), Principles of Good Practice (NASPA, 1997), and Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998), note the focus for collaborations to be student learning.

The paradigm shift away from othering and toward collaborative and respectful partnerships involved a greater sense of professionalism on the part of the faculty member as well as the staff member. However, it took a creative approach from the student affairs professional to show the professor how the two cultures could be
integrated into an expanded learning environment. When both individuals saw that cooperation would lead to enhanced student learning they were able to create an academic environment that extended beyond the classroom. (Blake, 2007, p. 71)

While the push for developing learning outcomes is a stand-alone category of types of collaborations often seen on the college campus, it is also at the root of all of the other types mentioned above. It is at the crux of most literature that exists on the topic of student and academic affairs collaborations. The majority of scholars and practitioners that discuss these collaborations continually refer to them as an imperative for the creation and attainment of learning outcomes. Recalling the historical context for such collaborations, White (2002) recalled the intentionality needed to create opportunities for teamwork between the two units in order to foster learning outcomes.

After reviewing these forms of collaboration and given my own experiences as a student affairs practitioner in the community college setting, I was curious to know if collaborations in community colleges would be rooted in the same practices. I intentionally designed this study to look for such topics and to find out around what functions collaboration was occurring in the setting to determine similarities or differences with the current literature from traditional, four-year institutions.

**Best Practices and Barriers**

Much of the literature around issues of collaboration in student and academic affairs can also be divided into two sub-categories: the cultural attributes that foster strong collaborations, sometimes referred to as ‘best practices’, and the attributes that serve as traditional barriers to those collaborations. The literature that examines the ‘best practices’ is often framed as a guide for how to develop collaborations where they do not currently exist (Dale & Drake, 2005;
Eickmann, 1989; Hyman, 1995; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, Hirsch, & Burak, 2002; Kuh, 1996; Martin & Samels, 2002; Schuh, 1999). One example of these guides to success was developed by Martin and Samels (2002) as they described eight best practices, to build, or rebuild, a successful partnership: (1) be opportunistic, (2) control the budget, (3) capitalize on turnover, (4) avoid collisions of culture, (5) design links to ongoing institutional assessment initiatives, (6) get press, and then get more press, (7) develop board awareness and support, and (8) don’t become attached. (89)

Others have taken another approach to facilitating collaboration between these two units, suggesting that they actually merge into one functional area. Price (1999) notes that having student affairs report to chief academic officers encourages interaction between the various players and thus, “can be a catalyst for developing effective partnerships on a variety of worthwhile learning ventures, such as teaching, research, curriculum development, and creation of learning communities” (p. 76). Others, however, have stated that while such assertions are certainly possible outcomes of this form of reorganization, they are not typically the actual result. Mullendore (2006) noted that, “what should then be an incredible opportunity for academic affairs/student affairs collaboration, however, often becomes a reduction in status, authority and influence” (p. 65).

Even more prevalent than literature on the ways to successfully develop collaborations is the literature that addresses the barriers to doing so. Whether it be a case study, a synthesis of prior literature, a best practice piece, or a research study on factors that influence collaboration, a plethora of the published work around collaborations include some discussion of the barriers that exist to having such successful partnerships (Astin, 1996; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999).
These obstacles have primarily been seen as cultural differences, the historical separation between the formal curriculum and the informal curriculum, the perception of student affairs as an ancillary function to the academic mission, competing assumptions about the nature of student learning, and differential reward systems for faculty and student affairs professionals. (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002, p. 9)

As Bourassa and Kruger (2002) point out, many of the barriers to collaborative practice between academic and student affairs units have been based on cultural differences. As I read this and reflected upon what others have said about best practices and barriers to collaboration, it struck me that culture of the setting might also have an influence on the nature of collaboration. This thought helped to guide the design of this study and to frame the research question as I sought to understand the nature of collaboration in the community college setting and any unique aspects of the cultures of these institutions that may impact partnerships. If that culture did have an impact, what was it and what might that mean for other research in this area?

**Research Design & Methods**

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine the nature of academic and student affairs collaborations within the community college setting. In order to add to the literature on collaboration between these units in the higher education setting, this study aimed to gain understanding of the experiences, influences, and perceptions of collaboration from individuals working in each unit at the chief and middle management levels. The research question guiding this study was: How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different?
My interest in looking at multiple perceptions and experiences in order to understand the topic of academic affairs and student affairs collaboration within the specific context of community colleges situates this study within a constructionist epistemological position. Crotty (1998) indicated that constructionism is rooted in the assumption that “meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world… it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (p. 8). In direct correlation with this epistemological stance is my theoretical perspective as an interpretivist; thus allowing myself to make meaning of data by interpreting it in relation to my own experiences and background, as well as my interactions with the ways in which the data are collected (Creswell, 2007). Creswell outlined various reasons why a qualitative methodology may be the best fit to answer research questions where in depth analysis of participants’ experiences, beliefs, and practice is necessary. He indicated, in part, that, “we… conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issues…[and] because we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40). His list and Roulston’s (2010) work on qualitative interviewing affirms that this type of qualitative study is necessary to understand the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs on the community college campus, since the research question seeks a deep understanding of those issues as they relate to a particular setting.

Further justification for a qualitative approach comes from Merriam (2009), who iterated that in qualitative research, researchers are not attempting to predict, replicate, or hypothesize about some distribution but instead are attempting to discover the meaning of an experience for those engaged in it. She also acknowledged the difficulty in having one definition for this area of research given the breadth of intentionalities and methodologies associated with it. After offering
multiple interpretations of qualitative research, she concludes that, “basically, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13).

**Study Format**

Building on the earlier work of Gulley and Mullendore (Forthcoming), this study uses the original data set, as well as newly collected data to address the research question at hand. The original study consisted of six semi-structured interviews with a chief academic and chief student affairs officers at three different community colleges within the same governed system; one from each unit at each participating institution. For the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with mid-level managers in each unit from each of the same participating institutions. In all there were a total of 17 interviews conducted and analyzed.

**Analytic Method**

For this article, the main method of analysis followed an interpretive qualitative design. “Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 154). This was the goal for of this article, to investigate the overall nature of collaboration in the community college setting. Given that this topic has not been addressed within this setting, in a qualitative manner, some general findings can move the body of knowledge to a place where other scholars can indulge in more in-depth projects.

Merriam (2002) indicated that in the basic interpretive projects, such as this one, “the analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns (presented as categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data” (p. 38). In other words, the data were reviewed in an attempt to find commonalities and contradictions between the participants, as well as patterns associated with their positions. This constant comparative method is further supported by Schwandt (2001) who
described this analysis as a multi-step process of coding and recoding based on similarities and trends found within and amongst individual interviews. This type of analysis is highly interpretive and relies heavily on the researcher’s ability to understand and extrapolate meaning from the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described the process the following way, situating the researcher as central mode of analysis:

The analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life… Through questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework, the researcher engages the ideas and the data in significant intellectual work. (p. 158)

Initial coding was done inductively, with the research question in mind, while being open to other findings. Then, the data codes were “(a) compared to one or more categories to determine its relevance and (b) compared with other segments of data similarly categorized” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 30). In making such connections, themes were identified from my interaction with the data. These meanings/categories were then used to interpret the data via the interview transcripts.

**Findings & Discussion**

In the following section I present the findings of this study as well as present a discussion of those findings. These are organized as themes in order to best represent the findings as they address the core purpose of this project. These themes and corresponding discussion are framed in direct correlation to the research question: How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different? In response to this question the following
themes will be discussed: missional understanding, collaborative practice, and motivation for collaboration.

**Missional Understanding**

One of the most significant findings when conducting the initial study from which this project emerged was that the chief officers participating in the study had a strong sense of the mission of their division, as well as the mission of the other division in question (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming). Participants were well aware of how their units fit into the larger institutional missions, and thus were able to understand how what they and their contemporaries in other divisions did on a daily basis impacted the work of the overall institution. That participants described the mission of their counterparts’ division in the same way as those counterparts meant that everyone knew their purpose, as well as that of others. When analyzing the data for this larger study, this proved to be an even more prevalent finding. One chief academic affairs officer, Allison, praised the student affairs division of her institution for all of the work that they do to support, develop, and engage the students holistically. She pointed out that her own academic affairs division has a much more focused task – to instruct. When speaking about the mission of student affairs at her institution, she stated that, “I think they are trying to handle many more things and provide many more avenues for the student to have the total college experience whereas instruction to some degree is more narrow in scope.” Gary, a chief student affairs officer echoed the delineation of purpose between the two units. When asked to summarize the purpose of the academic affairs unit at his institution, he stated that, “I would say the overarching, of course is to deliver the academic programs and to give students what they need to get from that function so. We support that.”
These comments are antithetical to the traditional academic and student affairs divide as understood in other types of institutions; those relationships having been forged and perpetuated by competing missions and the vying for control of similar functions. Instead, in these settings, the missions coexist and inform each other instead of being convoluted and laced with territorialism, insecurity, and inferiority complexes. Whether officially called student affairs, student services, or student development, the student affairs division participants were comfortable with their support role. One mid-level manager in student affairs, Barbara, talked about the recent name change of her division. She indicated that while they were now referred to as student affairs, their practice had not changed from when they were called student services. She articulated how her unit was one of service to the students from recruitment and admission to supporting them through their tenure and planning their graduation. Barbara went so far is to say that her division also serves the faculty, saying, “our other role -- again, I think we serve -- another set of our customers are the faculty. We're here to make their jobs easier so they can focus on teaching.”

Participants did not just understand the divisional missions of the institution but also the overall purpose of the institution. Many participants stated that the mission of the community college is to help students succeed and they named that success in multiple ways, such as assisting them in gathering new skills for job readiness or assisting them in transferring to other institutions for higher levels of educational attainment. One of the participants, Megan, a mid-level academic affairs professional, addressed this when discussing the institutional mission, by saying

I mean I definitely believe in what it says. It talks a lot about basically meeting the needs of the students. It really talks a lot about pulling in the local, the local community and
meeting community needs and job needs. So it talks about not only the individual student
but about the community. And I guess I see everyday, people trying to do these things.
So, I feel like it’s not just something they put down on paper full of lofty words… I see it
being put to use frequently and so I think we do really well that way.

Participants from both divisions accepted their role in that overall purpose. Whether it be the
academic affairs professionals accepting that they have a smaller role in the day-to-day
operations or the student affairs professionals knowing that their work is secondary and in
support to the primary objective of teaching. Participants’ acceptance of their roles led to their
ability to collaborate easily without being self-consciously concerned about their colleagues in
other units taking away or somehow superseding their power and place within the institution.

**Collaborative Practice**

The ways in which participants collaborated with their contemporaries in other divisions
were very different from the ways that are highlighted in current research on academic and
student affairs collaboration. Likewise, there was a significant difference in what topics or
functions they were collaborating around. As previously noted, the vast majority of the current
literature on the collaborative practice between these two units has been understood from
research in large research-based four-year institutions. The literature has focused on
collaborations around programming and interventions such as service learning, living-learning
communities, and first year seminars, by way of long-term and on-going partnerships often
grounded in committee work (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Jacoby,
1999; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Terenzini & Pascarella,
1994; Westfall, 1999). In this study, I found that collaboration was occurring not over
programming but in regards to more basic functioning, such as admissions and academic
advising. Collaboration around these topics was traditionally happening in less formalized ways than those found in the current literature.

When talking about her most frequent topics for collaboration, Barbara, a mid-level manager in student affairs, stated that most of her collaborations with academic affairs were around student admission to particular programs for which there were limited slots. She noted that she regularly works with faculty and other academic affairs colleagues in order to facilitate these competitive admissions processes. She specifically noted that she obtains the requirements for admission from the academic affairs division and carries out their wishes, saying, “I mean it’s much more direct with, you know, they’re much more cut and dried. This is how many people I want in my class, this is what I want them to be able to do, that kind of thing.” Dean, another mid-level manager in student affairs echoed that the admissions process is a topic around which there is a great deal of collaboration with academic affairs. As someone who works in the admissions area, he said that he often sees trends in applicant pools for certain programs that might indicate some alterations to the admissions criteria are necessary, or that he comes across some best practices from other institutions that he thinks should be adopted. He readily acknowledges that while he is the admissions officer, he is following the guidelines for admittance provided by the academic affairs division. So, when he has ideas or suggestions for changes, he works with the academic affairs colleagues to determine adoption of such ideas. He provided an example of this, saying,

We’ve developed certain policies for our nursing program because I received a lot of information on different schools and the state level on changing requirements for programs. I have to get with the academic side and then it has to go through different change of board approvals, student affairs, academic, and meeting with department
chairs. Working with the academic affairs side in presenting the project and how the project is going to affect our institution and then with him (vice president for academic affairs) getting it through and then getting all of the parties involved together and seeing the pros and cons of it.

In these examples, collaboration is about gaining clarification on policy, procedure, or parameters. These collaborations take place on an as-needed basis, rather than as part of ongoing formalized committees or taskforces.

Another topic around which participants pointed out frequent collaboration was in the area of academic advising. Each of the institutions that participated in this project handled academic advising a little differently but each used both faculty for advising, as well as professional student affairs staff. Also, at each institution, participants noted that many of the collaborative endeavors in which they engage with colleagues were around trying to improve academic advising. One mid-level student affairs manager, John, noted that at his institution, informal collaborative conversations on the topic had been so frequent and the call to improve advising had come so strongly from both academic and student affairs, that a taskforce was created with representation from both areas to assess and alter the current advising system. In this case, the taskforce decided to reevaluate an earlier decision to take the primary advising role out of the hands of the faculty, stating,

And you may have heard about our new advising center that we’re starting in the spring semester, I think this is a huge step for us. I think we’re putting most of the advising back into the hands of the faculty, and out of the counselors / with the advising center because our faculty advisors have the content knowledge and also where the degrees are going to get them when they graduate.
Other institutions were having similar conversations. Allison, a senior academic affairs officer similarly categorized advising as the most frequent topic and focus of collaborative efforts between the two divisions. She said, “I would have to say advising is an ongoing collaborative effort. Because both my division and his division are advising students and we’ve talked extensively about how we can improve it and we have some ideas on the table now.” She went on to indicate that a new team had been developed to work on exploring options for starting an academic advising center, saying that this team had grown out of ongoing conversations in the academic affairs committee (a regularly meeting group that is comprised of individuals from throughout the campus community).

Advising was seen by participants as an integral part to both of their division missions and to the institutional mission, as well. Participants noted that proper advising was a key to student success and achieving the institutional missions. It is for this reason that it was noted to be the focus of so many collaborative endeavors. Because of the changing needs of students, changing program requirements, and the imperative need to provide accurate guidance to students on those program requirements, this topic of collaboration fostered ongoing, intentional, and longitudinal collaboration in ways that other topics did not. This manifested itself within each of these institutions as committees working to constantly assess the current advising practices, as well as to improve them. These committees had representation from both academic and student affairs.

Another topic of frequent collaborations between the academic and student affairs officers that participated in this study was around registration functions. In these settings, participants identified registration functions as the scheduling of courses and assisting students to secure seats in those classes through online registration platforms and face-to-face registration
through student information systems. While advising is about suggesting courses and paths to graduation, registration is about setting up the systems which allow for actual course enrollment. Participants noted that collaborations around registration were often about student affairs practitioners providing services to faculty.

One of the chief student affairs officers, Gary, noted that since his division employees are the ones to develop, maintain, and handle data entry for the registration system, they are the experts on the system and they try to share that knowledge with faculty so that they understand it when working with students in advising capacities. He stated that, “our staff has done the trainings so I think… that’s created a level of connection that was there before, but it was much less. I think they always recognize us as the experts on student logic.” Gary noted that because of these trainings, the faculty have respect for the work of student affairs practitioners in the process. These trainings, however, are again, not on-going longitudinal collaborations but issue based networking.

When discussing the collaborations that occurred around registration, Abigail, a chief student affairs officer, made the point that partnerships with academic affairs are often about give and take for student good and noted that egos of staff members must be put aside for such efforts to work. She shared a story about faculty being concerned that students were being placed in higher level courses than they were ready for and that they requested to review placement test scores and student admission files to determine if it was human error or a problem with placement standards. Since the human error would have been on the part of the student affairs staff and any error with standards the responsibility of the academic affairs colleagues, all parties were equally vulnerable and willing to investigate. Here, again, everyone has an invested interest
in doing a good job for the purpose of student success, as placing students in the correct level of courses assists with that success.

**Motivation to Collaborate**

As indicated previously, student success is primary to the mission of these institutions and in order to, as one participant framed it, ‘eliminate barriers’ to that success, collaboration occurs, not just in large formal ways with broad topics but on individual student needs. Sam, a mid-level academic affairs manager, characterized collaboration as something that had to be grounded in student need, saying, “everything has to be driven with the students’ best interest at heart.”

When Sam was asked to provide examples of collaborative practice, he focused on collaborations aimed to support individual students. He stated it this way,

So, for me, out here, collaboration is–I have students who need something then I go to [my colleague], to whoever it happens to be. And as long as I have a well-written case and can present the information to my superiors adequately, I think collaboration is number one, their ability to listen but also their ability to help me reach the goals of the students.

In this way, he is framing collaborative practice as individually focused on student needs and that in order to meet those needs, people at all levels must work together. He is also highlighting here that collaboration in this setting is not necessarily about programming or long-term partnerships on overarching topics but about addressing individual student concerns and situations. Another participant, Allison, a chief academic affairs officer, spoke to the same point when telling a story of a specific example of collaboration that typified her experiences. She said,
a student may stop by in tears, you know, saying, ‘I’m $40 short on my tuition payment, is there anything anyone can do? I’ve already been to Financial Aid, nobody over there seems to be able to help me.’ So either I walk the student back over, say, ‘Hey’ or I call them up and say, ‘Look, 40 bucks here, you know? I got $20, you got $20.’ You know that’s the kind of collaboration we have and I think that is the kind of relationships that we have built.

These types of stories were common among participants in that when a student had a specific concern or dilemma, participants picked up the phone or visited with their colleagues face-to-face to come up with solutions to that particular issue.

Collaboration in these settings was not seen as something that needed to be ongoing or broad-based. Instead, they encompassed a wide range of format, including one-time discussions and standing/formalized engagements. This is evidenced by the previous findings presented, in that only collaborations around academic advising were long-term and committee based. Even when discussing advising, however, participants did note that there were committees working to better advising overall but that individual advising concerns for particular students were handled one-on-one and case-by-case with colleagues. Melissa, a student affairs mid-level manager, indicated that collaboration between the units is not simply communicating, but that it is based on an outcome that moves everyone toward the institutional mission, which is student success. And so for her and the other participants, that is the central motivation for engaging in collaborative practice; to foster student success, individually and collectively.

**Conclusion**

Based on the current literature available on the topic and the findings of this study, the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community college settings
is different from the nature of such collaborations in the other higher education settings that have been studied. For these participants, collaborative practice is motivated by student success as defined by individual students and the institutional mission. Whereas much of the previous literature on collaboration focused on program development that adds elements to the basic institutional practices, collaboration in the community college setting is occurring as part of those basic institutional practices. Specifically, this study found that collaboration in the community college setting was most often based in practices around admissions, academic advising, and registration. Participants found collaboration to be fostered on their campuses and I found that this ease of collaboration comes, at least in part, from the participants clear understanding of how their particular role plays into the mission of their division as well as the mission of the institution. The lack of role confusion and hierarchical power plays may be a result of the more flat organizational charts of these institutions.

I believe that these findings support the notion that community colleges are well equipped to foster collaboration and can be used as models for successful integration of collaborative practice. At the crux of why those in these settings are more freely and organically engaging in collaborations than their colleagues at the previously studied traditional, four-year institutions has to do with the first finding presented in this article, institutional mission. The fundamental mission of a community college is very different from that of a traditional, four-year institution. Community colleges are access institutions focused on providing basic liberal arts and specific technical training. This purpose means that individuals working in these settings are driven to assist students meet success however that is individually defined. By nature, community colleges are focused on service much more than four-year institutions, so it makes sense that collaboration is occurring around services (admissions, advising, registration) instead
of programming that, in these settings, is seen as superfluous to the primary mission of teaching specific skills and knowledge. Another factor that attributes to these service areas being the primary focus of collaboration is the fact that, based on mission, community colleges have not typically focused on student development in the same ways other institutions have. Most community colleges have very limited extra-curricular programming and initiatives and put very little energy into such activities because who the population they are working to serve. That population being commuter students who are coming for education as it fits into the rest of their life roles. The culture of these institutions, then, which has been shaped by the mission, has certainly impacted the collaborative practice in a way that should be explored in other settings and not assumed to be a non-factor.

As with all studies, this one has its limitations. One of the primary limitations is the sample for this project does not include front line employees in each division. Also absent are the perspectives of the students. Given the findings here, students may be uniquely situated to offer valuable insight into the actual collaborations that occur in these settings and a study that investigated their impressions would be beneficial in rounding out the picture of collaborative practice.

The findings of this study could assist those agencies that are attempting to foster greater collaboration. Through clearly working with their stakeholders to understand the overall institutional mission and how they assist in that mission, while defining how the collaboration meets that end, facilitators of collaborative engagements could enhance the validity of such operations and possibly alter the process and outcomes in a positive manner. Of course, more research can be done to see if such findings are prevalent at other institutions, particularly other community colleges. Likewise, since there seemed to be an overarching lack of collaborative
endeavors that are found in 4-year institutions, I believe that research on why those types of programming partnerships are not occurring would be beneficial to understanding the setting more clearly.
References


CHAPTER 6
A MATTER OF INSTITUTIONAL SIZE: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTINGS

Gulley N. Y. To be submitted to The Community College Enterprise
Abstract

The focus of this comparative case study was on understanding the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units within the community college setting through a particular qualitative approach, comparative case study. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of academic and student affairs collaboration at three community colleges of distinctly different sizes within the same system; examining similarities or differences. By exploring four cases (3 individual community colleges of distinctly different sizes and then all of the them together as one case) the findings of this study offer insight into the impact of institutional size and type on the collaborative practice of these two units. While overall these community colleges were collaborating more freely and naturally than at the other types of institutions previously studied, there were distinct differences in the nature of collaboration among the various community colleges participating in this study. Primarily, these differences were around what I refer to as attitudes regarding collaboration.
Introduction

When a college student has a concern or needs something from their institution of higher education, they often come to the individual or individuals with whom they have established relationships. Students do not generally understand the full array of differences between the missions, activities, or functions of academic and student affairs on a college campus. Instead, they see employees across the board as able to address any variety of their concerns. When a student addresses a faculty member about a need for counseling or goes to see their resident assistant for questions about their assignment for English class, they do not know that they are probably asking the wrong person for help (or at least that there are more appropriate people to address their concerns). For this reason and in order to ensure student success, it is not enough for us as college employees to point students to other areas for help, we must assist them in finding the right places and people and making those connections. Sometimes, this may mean venturing into another division and partnering with colleagues within areas that have sometimes been unwelcoming. We must bridge the gap between academic and student affairs to ensure individual and collective student success.

While much has been written about the historic divide between academic and student affairs units (Frost, Strom, Downey, Schultz, & Holland, 2010; Hirsch & Burack, 2002; Schroeder, 1999), there has also been an increase in the volume of intentional and necessary partnerships that have formed between the two units. As demands for accountability have pressured higher education professionals to critically review their practices, policies, and procedures, the propensity for collaborative endeavors between academic and student affairs professionals has increased. Also increasing, have been the number of research projects focused on understanding the forms and types of collaboration that are occurring between these units.

The research that has been conducted tends to focus on the topics and programming around which collaborations are occurring, the best practices of those collaborations, and the barriers to collaboration. This research has also typically been conducted in traditional four-year, research-intensive, residential institutions using mostly quantitative methodologies. There has been scant work done to understand collaboration in other settings or through qualitative means. This study focuses on understanding the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units within the community college setting through a particular qualitative approach, comparative case study. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore the nature of academic and student affairs collaboration at three community colleges of distinctly different sizes within the same system; examining similarities or differences. The research question guiding this study was: How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?

**Review of Literature**

Undergirding this study is previously published literature, which has examined academic and student affairs collaborations in higher education. As previously noted, the vast majority of this research has been conducted at traditional four-year, research-intensive, and residential campuses. Primarily, this research fits into three categories: topics of such collaborations, best practices of such collaborations, and barriers to such collaborations. Each of these is explored here, along with a brief review of the scant literature that does exist on the topic from the community college perspective.
**Topics for Collaboration**

Much of the literature that has been produced around the topic of academic and student affairs collaboration has focused on the programmatic partnerships that facilitate dialogue and interaction between members of each unit. These partnerships have traditionally been in areas such as seamless learning environments, service learning, freshmen and first year experiences, and faculty involvement in residence halls (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Guarasci, 2002; Jacoby, 1999). Further these collaborations have been grounded in the documents seminal to the understanding of purposes associated with academic and student affairs units. These include *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994), *Reasonable Expectations* (NASPA, 1995), *Principles of Good Practice* (NASPA, 1997), and *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998).

Seamless learning environments as a collaborative practice are efforts designed to engage students, faculty, and student affairs professionals in intentional learning opportunities outside of the classroom (Crafts, First & Satwicz, 2002; Kellogg, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). Kellogg (1999) described these partnerships as ones in which “students will have opportunities for learning both in the classroom and out-of-the classroom through co-curricular activities. Students will work with and get to know faculty and staff while taking courses and participating in non-classroom learning activities.” The focus of partnerships designed for this aim is typically the creation of incentive programs for faculty to engage with student affairs practitioners for this end goal.

Service learning programs offer students an opportunity to engage in community service projects that are directly linked to course content, thus providing student learning in real-world
environments while fostering a spirit of civic responsibility (Jacoby, 1999). Jacoby noted that for students, the benefits of participating in these programs, include:

- developing the habit of critical reflection;
- deepening comprehension of course content;
- integrating theory with practice;
- increasing understanding of the complex causes of social problems;
- strengthening one’s sense of social responsibility;
- enhancing cognitive, personal, and spiritual development;
- heightening understanding of human difference and commonality, and
- sharpening abilities to solve problems creatively and to work collaboratively. (19)

Service learning opportunities often manifest themselves as alternative break programs managed and developed by student affairs professionals or course-based civic engagement activities designed by faculty but facilitated by student affairs professionals. In the latter, student affairs professionals usually serve as the liaison between the faculty and the community partner. The student affairs liaison is rarely in full partnership with the design, implementation, and debriefing of such learning opportunities (Jacoby, 1999).

As institutions have worked to retain students and assist them to matriculate to graduation, the concept of student engagement has become a highly emphasized component of fostering such long-term student success. Some of the most popular ways that institutions have used to encourage students to engage with faculty and staff across campus are freshman and first year experiences programs (Bourassa & Kruger, 2002; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). These programs join faculty and staff in partnership to offer short courses on subjects of interest to the faculty and staff member. These courses are typically, one credit hour and meet every few weeks of a semester with topics of general interest.
Residence halls provide a captive audience with whom faculty and staff can engage. Bourassa & Kruger (2002) indicated that, “the residential experience provides limitless opportunities for integrating the student academic experience with out-of-class experience” (11). Institutions have taken advantage of this and leveraged engagements such as faculty-in-residence programs that place faculty in living spaces within residence halls so that they can be accessible to students outside of class time. This experience also humanizes the faculty for students. There are other programs that foster faculty engagement in residential situations that demand less of the faculty, in terms of time. Often, these programs have faculty offering lectures in residence halls in the evenings or through brown-bag lunch series.

**Best Practices and Barriers**

As is sometimes the case, a significant amount of the research academic and student affairs collaboration is positioned from a deficit model by highlighting the barriers to such collaboration (Astin, 1996; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Schroeder, 1999; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996; Schroeder, Minor, & Tarkow, 1999; Westfall, 1999). Bourassa and Kruger (2002) discussed these barriers, saying,

These obstacles have primarily been seen as cultural differences, the historical separation between the formal curriculum and the informal curriculum, the perception of student affairs as an ancillary function to the academic mission, competing assumptions about the nature of student learning, and differential reward systems for faculty and student affairs professionals. (p. 9)

Much of this harkens back to the historical divide between academic and student affairs units and the entrenched derision between the two. Schroeder (1999), a prolific scholar in the
area of student affairs and academic affairs collaboration, put the disconnect in a historic context when he wrote,

this persistent gap is evident in the historical separation of the formal curriculum from the informal cocurriculum as well as the prevailing view that the role of student affairs is ancillary, supplementary, or complementary to the academic mission of the institution. (p. 8)

Despite these barriers, however, collaboration is occurring in significant ways and a significant amount of the research on these collaborations highlight the best practices associated with them (Dale & Drake, 2005; Eickmann, 1989; Hyman, 1995; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999; Kezar, Hirsch, & Burak, 2002; Kuh, 1996; Martin & Samels, 2002; Schuh, 1999). These practices are usually highlighted as a way to promote collaborations and offer guidance for how institutions can implement them through proven techniques for overcoming the structural and implicit barriers.

After significant review of the research and their own study, Martin and Samels (2002) designated eight best practices for fostering academic and student affairs collaboration, to build, or rebuild, a successful partnership: (1) be opportunistic, (2) control the budget, (3) capitalize on turnover, (4) avoid collisions of culture, (5) design links to ongoing institutional assessment initiatives, (6) get press, and then get more press, (7) develop board awareness and support, and (8) don’t become attached. (89)

These tips and others have been used to assist institutions, offices, and individuals to build partnerships that last and are supportive of all parties as they support institutional missions of student success.
Community College Setting

Given the vast amount of literature produced over the past 15 years on collaborative practice between academic and student affairs units in higher education settings, very little of that research has focused on the community college setting. Noting this exclusion in the literature some years ago, Bourassa and Kruger (2002) stated that,

The entire higher education community should keep track of factors within the community college sector that cultivate successful partnerships that are easily adapted by either community colleges or four-year colleges and universities. For example, the community college sector is leading the way in the formation of strong, vibrant student and academic affairs partnerships as well as partnerships with external constituencies in the development and advancement of educational outcomes tied to service learning. (p. 15)

Unfortunately, their call has made little difference in the context of literature being produced on the topic. The fact that most of the literature is situated in traditional, large, research-intensive institutions is not surprising, however, when one realizes that those are the home sites for the very scholars who are producing this research and most interested in its benefits (Levinson, 2005).

Of the works that have been conducted in the community college setting around the topic of academic and student affairs collaborations, several have been unpublished dissertations (Kennedy, 2004; Kolins, 1999). Kennedy (2004) attempted to understand the variables that were most important to chief academic and student affairs officers when considering possible collaborations and engaging in current ones. She found that, “collaboration by institutional leaders, positive personal relationships among Chief Academic and Chief Student Affairs
Officers, and Student Affairs personnel taking the lead in initiating collaborative activities are three areas for community college administrators interested in promoting collaboration to consider” (Kennedy, 2004, p. iii). Her findings, then, indicated that collaborative practice in these settings was driven by top-down leadership decisions.

Kezar (2002) conducted a quantitative study on collaborations between these units at a variety of institutions, including community colleges. After disaggregating the data, the most significant finding was that there were less structural barriers to collaboration in community colleges than other institutional types. One can hypothesize that this is due to the fact that these institutions typically have fewer hierarchical layers in their organizational charts, minimizing the silo effects that are prevalent in other settings.

Amey (2010) offered the competencies and considerations needed in order to effectively engage in collaborative efforts in the community college setting. She noted that in an environment of scarce resources, collaborative partnerships are often seen as feasible options for individual goal attainment with shared responsibility. Noting that in such situations, as in most top-down collaborative efforts, the outcomes of such endeavors are the most common focus but that the process is the most beneficial for the stakeholders, she stated that, “partnerships are often more important for the relationships they facilitate, the values they symbolize, and the political alliances that can bebanked for future use than for the measurable outputs they produce” (p. 15). Such relationships are valuable in that they support long term engagement between individuals and units that can carry through a variety of specific reasons for collaboration. These personal connections make it easier for individuals to partner on different topics across time. That community colleges are often places with less hierarchical, organizational layers and that leaders of these organizations frequently demand that employees do whatever it takes to accomplish the
overall institutional task, contribute to the number of collaborations and the relationships built through such partnerships.

**Research Design & Methods**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of similarities or differences in how collaboration between academic and student affairs units is categorized, operationalized, or understood among community colleges of differing sizes. This exploration responds to the calls of Bourassa and Kruger (2002) and Gulley and Mullendore (Forthcoming) to further examine the nature of collaboration in community college settings. These authors based these calls on their own research projects as well as on the anecdotal success of such partnerships and their flexibility based on smaller institutional sizes and decreased hierarchies in organizational charts. The research question guiding this study was: How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?

Based on this research question, my epistemological stance as a constructionist, and my interpretivist theoretical perspective, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. This decision was supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) when they defined qualitative research in the following way.

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations… qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 4)
My goal in this article was not to simply know how collaboration is defined in these settings or in what ways individuals are collaborating but to know how such understandings impact the actual practice and how the practice, in turn, adds to the general understanding of collaboration. I wanted to understand what these formulations of meanings looked like across similarly structured institutions of varying sizes.

A case study design was chosen to answer the research question. A case study approach is appropriate when the “research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases with a bounded system” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 73). This idea is further supported by Yin (2009) who suggested the use of case studies when research questions are seeking to understand the ‘how’ or ‘why’ of a particular research topics, as is the situation with this particular research project. For this study, I examined the nature of collaboration within one community college system in the southern United States, separately and collectively reflecting upon three individual institutions within the system as well as the system as a whole. Thus, creating four distinct cases for a multiple case study approach.

Case studies are particularly useful when the contextual conditions that might impact a phenomenon is the focus of study (Yin, 2009). Another well-known case study researcher argued a somewhat contradictory stance, saying, “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of the object to be studied” (Stake, 1998, p. 86). Regardless of this difference, both agree in the value of investigating individual cases. They support that by looking in-depth at bounded cases, a researcher can more fully understand the situation and the many facets affecting the primary research question(s) being studied. Further, by comparing several cases, contextual differences in findings can lead a researcher to better understand how context affects outcomes associated with research questions. To this end, I believe that by looking at individual institutions
and how their academic and student affairs units collaborate and then comparing that with other similar institutions, I can better understand the nature of that collaboration as a whole.

Stake (1998) operationalized several forms of case study research. This particular study encompassed an instrumental case study as well as collective case study as I sought to understand the larger issue of academic affairs and student affairs collaboration by investigating particular cases. Stake argued that in order to maximize learning from a case study,

the case is expected to be something that functions, that operates; the study is the observation of operations. There is something to be described and interpreted. The… case studies emphasize objective description and personalistic interpretation, a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena, and empathic representation of local settings – all blending (perhaps clumped) within a constructivist epistemology.

(p. 98)

I wanted to not only understand how each institution that I studied understood, practiced, and operationalized collaborations, I also wanted to look at these items from the perspective of these community colleges as a whole.

Some research studies include multiple cases that are investigated, analyzed, and presented individually, as well as in comparison to each other (Stake, 2006). In order for such cross-analysis to occur the cases must be similar enough for comparison yet different enough to warrant that there inclusion is not overly similar to any other individual case. Stake (2006) purported that using multiple case study is beneficial when seeking to understand what he coins the “quintain.” He defined the concept as the overall understanding of a phenomenon by the investigation of its manifestation in particular cases. For this study then, the quintain is located in seeking to know the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units
within community colleges by examining particular institutions. Specifically, I set up a quintain case of all institutions studied, by investigating the three institutions (small, medium, large) separately.

While not all case study work is interpretivist, I have framed this particular study in that manner. Basic interpretivist inquiry is a very common form of qualitative research in the social sciences (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2009). Researchers conducting this type of study are interested in

how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences… In summary, all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings. (Merriam, 2008, p. 23)

In order to understand the nature of collaboration in these settings, collectively and individually, I needed to be able to examine the settings in an interpretive manner, as Merriam describes it above.

**Study Format**

Furthering the work of a previous study on the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community college settings (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming), this study uses the original data set of that project while adding new data. The original project was based on semi-structured interviews with the chief academic and chief student affairs officer at each of three community colleges within the same system in the southern United States. This
study added to those six interviews an additional 11. These interviews were conducted with mid-level managers from each unit at each of the original three sites.

**Analytic Method**

This article follows a multiple case study design in order to answer the research question. Yin (2009) asserts that analyzing case studies can be done in several ways based on the intended use of results. In this case, I analyzed the data by developing case descriptions informed by the original research questions in order to compare and contrast results. In doing so, I followed the suggestion of Stake (2006) when looking for naturalistic generalizations (i.e. collaborations occur around topics related to student needs) within each case, as well as across them. Always looking for categorical aggregation in which “the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (Creswell, 2007, p. 163). Analyzing the data, individually from each institution through the basic interpretive methods described above allowed me to paint a picture of the nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units at each institution separately for ease of comparison. I was clear to frame the cases as these two units at each institution and not the entire institution itself. Topics of comparison included: locations of collaborative practice, topics of collaborative practice, forms of collaboration, motivations for collaborations, definitions of collaboration, etc.

I then took this a step further in order to enter a process of case study analysis that Yin (2009) referred to as explanation building. In this analytic method, patterns are found in the data within or amongst each case and then the researcher attempts to make some explanations of the similarities or differences of these patterns. This is an iterative process that was repeated for each of the multiple cases before being analyzed across the cases. Yin suggested that as a practical matter, when analyzing cases, that:
First, your analysis should show that you attended to all the evidence… Second, your analysis should address, if possible, all major rival interpretations… Third, your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your case study… Fourth you should use your own prior, expert knowledge in your case study. (p. 138)

The employment of this analytic technique allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units within each institution, comparatively and collectively.

**Findings & Discussion**

In analyzing the data for this comparative case study, I was struck by a major theme across the interviews with participants from all three institutions. This being that almost all participants focused on institutional size and its implications for collaboration in the settings. What follows, here, is a discussion of the findings for these case studies. I start by unpacking this idea of institutional size and then frame the rest of the article by presenting findings from each participating institution, comparing them across institution.

**Impact of Size on Collaboration**

This study included participants from three institutions within the same community college system in the southern United States. These three institutions were chosen in order to have representation from schools of different sizes. The large institution had a total of 21,193 credit students. The medium-sized institution had a total of 6,295 credit students enrolled. The small institution enrolled a total of 1,949 credit students. Almost every participant discussed the influence of their institutional size on the nature of the collaborative practice between academic and student affairs within their college. In some cases, primarily the medium and small
institutions, participants noted their college’s size had a positive impact on collaboration and in others, primarily the large institution, it was seen as a hindrance.

Sally, a mid-level student affairs professional working at the largest institution, stated that her large institutional size was a hindrance to collaboration. She said, “I think we’re large. I think that it’s sometimes hard to really, in your mind, wrap your mind around who needs to know what and when… we need to make sure that everybody is talking with each other.” For her and others at the institution, the task of keeping everyone informed was a daunting one given the sheer number of people involved in the day-to-day operations, as well as the many specialty areas they represent.

Bill, a chief academic affairs officer at the same institution, noted that because they were large, some strong functional distinctions had been made between departments and divisions. He lamented that in some smaller institutions academic and student affairs were able to work more closely together because they were actually in the same division. There were several times that he mentioned the structural barriers brought on by the multi-layered and segmented organizational chart that existed at his institutions and how those barriers impeded collaborative practice. He discussed how it was difficult to know what everyone is responsible for which led to a lack of understanding of how individuals, offices, departments, and divisions could work together. Sally and Bill’s comments highlight the ways in which participants from this institution felt that size impacted collaborative practice. Their assertion that the organizational chart had placed employees into silos and thus did not always encourage partnerships across units is one that mirrored the findings of previous research on these types of collaborations.

The participants from the medium-sized institution had a different set of concerns in regards to the influence of enrollment on collaborative practice. In this setting there had been
significant enrollment growth in recent years, which had changed the nature of collaborative practice for several reasons. Gary, the chief student affairs officer at the institution talked about the growth in enrollment over time and how that growth had impacted the operations of the college. During the growth spurt, he saw a decrease in the amount of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs, due to the fact that the workload had become overwhelming. But, things are settling down on that front as the growth is leveling off and Gary noted that he has started seeing collaboration re-emerge as a common practice, saying, “I think it’s a bit of a new day so to speak, this institution started out small and grew larger and some of the people didn’t really change their philosophy very much over the years, and it was difficult sometimes.” He felt that people were so struck by figuring out how to survive the increased workload that they could not think about collaborating during the time of constant change brought on by the enrollment increase. Since the enrollment had leveled off a bit in recent months, he noted that they were able to go back to their original mode of operation and collaborate more frequently and freely.

Gary’s contemporary, Robin, the chief academic affairs officer, reinforced the sentiment that the institutional growth had changed the dynamics of the operation. She said,

When we were smaller, it was easier, you know. Everyone knew about everything. But the larger we get and the more responsibility folks have, they just need to get it done and they don’t always take the time to think, ok, I need to talk to this person. They just do it, so that creates some challenges.

For this institution, the growth in enrollment also meant an ever-evolving organizational chart, developed to meet the increased demands on the college’s human resources. While these adjustments included adding some personnel, layers such as associate directors and associate
vice presidents were also added to the organization. The layers are not as cumbersome as described at the large institution but the increased number of positions between the upper administration and front line employees have come with challenges. Jane, a mid-level academic affairs practitioner discussed the changes by saying that they made it more difficult to collaborate because the faculty/staff had a more difficult time knowing how to navigate the new chains of command. Whereas before the new structures, personnel would just go to others for help, now they seemed more nervous about going to the wrong person and so would simply did not go as readily. This cut down on the communication flow.

The findings from data collected at the small community college affirm the claims of participants from the medium and large institutions, in that collaborative practice was occurring more readily at the small institution. Actually, collaboration in this setting was seen as not just necessary for student learning but for basic functioning. Abigail, the chief student affairs officer from the small institution discussed how all of the faculty and staff really knew each other very well and got along with each other. She thought that this made collaboration easy since people felt comfortable with each other on an interpersonal level and were able to translate that into supporting each other regarding work concerns. While the institutional size meant that many employees had a variety of responsibilities, Abigail framed this as a positive attribute when discussing collaboration, noting that it made it easier to schedule meetings since fewer people’s schedules had to be consulted.

Dean, a mid-level manager in the student affairs area of the small institution attributed their small size directly to student success by way of the ease of collaboration between academic and student affairs. He said,
We meet a lot of the… goals because of our size, because we’re a small institution. We’re always able to say, ‘Go to such building, you’ll meet this person there. Wait a minute, let me walk you over there.’ And also, the size plays a big part because… students know where to go when they have questions. So, we are able to meet all of those goals that we set out to do.

In this sense, the small enrollment directly impacts student success by allowing employees to connect with colleagues on individual student needs very readily. He, and others from the institution, talked about how easy it was to pick up the phone to work together on a student concern and that they often walk with a student to their counterparts office to sit down together and collaborate on problem-solving. Participants from this institution did note that with a larger enrollment, they could impact more students but that they might not be able to do so in such a collaborative way, diffusing the quality of the student engagement experience.

Overall, as Bourassa & Kruger (2002) posited, there were fewer barriers to collaboration based on institutional size than have been found in other studies focused on traditional, four-year, research-intensive institutions. Even the largest community college participating in this study had fewer barriers than some of the larger counterparts. This might be due to the fact that while their enrollment was as high as many of the other institutions that have been studied, they did not have nearly as many faculty/staff managing those operations, thus forcing them to do more with less and look to collaboration to assist in that effort. It is obvious, however, that the smaller the institution the more equipped academic and student affairs professionals are to collaboration across those divisions. The following sections, which go into more depth regarding findings from each institution, further explore this trend.
Large Institution

The largest participating institution was located in a major urban area with several significant satellite campuses. This institution had a senior vice president of curriculum education services who was responsible for all of academic affairs. Ten mid-level associate vice presidents / deans report to the senior vice president. Academic affairs practitioners at this institution are responsible for all instructional programming as related to credit programs, as well as sustainability initiatives. A senior vice president of student services oversees all of the student affairs operations for the institution. Four associate vice presidents / deans report to this senior vice president and a director of each functional area within student services are also considered to be mid-level staff. The areas of responsibility associated with the student affairs division at this institution include: admissions, advising, athletics, career services, community engagement, counseling, disability services, financial aid, registration/records, student activities, testing, and veterans services. The organization is large, with many employees who have been assigned specific tasks and responsibilities. Participants noted that the chain of command is well established and multi-layered with clear expectations of communication channels. These expectations, however, were not formalized but implied by chief officers of each unit and something that both the chief officers and mid-level managers discussed. In a basic sense, it was expected that the chief officer know what was going on in their area and that they approve of personnel seeking assistance outside of their area if the particular situation might warrant any possible negative or questionable feelings.

Participants from this institution spent a great deal of time focusing on the barriers to collaboration. They certainly were collaborating on various projects but I was struck by just how much they talked about the challenges associated with collaborative practice. One mid-level
academic affairs practitioner from this institution, Leslie, related the challenges to the specific task orientation that is mandated by their organization, saying, “people get very focused on their own end goal and they see other people as barriers instead of understanding that the person also has their focused end goals that are different from theirs.” She went on to say that people try to be cognizant of how their work interlocks with that of others but that since very few people have generalist training and everyone has such specific areas of responsibility, it can be difficult to look beyond those items. The chief student affairs officers, Robin, talked about this same issue and how it plays out in the long term, saying,

so next thing you know you got a problem because somebody didn’t say to somebody else well if I had known you were doing that if you had asked me I could have told you how it was gonna cause a problem. So, um we find out ways sometimes have to back out of these webs that we have created because the collaboration wasn’t done up front but a lot of times…I don’t think it’s malicious, I think people just didn’t know…and then it’s a time frame.

The lack of understanding of the interconnectedness of these two divisions presented some difficulties for the institution but I also found that despite it they were collaborating with less barriers than the institutions previously studied. Robin and others clarified for me, how with the organizational challenges they each outlined, they were creating successful partnerships. It was in the in the intentionality of their efforts. As she stated above, the individuals in these two divisions bothered to untangle the webs when they needed to, instead of letting them continue to cause problems. By chief officers pointing out points of connection and individual mid-level managers seeking answers to questions raised by students, the overall goals of the institution
became paramount to all players and they resolved the question of how to work together to achieve them.

In direct correlation with the intentional attempts to partner across divisions is the fact that at this particular institution there were more formalized forms of collaboration occurring than at the other participating colleges. Leslie, that mid-level academic affairs officer, shared that as part of an attempt to promote collaboration and communication, a new committee was recently developed. This group will consist of upper level staff from both academic and student affairs and will meet monthly to discuss various initiatives and also work to establish some communication protocols to assist with partnering. This idea of committee work as the basis for collaborative practice was one repeated by other participants from this institution. Such structured environments promoted communication and engagement between the two divisions.

These committees and other formalized partnerships were around topics that are not traditionally associated with academic and student affairs collaborations as outlined in the literature review. Instead these topics were grounded in more fundamental practice. The most frequently highlighted topics for collaboration were around information sharing in conjunction with course registration, transferability of credits, and academic advising. In these areas, typical collaboration was prompted by the fact that student affairs was managing these functions but that final oversight of the information needed to engage in these functions was the responsibility of academic affairs. For example, Nathan, an academic affairs mid-level manager, discussed how there are general advisors housed in student affairs to help students make curriculum decisions around program and course selection but that ultimately, advising and designing curriculums was the responsibility of academic affairs. So, these two units had to collaborate on this topic by way
of the academic affairs practitioners training the student affairs advising staff on the intricacies of their curriculums and working with individual students to make proper course selection.

One mid-level student affairs practitioner from this institution, Henry, shared a great story, which encapsulates the way that such collaboration occurs around the topic of registration. His story also highlights how the hindrance of organizational structure can be surmounted through intentionality on the part of the upper administration,

For example, when we get ready to start a registration period, we bring the [associate] vice presidents in and we sit down and we talk. We talk about issues and things that we see could be problems or better working and they can give us their viewpoint on it from their side, which is a completely different perspective, ultimately. There’s a lot of give and take. And I think the biggest thing, you see, is we all understand what the senior leadership’s vision is of what they want to do. We evolve into it.

Because of the multi-layered organizational chart and emphasis of hierarchy at this institution, participants discussed the influence of college leadership on their collaborative practice. They felt like if the leaders pushed for collaboration, partnerships were more frequently implemented and well received.

Medium-sized Institution

The medium-sized institution participating in this project was located in a suburban / rural setting with one large main campus and two small satellite campuses. This institution serves predominately rural students from a large geographic region. The division of academic affairs is overseen by a vice president for academic affairs to whom four mid-level managers report. Responsibilities of this division include all curriculum and instruction, as well as academic support initiatives. A vice president of student affairs is responsible for all areas of
student affairs at the institution, including: admissions, athletics, counseling/advising, financial aid, registration/records, student activities, and testing. To assist with these functions, six mid-level managers for student affairs report to the vice president of the division. The overall organizational chart is less cumbersome than that of the large institution. There are fewer employees and more of them have responsibility for more than one singular function. The chain of command is still strongly emphasized at this institution.

While participants from the large institution highlighted the hindrances to collaborative practice, those from the medium-sized college framed such challenges as opportunities. One of the barriers of collaboration noted at this institution was the difficulty in engaging various members of the faculty/staff in collaborative projects because of lack of buy in. This institution was able to take that as a challenge and work hard to find ways to engage various personalities in productive partnerships, which the upper administration believed would create better opportunities for student success. Barbara, a mid-level manager in student affairs discussed how this played out when a faculty member, known for his reluctance to engage with others in the community was placed on a campus-wide committee charged with looking at big picture issues instead of targeted initiatives. She said,

That committee work clicked with him and got him to a level of involvement that he hadn’t been involved in before. So I think that’s a good thing. And when you have positives in that kind of committee work, that carries over into your other jobs. You know, that same faculty member who might be someone who otherwise stays fairly disconnected is then more likely to ask questions about how do I withdraw the student or how do I do this or how do I fix this or what not – it just fosters communication and collaboration in general because you serve on that committee together.
By finding the one committee that spoke to this faculty member’s way of thinking (big picture), that faculty became an overall more engaged member of the team and continued to partner with colleagues across campus on a variety of issues.

Gary, the chief student affairs officer echoed the sentiment that challenges can and are being overcome when he discussed the propensity for individuals to focus on their own areas of responsibility. He said,

in an ideal world I guess people learn to, and are willing to compromise, to give and take, to recognize particularly there may be one academic program within a larger whole. Sometimes you have to do what’s best for the larger group, as opposed to a silo, which we like to sit in and dominate… but I think the structure is in place.

His ending of this discussion on a positive note is indicative of the conversations I had with others. Individuals at this institution were actively attempting to overcome obstacles to collaboration. In this particular example, they were reinforcing the institutional mission and how individual areas helped to support that mission. When personnel felt that their work was meaningful to the whole, they began to work more diligently with their colleagues to ensure the success of that mission.

Whereas, at the large institution, where overcoming such barriers demanded more formalized interventions such as committee structures, at this institution, hindrances were seen as something to be challenged for the greater good (i.e. individual student success) and that overcoming such hindrances was accomplished through less formal means. The fact that this institution was smaller in number and less organizationally layered meant that employees were able to engage in big picture discussions enough to see that collaborative efforts could benefit the student population overall. Some of the ways that they were able to work toward overcoming
obstacles was by collaboratively creating opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators to experience the work of their counterparts in other divisions. This idea of cross-training came up with several participants who acknowledged that having faculty spend time in student affairs areas observing and working with those employees, as well as having student affairs employees go into classrooms to observe faculty was beneficial to those employees overall understanding of each division's daily contributions to the institutional mission. It was seen as a positive thing and a unifying experience for participants. This cross-training or cross-experience happened sometimes through training programs and sometimes through personal invitations or requests. No matter the origin, however, it was seen as good for those involved. One mid-level student affairs manager, John, said, “The more people that cross those lines, I think the better it is for your institution, your students as a whole… the more we separate our houses, the less effective we are overall as an institution.”

While the way that the large and medium-sized institutions handled hindrances to collaboration were different the primary tasks around which collaboration were occurring were markedly similar; both being focused on fundamental institutional tasks. Such a focus was totally dissimilar from the way that previous studies of four-year institutions have framed collaborative practice. Specifically, these fundamental institutional tasks were related to the areas of admissions, advising, and registration.

Allison, the chief academic affairs officer, discussed her collaborations with the office of registration around course development and student course selection. She, along with other participants, acknowledged that most collaboration between the units was about specific issues. Her characterization of this type of collaboration was as follows,
I have tried to put some systems in place to try and expedite [the registration processes]… It’s picking up the phone and calling the registrar, saying, ‘okay I have run into this glitch-- the computer is telling us we have a problem with xyz student, what can we do here? Can you assist me with changing the code? Do I need to change this to a hybrid? From a hybrid to online? How can we work this out?’ That kind of thing.

This theme of collaborating for intervention-based, problem-solving was evident (to some extent) at all of the institutions but was very heavily emphasized at the medium and large institutions. This falls in stark contrast to previous studies conducting on collaborative practice between academic and student affairs, which highlighted more program and intervention based collaborative endeavors.

**Small Institution**

The small institution participating in the study was located in an extremely rural area with one campus. The college was the only institution of higher education in the region. A vice president for academic affairs served as the leader for all academic affairs operations at the institution. There are approximately six mid-level managers who report to that vice president, as well as the chief student affairs officer, the dean of student services. Four mid-level managers report to the dean. The academic affairs division is responsible for all things having to do with curriculum and student services handles functions such as: admissions, financial aid, registration, and student activities. The primary reason that student affairs reports through the office of the vice president of academic affairs is that the institution is so small and has strategically chosen to not be unnecessarily organizationally top heavy. Participants did acknowledge, however, that this reporting structure fostered collaboration through consistent leadership.
Even though they framed it differently, both the large and medium sized institutions participating in this study focused on the hindrances to collaboration. The participants from this small institution had a dramatically different perspective and spoke at length about the ease of collaboration. Being located in a small community, the faculty, staff, and administrators knew each other not just as colleagues but as community members and friends. They discussed going to dinner together and seeing each other in the community at athletic events and church gatherings. Participants said that having those personal connections really made a difference in their ability to collaborate. One of the mid-level academic affairs practitioners, Megan, talked about the impact of her friendship with the chief student affairs officer. In response to being asked what forms of collaboration she had with the dean of student services, she said,

That’s probably a really unfair question because [we] are very, very, very good friends outside of work… So, I feel very comfortable. Because, you know, we are very good friends if I need something I have no qualms about not only just picking up the phone and calling her, but I can send her a text message or something.

While she thought her response might been skewed because of her friendship with the dean, the reality is that the other participants shared similar accounts and acknowledged the impact of their personal relationships on their ability to collaborate effectively in their work roles.

Another way that individuals built these strong interpersonal relationships was by being with the institution over a long period of time and being nurtured in their positions and up through the ranks. Most of the participants from this institution had started out in lower level positions and had been promoted into their current roles over time. Many identified their path to their current position as one that they travelled unintentionally, acknowledging that others had
seen their abilities long before they had developed their own desires in these areas. A mid-level student affairs officer, Dean, said, “I had the opportunity to start working here and one thing led to the other. I kind of grew up through the institution – when I got my four-year degree, when I got my graduate degree and was offered an opportunity to work in this area.” His story was a common one among participants from this institution.

That so many of the upper level administrators had been with the college and started out together in other positions, meant that they not only knew each other well but that they had experienced other functional areas of responsibility. This allowed these individuals to see the big picture mission of the institution and how each area of responsibility contributed to that mission. This perspective allowed them to feel at ease making connections across campus as they were interweaving their own diverse experiences. This was truly unique to the small institution.

Collaborative practice at this institution was much less formalized than at the large or medium sized institutions. While the large institution had formalized partnerships and the medium-sized institution had a combination of formalized and problem-based collaborations, this small institution almost exclusively operated on one-on-one collaborations. When discussing such collaborations, participants, across the board, indicated that the topic driving them was student success. They did not discuss programming or intervention based models that have been highlighted in previous literature, nor did they focus on functional areas for collaboration such as admissions, registration, and advising, as the participants from the medium and large institutions did. Instead the conversations were generally framed around collaboration for the purpose of facilitating individual student success, whatever that meant in each case. When asked about working with others across campus, Abigail, the chief student affairs officer talked about the
unique nature of working at a small school and the focus she has when partnering across campus by saying,

The nature of the relationship and the interaction with students is a little bit different.
When we have students that we know their personal history, and story, and what other factors may be negatively impacting or effecting them, it does make us work all that much harder to try to see if we could find some sort of scholarship to help you out, or is there some sort of support program or something that we can plug you into that’s going to help you achieve your overall goal.

Even when defining collaboration as a concept in their setting, participants framed partnerships as a student focused initiative. Sam, a mid-level manager in academic affairs defined collaboration as the ability to give and take with colleagues so that he can “make sure that the students are successful.”

This focus on individual student success was a unique feature of the small institution. Based on the low numbers of students attending the institution, the faculty, staff, and administrators could individualize much of the experience for those students. These participants knew the power of such customized support and service in terms of retaining students and assisting them to gain success, however those individual students defined it. This was a luxury that the large and medium-sized institution did not always have because of sheer numbers.

**Conclusion**

In this study, I attempted to understand the similarities and differences of how collaboration is operationalized at three different community colleges of distinctly different sizes. I have also tried to understand how, as a whole, findings from these community colleges related to the findings from previous studies set in four-year institutions. Overall, the three
community colleges that participated in this study have similarities and differences in the ways members of the academic and student affairs units collaborate. The primary similarities being their stark contrast to how members of these units have collaborated with each other in larger four-year institutions studied. They are collaborating differently and arguably more naturally than at the institutions studied previously. By this, I mean that while some top-down, structure collaborations were occurring in the form of committees, most collaborative practice was based in interpersonal relationships and generated from the individual level. By knowing one another and their students, these employees felt not only obligated to communicate but supported in freely doing so. One of the reasons that the employees of these institutions had such close relationships was that many of them grew up together within the institution. In these settings it was not unusual for employees to start at lower level positions within the organization and then to take on larger roles. It was also not unusual for them to have had many jobs within the institution, giving them a variety of experiences in multiple offices. Such experiences allowed them to understand the way that various positions impacted the overall mission of the college. It also enabled participants to know who to see for assistance, since they better understood a larger spectrum of job functions across the institution.

All of the participating community colleges did a better job of being able to focus on individual student needs through collaboration than has been exposed in previous studies, which have focused on larger, four-year institutions. I argue that this difference is at the root of the reason that the four-year institutions focus discussions of collaborations around programming and interventions (examples) and the community colleges are focused on fundamental operations. The programs and interventions that are the typical focus of the studies conducted on collaboration at four-year institutions are usually programs designed to assist with retention and
student success. These institutions work to create and maintain these programs through collaboration because it is not feasible to individualize the student experience. In the community college setting, that is the very goal and given the generally smaller numbers, they are better equipped to offer such attention to the individual students. This is evidenced not only when the case of all of the participating community colleges is viewed but also when they are looked at individually. In doing so, I found that the smaller the institution, the more they are able to hone in the focus of collaborative practice to individual student success.

While overall these community colleges were collaborating more freely and naturally than at the other types of institutions previously studied, there were distinct differences in the nature of collaboration among the various community colleges participating in this study. Primarily, these differences were around what I refer to as attitudes regarding collaboration. Participants from the large institution were quick to focus on the negative barriers to collaboration while the small institution participants choose to highlight the ease of collaboration and the factors that encouraged it. The medium-sized institution participants shared a combination of both perspectives. That the larger the institution the more focus on hindrances might explain why so much of the literature that currently exists on collaborations between academic and student affairs is framed around overcoming such barriers. Since those studies, as outlined in the literature review, were conducted at large institutions, it is no wonder that the articles written up are focused in this way.

This study has shed some new light onto some previously made assumptions about the nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community colleges. However, more work needs to be done in this area and this study could be made stronger with the addition of more research, even qualitative, in this setting. I think that this study only begins
to unpack the practices and assumptions around collaboration in these settings and how they help us understand the overall nature of collaboration in the larger collegiate setting. Based on this, I believe that more research needs to be done on the nature of collaborative practice at smaller institutions, not just community colleges but smaller four-year institutions. Primary focus of such research should be on the impact of personal relationships of collaboration. I would also like to see more research conducted around the functional area collaborations at four-year institutions, as opposed to only exploring their programmatic and intervention-based partnerships.
References


CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Conducting this research and writing this dissertation has been both interesting and ironically humorous. Interesting in that I have learned a great deal about the subject matter, the production of scholarship, and myself through the process and ironic in that I have been studying collaborative engagement and this has primarily been such a solo endeavor. In this closing chapter, I offer some concluding thoughts on the overall nature of collaboration between academic and student affairs units in community college settings based on the three analytic forms used for the manuscripts within this dissertation. I then offer a synopsis of the implications that this project has on future work and research. Also included here is a personal reflection on the overall experience of writing this dissertation.

Concluding Thoughts

While each article had separate findings based on the analytic method used to investigate the particular research question guiding the particular manuscript, there was a major theme across all findings. For me, the most interesting and significant aspect to the findings across the three manuscripts was that what is considered to be collaborative practice at these institutions was so vastly different from the forms that have been highlighted in previous literature. In the literature currently available, collaboration has been presented as ongoing partnerships for the purpose of program development/management for the good of the overall student body or interventions designed to target specific student populations. In the community colleges that participated in this study, collaboration was based in communication for specific outcomes for
individual students. But, as Melissa, a mid-level student affair professional said, “[collaboration is] a little bit more than communication because I think it’s defined in an outcome.” Almost every participant’s primary example of collaborative practice was based in one-on-one interpersonal conversations with colleagues for the purpose of problem solving issues related to individual student concerns.

This finding manifests itself in the discourse analysis article as the disconnect between how people talked about their ideal collaborations and how they were actually collaborating. As noted above, collaboration, in practice at these institutions was one-on-one and problem based. However, participants actually defined collaboration in ways that more aligned with the ways in which the concept has been discussed in the research on traditional, four-year institutions; as long-term intentional engagements. This finding was supported across the other forms of data analysis as well.

The basic interpretivist piece addressed this same issue when highlighting the realities of collaborative practice in the setting, as well as the motivations for such collaborations. What this piece brings to this particular issue is the idea that the primary reason for collaborative practice in the community college setting is around student success. That student success was so central to every conversation colleagues had with each other greatly impacted the ways in which these practitioners collaborated. Since student success, for them, was defined individually for each student, collaborations aimed at helping the individual students succeed had to be individualized too. Thus, collaborations were one-on-one to address particular student concerns or issues.

Part of the findings from the case study article focused on the issue of institutional size in terms of student enrollment, which ultimately impacted the institutional size organizationally. The idea that community colleges have a unique way of collaborating and that they collaborated
around different subjects than other institutions came up here, as well. In this article, given the findings, I argue that because community colleges are typically smaller in terms of the number of students, as well as the number of employees and that the mission of these institutions is centered around assisting students to be successful who might not otherwise have the means by which to attain success, the focus and form of collaborations in the community college setting are fundamentally more individualized.

**Implications**

The research presented in this dissertation offers a unique perspective to the larger scholarly conversation about academic and student affairs collaborations. This research is unique in that it adds not only representations of collaborative practice in the community college setting but also, in that it has been conducted using qualitative means. Barring a couple of unpublished dissertations (Kennedy, 2004; Kolins, 1999), such collaborations in community college settings have not been studied despite the call of Bourassa and Kruger (2002) that such settings could offer significant insights into collaborative practice. Additionally, previous studies have been quantitative in nature and not allowed for the rich understandings that I believe are necessary to conceptualize the actual practice of partnerships occurring in the setting and/or the reasons that such partnerships are or are not present.

It was important for me to write a manuscript style dissertation because I wanted to assure that this research makes it into publication in order to add to the scholarship currently being produced around academic and student affairs collaboration. So much of that scholarship has been repetitious of previous research endeavors on the topic and has not branched out in terms of the settings examined or the methodological perspectives used. I believe that the articles presented in this dissertation challenge the current scholarship to move beyond the settings and
formats currently explored. I further hope that these pieces will spark question and debate within the scholarly community and push those conducting this research to question their assumptions about collaboration and the ways in which they set up their studies on the topic.

Further, academic and student affairs practitioners working in community college settings have not seen their experiences reflected in this line of research. This means that to find any meaning for their practice out of the current literature, they are translating findings from studies that may not reflect their own conditions. So, the findings found in current literature and any corresponding implications for practice presented in those studies are not applicable to this sector. My hope is that the manuscripts presented here will serve practitioners in the community college settings as they seek to better understand their own collaborative partnerships and possibly improve the quality of those engagements.

Reflection

Writing this dissertation has been an experience that I will not soon, if ever, forget. As one might expect from such an exercise, I have grown as a scholar and learned a great deal about my own style of research and writing. Over the course of proposing this project, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and writing manuscripts, I have been able to immerse myself into a fascinating world of scholarship and join the ongoing conversation about academic and student affairs collaboration. Based on this immersion, I am confident in my ability to speak about this topic and make assertions regarding my data. One of the difficulties that many new researchers face is overcoming the natural self-doubt that makes them unsure of their ability to make claims about their research findings. I certainly fell into this category before undertaking this dissertation. Thankfully though, through the guidance of my committee and the support of colleagues, I have been able to overcome that hesitation to not just share findings but to interpret
them for others and assert my understanding of what those findings mean. This is not to say that I will not struggle further with this self-doubt as I undertake new research projects, but this current one has certainly provided some much needed confidence as a scholar.

It took a little convincing to get my faculty to support me in writing the first manuscript style dissertation in our program. But, I am very pleased that they made such an allowance, as I believe this product to be one that is reflective of the high standards of practice in our program and one that shows the innovation for which student affairs professionals are known. For some, the thought of writing three manuscripts for the dissertation equates to writing three separate dissertations. I do not feel this way. For me, being able to distinguish these articles by analytic technique, allowed me to gain a much more in-depth understanding of the full nature of collaboration in the setting than I would have been able to determine by exploring this topic in only one way. I also feel that I was able to gain incredibly valuable insight into a variety of analytic techniques; something that would not have necessarily been the case if I had written in a more traditional format. That three articles are now ready for submission to academic journals helps to assure that this work does not end with the dissertation but helps to promote its entrance into the larger scholarly conversation on the topic.

Taking on a project of this magnitude comes with some struggles. For me, the most challenging part of this dissertation had to do with data collection. Anytime we are looking to other people to provide us with data, we must expect there to be certain things out of our control. I experienced such lack of control to a level that almost threatened the fundamental study design. This study was built on a previous project (Gulley & Mullendore, Forthcoming) in which the chief academic affairs and student affairs officers from each institution were interviewed regarding their insights on and experiences with collaboration. At that time all participants
indicated that they would welcome me back to conduct further interviews with employees for my dissertation. One institution, however, was not responsive for several months when I was attempting to set up such interviews. The chief academic affairs officer with whom I had been in contact previously had since retired and the chief student affairs officer did not respond to any of my attempts to contact her by email or phone (leaving voice mails and messages with colleagues). After several months of failed contact, I knew that I needed to change my strategy if I wanted to have this institution represented in the study; which I felt I must. I was able to contact the office of the president and gain access without addressing the unresponsiveness of the chief student affairs officer. This experience provided me with several lessons, not the least of which was a lesson in patience. It also taught me to be creative when working with others. We cannot control the actions of others and in most cases, as social science researchers, we are at the mercy of our participants.

Overall, despite being tired in both mind and body from this project. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this tradition. The writing of a dissertation is a right of passage; it is an experience, which if framed correctly, ensures the quality of scholars that are being generated from our institutions of higher education. I am thankful to have had the privilege of the experience, as well as the growth that has come from the challenge.
REFERENCES


### APPENDIX A

#### PARTICIPANT GRID

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small Institution (1,949 credit students)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Dean of Student Services</td>
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<td>Dean</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Director of Admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Division Chair, Education Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Division Chair, Business &amp; Public Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Vice President of Academic Affairs</td>
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<td><strong>Medium-sized Institution (6,295 credit students)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
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<td>Vice President of Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Registrar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Vice President of Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Dean of Arts and Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Director of Financial Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Dean of Business and Applied Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Large Institution (21,295 credit students)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
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<td>Dean of Advising and Retention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Associate Vice President for Arts and Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
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<td>Dean of Admissions and Outreach</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Senior Dean of Strategic Innovations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>Woman</td>
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</tr>
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APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences, influences, practices, and perceptions of academic affairs and student affairs professionals around collaboration between these two divisions in community college settings. Further, the goal is to better understand the nature of collaboration in these settings versus offering descriptives on particular forms of collaboration. To this end three research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

How do academic affairs and student affairs practitioners in community college settings define and discuss collaboration between their units? How do chief managers and their mid-level managers in academic affairs and student affairs units in community college settings practice collaboration? Are these practices similar or different? How are the experiences with, understandings of and basic nature of collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs units similar and different at community colleges of distinctly different sizes?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me your name, institution, job title, how long you have been in this position, what is next for you in terms of career aspirations?

2. Please tell me about the career path that brought you to this position.
   a. If there were individuals who influenced that path, please tell me who and how.
   b. Was your path intentional and or unintentional?
   c. Can you tell me about the pivotal events that shaped the direction of your career?
3. Please share with me how you see the purpose of your functional area (academic affairs / student affairs)? What does it encompass?
   a. Who do you have the strongest working relationships with? Who do you need to strengthen relationships with? (Reword these so you don’t end them with “with”)
   b. What units do you work most closely with? What units do you need to build better relationships with?
4. Please share with me how you see the purpose of the other functional area (academic affairs / student affairs)? What does it encompass?
   a. What is their mission? How effective are they at accomplishing their goals?
   b. What areas do they need to work on?
5. Please describe the opportunities that you have had for collaboration with the other functional area (academic affairs / student affairs).
   a. Give examples of ways in which you personally collaborate with your contemporary in the other functional area (academic affairs / student affairs).
6. Please describe any factors which hinder you from personally collaborating with your contemporaries in the other functional area (academic affairs / student affairs).
   a. In a dream world, how would you overcome these challenges? What would it take?
7. Please describe the opportunities for collaboration between those in your area (thinking of yourself and your colleagues) and those in (academic affairs / student affairs).
   a. What kinds of activities do these areas work on together?
8. Please describe the factors that hinder collaboration between those in your area (thinking of yourself and your colleagues) and those in (academic affairs / student affairs).
9. In a dream world, how would you overcome these challenges? What would it take? How do you feel about collaboration between your area and (academic affairs / student affairs)?
   a. Can you tell me a story about when this was most effective?
   b. Can you tell me a story about when this was least effective?

10. In what ways do you think that collaboration between academic and student affairs units is similar or different in the community college setting than in others?
   a. If you have worked at another type of institution, please provide an example that highlights your thoughts.