The implementation of a strategic plan at a small, private college in Michigan

Matthew C. Rheinecker

University of Toledo

Follow this and additional works at: http://utdr.utoledo.edu/theses-dissertations

Recommended Citation
http://utdr.utoledo.edu/theses-dissertations/1914

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by The University of Toledo Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The University of Toledo Digital Repository. For more information, please see the repository's About page.
A Dissertation

entitled

The Implementation of a Strategic Plan at a Small, Private College in Michigan

by

Matthew C. Rheinecker

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

Debra Harmening, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Penny Poplin Gosetti, Ph.D., Committee Member

David Meabon, Ph.D., Committee Member

Frank Hribar, D.B.A., Committee Member

Dr. Patricia R. Komuniecki, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

December 2015
An Abstract of

The Implementation of a Strategic Plan at a Small, Private College in Michigan
by
Matthew C. Rheinecker

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

The University of Toledo
December 2015

This study explored the process of implementing the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan at a
small, private college in Michigan. As competition grows in the industry of higher
education and small, private institutions attempt to maintain or grow revenue streams;
institutions must find ways to successfully implement their strategic initiatives. If
administrators and institutions are to put their strategic plans into action, they must do so
by studying other institutions that have successfully implemented strategic plans. The
purpose of this study was to study the process of implementing a strategic plan. The
results of this study indicate that there were three main reasons for successful
implementation. First, the leadership was in place to create and communicate the strategic
plan and its goals. Second, the president created a new culture on campus of appreciation,
change and direct communication. Finally, the president set expectations and held
employees accountable to those expectations which contributed to the new culture on
campus. These three areas allowed for ideas to be generated and implemented. This study
provides examples from one institution that other colleges and universities may be able to
use to better understand tactics for implementing strategic initiatives.
I would like to dedicate this study to my wife, Kim, and my parents, Chuck and Janet Rheinecker.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge several important individuals who played a critical role in the completion of this dissertation. First, I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Debra Harmening, for her guidance. She has assisted me through the entire process with patience and wisdom. I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Frank Hribar, Dr. David Meabon and Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti for all of their contributions and insight. I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Kim, for her patience listening to my frustrations and never doubting me. I’d like to thank my parents for always making me do my homework when I was little and encouraging me no matter what new journey I started. I’d also like to thank my siblings; Lynn, Mike and Tom, for their indirect motivations throughout my childhood years.

I’d also like to acknowledge Dr. Kellie C. McGilvray, who was a friend to me through coursework and helped guide me through the dissertation process. Her friendship and mentorship helped more than she probably knows. Thanks to everyone who helped me through this long process, it was well worth it in the end.
Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements v

Table of Contents vi

List of Tables xiii

List of Figures xiv

1. Introduction 1
   A. Background of the Study 2
      a. Latest Economic Recession 3
      b. The Recession of 2007 4
      c. Unemployment 5
   B. Statement of the Problem 5
   C. Conceptual Framework 12
   D. Purpose of the Study 13
   E. Research Questions 14
   F. Significance of the Study 14
   G. Limitations 15
   H. Assumptions 16
   I. Definitions of Terms 16
   J. Summary 17

II. Review of Literature 19
   A. History of Small, Private Institutions 19
      a. Purpose of Colleges 20
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Tough Times</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Role in Higher Education</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Current State of Higher Education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Enrollments</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Competition</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Globalization</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Questioning of Value</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Accountability</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Declining Family Incomes</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Rising Cost of College</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Need for Education and Jobs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Small, Private College Funding Sources</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Tuition</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Fundraising</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Endowments</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Other Sources</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Conclusion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Small, Private College and University Administrators</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Strategic Planning in Higher Education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. History</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Strategic Planning on College Campuses</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Negative Aspects</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Implementing Strategic Planning</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
e. Communication 64
f. Senior Administrators 66
g. Middle Managers 67
h. Frontline Employees 69
i. Campus Culture 69

G. Summary 70

III. Methods 74

A. Research Questions 74
B. Context and Site Selection 75
C. Case Study Design 79
D. Participant Selection 81
E. Study Approval and Ethical Considerations 83
F. Data Collection Procedures 83
   a. Document Analysis Procedures 84
   b. Meeting Observations 86
   c. Interviews 87
G. Data Analysis and Coding 92
   a. Validation 95
E. Researcher Bias 98
F. Summary 100

IV. Findings 102

A. Overall Description of Data Analysis 103
B. Interview Analysis 104
a. Description of Interviews 104
b. College President 104
c. Former College Vice President #1 105
d. Former College Vice President #2 106
e. College Vice President #1 106
f. College Vice President #2 107
g. College Vice President #3 108
h. College Vice President #4 108

D. Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Interview Transcripts 109

E. Presentation of the Findings from the Interview Transcripts 112
   a. Theme #1 – Human Resources: Hiring, Firing, Setting Expectations, the President’s Involvement, and Rewarding Employees 113
   b. Theme #2 – Accountability: Holding Employees Accountable and Employees’ Commitment 120
   c. Theme #3 – The Strategic Plan: The Plan, the Culture, and the Role of Enrollment, and Athletics 124
   d. Theme #4 – Leadership: The Skills and Responsibilities of the President, the President’s Expectations, and the View of the President 128
   e. Theme #5 – Challenges: Potential Missed Opportunities, Doubts, Frustrations, and Changes 131
   f. Theme #6 – Communication: Senior Staff Communication,
Board of Trustees Communication, Employee Expectations, and Interpreting the Strategic Plan

F. Meeting Analysis
   a. Description of Meetings

G. Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Meeting Observations

H. Presentation of the Findings from the Meeting Observations
   a. Theme #1 – Culture: President’s Involvement, Accountability, and Communication
   b. Theme #2 – Analysis and New Ideas: Competitive Analysis and Generating New Ideas
   c. Theme #3 – Appreciation and Involvement: Thank-You Notes, Compliments, and Fostering Involvement
   d. Summary of Meeting Observation Findings

I. Document Analysis
   a. Description of Documents

J. Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Documents

K. Presentation of the Findings from the Document Analysis
   a. Theme #1 – Culture: Student Focus, Accountability, and Employee Improvements
   b. Theme #2 – Competitive Analysis: External Analysis and Idea Generation

L. Analysis Across all Data Types
   a. Key Assertions Method
M. Summary of the Findings

V. Discussion

A. The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan – Renaissance I
   a. Goals
   b. Cost
   c. Fundraising
   d. Overall Result of Renaissance I

B. Summary of the Findings
   a. Findings from Interviews Conducted
   b. Findings from Meeting Observations
   c. Findings from Document Analysis
   d. Synthesized Findings from All Three Data Types

C. Discussion of the Findings
   a. Presidential Leadership
   b. Culture
   c. Accountability

D. Conclusions

E. Limitations

F. Recommendations for Practice

G. Recommendations for Future Research

H. Summary

I. Conclusion

References
## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Example Email for Meeting/Interview Setup</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. President and Vice President Interview Questions</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Member of the Board of Trustees Interview Questions</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Interview #2 Questions with the President</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Interview #2 Questions with the Former Vice President</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Interview #2 Questions with the Former Vice President</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Informed Consent Form</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1. Focus of Data Source by Data Type .................................................. 92
Table 2. Summary of Member Checking Options Selected ......................... 97
Table 3. Interview Coding, Theme Development, and Assertion Development Process ................................................................. 109
Table 4. Meeting Observation Coding, Theme Development, and Assertion Development Process ................................................................. 143
Table 5. Specific Documents Analyzed ............................................................ 158
Table 6. Document Analysis Coding, Theme Development, and Assertion Development ................................................................. 160
Table 7. Summary of Themes from Data Collected and Analyzed ................ 171
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Data Collection and Analysis Workflow</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Senior Staff Meeting Observation Notes from September 8, 2014</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

Introduction

Higher education changed during the past decade in ways that education professionals could not have previously imagined or predicted. The number of delivery methods increased, the costs increased for some colleges and universities and decreased for others, and recruiting methods and marketing efforts changed. Education was recently promoted to a wider range of individuals and advertised as their key to a solid financial future and an opportunity for upward social mobility. However, the value of a college degree was brought into question by those attempting to enter the higher education marketplace with new ideas. Institutions that historically have dominated the marketplace needed to reevaluate their strategies and determine the best course of action for their individual colleges and universities.

This research project explored how a traditional college navigated the higher education industry during a recession through the implementation of a strategic plan. I discuss the problems colleges are facing along with the conceptual framework that guided the data collection of the study. I then explain the purpose of the study, present the research questions this study answered, and provide a rationale that explains the significance of the study for higher education professionals. I discuss the limitations and assumptions of this study as well as define key terms that assist readers in better understanding key concepts throughout the study. Overall, this chapter helps readers understand the history of strategic planning at small, private colleges and universities and why it is an important area for investigation in higher education.
Background of the Study

Small, private colleges and universities have prided themselves on offering a quality education in an intimate campus setting with an experience that students, faculty, and staff value for a lifetime. Each campus’ unique atmosphere is geared toward attracting and educating a select group of prospective students (Shulman, 1974). While tuition and fees are usually greater than those of surrounding public colleges and universities, students choose small, private colleges and universities because they offer a unique educational experience. Many small, private colleges have recently been adversely affected by three important factors: (a) the increased number of educational options available to students, (b) the recent economic recession, and (c) a lack of effective strategic planning (Burrell, Anderson, Bessette, & Dawson, 2011; Doyle & Delaney, 2009; Goodman, 2009; Van Fleet, 2010).

The number of higher education colleges and universities in the United States grew rapidly from the end of the 1700s through the mid-1800s. There were just over 1,000 students in higher education in 1790 yet more than 60,000 just 100 years later (Cohen, 1998). As the number of students and colleges and universities grew, so too did the need for specific colleges and universities to cater to particular needs. Small, private colleges and universities began, in part, because religious orders wanted their youth to be educated with specific sets of principles and ideals (Shulman, 1974). However, as time progressed, small colleges envisioned their students spending “four years with one’s aged cohort in a physically attractive setting, usually nonurban, [that] promised a life-enhancing self-development” (Koblik & Graubard, 2000, p. 10). Through their history it was these small colleges that not only experienced growth but also survived difficult
times.

The history of small, private colleges and universities has been volatile with various high and low points. In the early 1900s, state colleges and universities and small, private colleges and universities competed for students. During the Great Depression, enrollments declined for both types of colleges and universities because of the poor economic conditions (Koblik & Graubard, 2000). After the Great Depression, family incomes rose, and the landscape of higher education changed. The late 1930s and 1940s saw a change in the way small, private colleges recruited and admitted students. In part because of issues related to the Holocaust, small, private colleges and universities began to reassess admissions policies and allowed students of different religions and faiths into their colleges and universities (Koblik & Graubard, 2000). The Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Education Amendments of 1972 provided federal student aid opportunities for students who attended private colleges (Koblik & Graubard, 2000). Although federal financial aid provided students with opportunities to attend small, higher-priced, private colleges, Koblik and Graubard (2000) found that these colleges and universities again encountered tough times as “167 private four-year colleges. . . disappeared between 1967 and 1990” (p. 21), and “the proportion of [small] four-year colleges and the proportion of undergraduates attending them declined during the 1990s” (p. 21).

**Latest economic recession.** This section reviews the recent economic recession as well as the economy now that most experts think the worst part has passed (Krueger, 2012; Peck, 2011). Small, private colleges and universities have been directly affected by changes in the economy because of the higher than average out-of-pocket costs for students. Students and families may become convinced that a small, private institution
education is the best choice for them but not be able to afford the expense. This section reviews the reasons for the recent recession, unemployment figures, declining family incomes, the rising cost of college, and how a recession affects the hiring of graduates.

The recession of 2007. The recent recession was a difficult time for many citizens as millions of jobs were lost and personal wealth dropped significantly for many individuals. In the 1990s and the first part of the 21st century, citizens spent more than they made because they believed and had always experienced that worth would continually increase (Peck, 2011). People were convinced that owning a home was an investment that would increase in value as time went on, leaving them in a better position than when they originally bought the home. However, home values went down considerably and some homeowners were left owing more than their home was worth. Others lost money in the stock market as it fell thousands of points during the recession (Peck, 2011). The collapse of the economy hit American citizens hard, which in turn affected colleges’ and universities’ ability to enroll students, raise money, and grow their colleges and universities.

The suggested reasons for the recession are widespread; some experts have attributed the recession to a combination of corporate greed, the housing market collapse, and unethical practices within the banking industry (Krueger, 2012; Sloan, Newmyer & Burke, 2010). Other individuals have suggested that offshore trade policies, increasing energy prices, a decline in qualified workers with the right education, and high medical expenses also were major reasons (Hetzel, 2012; Vlasenko, 2010). While some may have believed that education suffered because the economy was doing poorly, and others may have believed that education was already performing poorly and helped contribute to
starting the recession. Regardless of which reason(s) were responsible for the recession, higher education was impacted directly and may have changed for the foreseeable future.

Unemployment. The recession affected higher education primarily because many individuals experienced employment disruption. “By the middle of 2010 . . . 55 percent of American workers had experienced a job loss, a reduction in hours, an involuntary change to part-time status, or a pay cut since the recession began” (Peck, 2011, p. 19). A lack of personal income can directly affect small, private college enrollments because many students and families no longer possess the resources to pay tuition and other costs not provided for by financial aid packages. Tuby (2012) indicated a negative outlook for colleges and universities that are tuition-driven because many of their potential students and their families are increasingly price-sensitive and “have more limited resources to invest in higher education” (p. 1).

The unemployment rate in America nearly doubled between the 1990s and the middle of the recession in 2009 (Vlasenko, 2010). This caused many individuals to go back to school to either pursue a traditional degree or attend a career/training school to increase their likelihood of finding employment in their current industry or a new field.

Statement of the Problem

Burrell et al. (2011) stated the following:

The problem with some small colleges and universities today is an absence of a strategic systems approach to organizational planning, program development and marketing strategies. Many of these colleges are tied to their original approach to operations, history, and mission, which limits the potential for an effective organizational environment. (p.
In 2015 there were more than 4,800 degree granting, colleges and universities that served millions of traditional and non-traditional students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). These colleges and universities differ in many ways. For example, some colleges and universities are highly selective while others have an open enrollment policy. Schools can be private or public, two-year or four-year, for-profit or nonprofit, religious or independent. “Like most status systems . . . [higher education consists of] a few elite and widely known colleges and universities, a sustainable middle class, and a large number of relatively unknown . . . colleges and universities” (Astin & Lee, 1971, p. 1). No matter their classification, size, or defining characteristic, almost all educational colleges and universities share very similar purposes: to educate today’s students. However, the ways in which small, private colleges and universities educate students differs from the ways that their larger, public counterparts educate students. According to Shulman (1974), “The unique mission or institutional character of these colleges accounts for their existence in American society because differing colleges and universities are necessary to serve adequately the needs of a great variety of students” (p. 15).

However, Christensen and Eyring (2011) have suggested that “university communities will need to go further, asking fundamental questions about what they can do well and abandoning much of what they have undertaken in the spirit of emulation” (p. 10). Institutions of higher education, specifically, small, private colleges, will need to make decisions about how to move forward in the new economy. Do they stay with their current plans and projects? Do they explore new opportunities once thought extreme or
risky? Or do they cut back and operate only in areas where they have been historically successful? For colleges and universities that have experienced decreased enrollments and revenues, decisions about which strategies to implement must be considered in order to respond to environmental changes. If small, private colleges do not respond to changes in the environment, they risk being priced out of the higher education market due to competition from less expensive educational options.

Small, private colleges and universities that correctly position themselves in the marketplace will be able to strategically recruit students; spend resources appropriately; and involve all faculty, staff, and administrators on campus in the process of strategic planning. According to Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence (1997), “The central objective of strategic planning is to position the institution so that it can shape and exploit its environment” (p. 3). Those colleges and universities that are able to use their internal strengths to take advantage of external opportunities will be able to balance their budgets, maintain or increase enrollments, potentially grow their endowments, satisfy constituents, and remain relevant in U.S. higher education.

The latest American economic recession, which began in the summer of 2007, had been the worst economic downturn since the 1930s. The number of jobs lost per month grew to 750,000 in the beginning of 2009 (Blinder & Zandi, 2010). Students and families affected by the rise in unemployment found themselves rethinking their personal financial situations. For example, “In 2009, average income was 11% lower than it had been a decade earlier for the bottom 20% of families, 5% lower for the middle 20%.” (Baum & Ma, 2010, p. 4). Declining family incomes affected many industries, including higher education and specifically small, private colleges and universities because of their
already higher tuition and decreased external funding. The need for short-term and long-term planning became increasingly important for small, private colleges and universities to survive and prosper (Calareso, 2007). According to the National Center for Education Statistics data, of the 161 four-year, private, non-profit colleges and universities with less than 5,000 students in the Great Lakes area that reported enrollment data from 2005/2006 and 2008/2009, 62 colleges and universities reported a decrease in enrollment, and the average decrease was more than 100 students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). For those colleges and universities that fit the same criteria, the reported net price in 2008-2009 averaged more than $18,500 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). For those colleges and universities that experienced an average decrease in enrollment of more than 100 students, the financial ramifications resulted in a loss of nearly $2 million in tuition revenue.

While small, private colleges and universities have relied heavily upon tuition revenue, they also have focused on donations, fundraising, and the appropriate use of the school’s endowment. Many major financial contributions to colleges and universities have been linked to and dependent upon stock market investments, which suggest that a downturn in the stock market can lead to a decrease in donations (Ashburn et al., 2008; Masterson, 2009). Additionally, as employment numbers decrease, so do annual gifts (Masterson, 2009). Institutional advancement departments must consider changing their strategic focus in accordance with their changing staffing needs. As enrollments and individual contributions decrease, colleges and universities often must consider using their endowments to make up for shortfalls. Obviously, “as the economy soured… the
value of colleges’ endowments plummeted” (Field, 2008, p. 2). According to Ashburn et al. (2008), not only has the value of endowments decreased, but some colleges have taken funds from their endowments to help retain students with the help of institutional financial aid. Institutions must use strategic planning to determine which areas will provide the greatest benefit in the short term and long term.

According to Sullivan and Richardson (2011), “Global economic conditions, shifting competitive forces, continuing calls for accountability, and dramatic changes in institutional funding streams contribute to an environment characterized by both opportunity and challenges” (p. 1). All of these factors make it critical for college and university administrators to think strategically and implement plans that drive the institution forward. In addition to strategic planning, administrators must ensure their faculty members and staff members are carrying out the strategic plan. “Holding higher education professionals accountable is a relatively new phenomenon” (Sullivan & Richardson, 2011, p. 1); thus, as colleges and universities carry out strategic plans, expectations should be established for faculty and staff members in order to make the strategic plan operational.

Current and future small, private school administrators need strategic planning skills and/or knowledge to ensure their colleges and universities are taking a comprehensive approach to planning; however, research has suggested that “there is not much emphasis in higher educational administration program curriculum on the relevance of teaching these approaches in the development of university and college administrators” (Burrell et al., 2011, p. 65). A review of the top 15 colleges and universities with higher education doctoral programs (U.S. News and World Report,
2013) suggested that only one institution, the University of Southern California, provides a course that specifically targets strategic planning (University of Southern California, 2012). Many of the doctoral programs in this review require coursework in organizational theory and economics of higher education; however, these coursework requirements may or may not focus on strategic planning processes. For example, Harvard University offered a course called “Managing Financial Resources in Nonprofit Organizations” (Harvard University, 2012). Most of the coursework offered in these doctoral programs seems to be somewhat unrelated to the business aspects of higher education, an area of concentration that senior-level administrators will need in the coming decades.

Higher education will play a key role in the United States economy in the coming years, and small, private colleges and universities are an important component of higher education as they educate more than 5 million students annually (National Student Clearinghouse, 2011). This number represents approximately half of the total number of students who attend four-year, public universities (Baum & Ma, 2010). As of 2012, private, four-year, non-profit colleges with fewer than 5,000 students made up approximately one-fifth of the total number of colleges and universities of higher education in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). Although private colleges and universities have not been in the majority and have typically been small in terms of student enrollment, they have served a significant portion of students and will play a crucial role in the future of higher education. In fact, Eckel, Affolter-Caine, Green and the American Council on Education (2003) have described the importance of this role as follows:

Society’s increasing demands on higher education to widen participation,
serve as an engine of economic and cultural development, and be a full
partner in the educational system have served as powerful forces for
change at the system and institutional levels. At the same time, increasing
competition for students and resources has spurred colleges and
universities to explore new ways to maintain or expand their enrollments,
create new revenue streams, and gain visibility and prestige that can
ensure their place in the higher education market. (p. 3)

Similar studies have been conducted that examined strategic planning at small,
private colleges and universities. Dissertation studies have explored the need for a highly
formalized system of planning that results in successfully implementing a strategic plan
in a higher education setting (Siren, 1982). Watkins (2002) examined three separate
colleges and universities and examined how the strategic plans were actually
implemented as well as the influence of these strategic plans on recruiting and retention.

However, these studies lacked several components that this study included. The
study conducted by Siren (1982) investigated whether formal planning processes were
used at colleges and universities of higher education. In this present study, the institution
under investigation used a structured process to develop and implement a strategic plan.
This research study focused on the implementation of a strategic plan. Watkins’ (2002)
study concluded that some strategic plans were tied to recruiting and retention efforts
while others were not. This study investigated the university as a whole and its ability to
implement a strategic plan. This study analyzed the implementation of a strategic plan at
a small, midwestern institution during an economic downturn. The role of online colleges
and universities and the weak economy are two factors that have not been associated with
previous studies. This study looked at how an institution implemented a strategic plan during challenging economic times. The context of small, private institutions combined with their history, the process of strategic planning, and the economy illustrate the need for additional research.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used for this study was from Hunt, Oosting, Stevens, Loudon and Migliore’s 1997 text on strategic planning in private higher education. Hunt et al. (1997) identified five key areas that need to be analyzed in order to successfully implement a strategic plan in private institutions of higher education. This conceptual model for strategic planning was not grounded in research findings; however, for the purposes of this research study, it was a useful and practical model for examining the strategic planning process. According to Hunt et al., colleges and universities must (a) evaluate their personnel, (b) build relationships among all campus constituents, (c) gain commitment from all parties involved, (d) ensure that effective leadership styles are in place, and (e) implement reward systems for those who help implement the plan.

Additionally, it is extremely important that an assessment plan is established before implementing the plan (Hunt et al., 1997). Putting these mechanisms in place before implementing a strategic plan is important to ensure its success. College personnel must be confident that the institution has established the leadership, relationships, and buy-in to ensure the success of the plan, or commitment to the plan will erode, and therefore the plan will be more likely to fail.

The steps suggested by Hunt et al. (1997) served as a guide for creating interview questions, which were used when conducting participant interviews and explored how the
College planned and executed the implementation of its strategic plan (see Appendix B & C). By asking questions related to employees, relationships, commitment, leadership, and rewards, I was able to better examine all facets of the implementation process. Hunt et al.’s 1997 work on strategic planning provided an appropriate conceptual model for examining and evaluating a small, private institution’s 2005 - 2010 strategic plan. The five steps Hunt et al. (1997) identified were used to help evaluate the process of implementing a strategic plan from beginning to end.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the manner in which one small, private institution implemented a strategic plan. The current gap in the literature is a lack of information on the implementation of strategic plans in higher education. This research study furthers the knowledge base related to higher education strategic planning implementation. This study also provides a better understanding of the need for strategic planning and provides an example of one small, private institution where one strategic plan was organized and implemented. This case study provides students and administrators with an in-depth look at the strategic planning implementation process in service of future colleges and universities that may wish to implement strategic plans. With increased competition for students, lack of comprehensive strategic planning education and curriculum options for doctoral students, and a continuing recession, this was the perfect time to analyze the implementation of a strategic plan so that other colleges and universities can learn from this process and adjust their strategies accordingly or mimic what has been done at this institution. This study is important because it illustrates how one small, private university responded to today’s educational
challenges while also experiencing the worst economy in decades.

**Research Questions**

In this study, I examined how a small, private institution implemented a strategic plan by conducting interviews, observing meetings and engaging in document analysis. The following research questions guided this study and were designed to identify strategies that have and have not been successful when implementing a strategic plan.

Research Question 1: How is a strategic plan implemented at a small, private institution?

Research Question 2: What can be learned from how a strategic plan is implemented?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes needed information about strategic planning implementation processes. As a result, higher education researchers may be better able to understand the importance of and research behind strategic planning in higher education. The findings of this study provide college and university faculty members and staff members with an in-depth look at one institution and its methods for implementing a strategic plan. The results of this study also enable faculty and staff members to gain an understanding of the strategic planning process at one particular institution and their role in the implementation. The findings provide parents and students with a clearer understanding of the initial actions colleges and universities take when implementing their strategic plans, which may assist students and parents in their decision when selecting an institution. The findings of this study provide administrators with strategies and tactics they can employ at their own colleges and universities when
implementing their strategic plans. Overall, findings of this study provide a variety of constituents with a better understanding of ways in which strategic planning and implementation processes can be used to improve higher education.

Additionally, the significance behind this particular case study is tied directly to the design. The benefit of studying one school is that it allowed me to focus in on the small details that are important to the findings. The single institution approach gave me time to delve into specific areas that routinely arise during interviews. This study not only gives general knowledge to the individual constituents interested in the results but also provides specific details for those interested in using the results for their own practice.

Furthermore, this study has provided College employees with an in-depth look at the Renaissance I strategic plan. It allows faculty, staff and administrators insight into the methods that helped successfully implement the Renaissance I strategic plan. College employees, and those interested in the institution, will be able to understand not only the implementation tactics used but also the results of the specific metrics used to measure success.

**Limitations**

The first limitation of this research was that I studied an institution in a particular geographical region of the country, and, as a result, the findings may not be generalizable to colleges and universities in other parts of the country. The economic environment differs regionally and how one institution plans and implements strategies within its market may be unique to that particular geographic region. Another limitation was that I studied only one small, private institution. Some of the results may not be applicable to other colleges and universities because of specific campus characteristics that affected the
implementation at the particular school I studied. Furthermore, the results of this study may only prove beneficial for small, private colleges and universities of higher education. Finally, the conceptual framework used for this study was not grounded in research and therefore provided an additional limitation to my research due to the fact that the framework has not been tested in other studies.

**Assumptions**

I assumed that the recent economic recession had affected small, private universities thus altering the way in which they strategically plan for the future. I also assumed that I would be given access to the participants, information, and documents required to conduct this study. Another assumption was that participants who were selected for interviews responded honestly to questions. The last assumption was that I was able to put aside biases and remain objective during the collection of data.

**Definitions of Terms**

Definitions of the following terms help clarify concepts that are important to this study:

- **College, Colleges, University, Universities, Institution, Institutions** – These terms will be used interchangeably to refer to colleges and universities of higher education.
- **Frontline Employees** – Individuals who are in direct contact with students and who implement strategic plans.
- **Implementation** – The process of executing a strategic plan.
- **Middle Managers** – Individuals who are in charge of departments and who are responsible for implementing strategic plans.
- **Senior Administrators** – President, vice presidents, and members of the board of
trustees.

Small, Private Colleges/Institutions – Four-year, nonprofit, degree-granting, private colleges and universities with between 1,000 and 4,999 students.

Strategic Planning – The process by which colleges and universities formally plan their strategies.

Senior Staff – A weekly meeting held by the president, which consists of all of the vice presidents, the athletics director, the dean of students, the president’s administrative assistants and the director of alumni relations.

Summary

Small, private colleges and universities provide a unique educational experience for some of today’s college students. The history of small, private colleges has been filled with competition and change; some of these colleges have endured these changes and weathered competitive environments, while others have been forced to cease operations.

The problem in today’s economy is that competition among small, private colleges and universities is at an all-time high and that economic forces have affected student and family incomes. As the economy has struggled, individuals around the country have turned to education to develop and improve their skills as well as to help create a more productive and employable workforce. To position themselves effectively within this new economy, small, private colleges and universities must strategically plan for their future.

To better understand and analyze small, private colleges and universities, this study used a framework that outlines the steps needed for a successful implementation. The research questions this study addressed help explain how a strategic plan is implemented after it is created. The purpose of this study in general is to better
understand how small, private colleges endure outside influences and competition. It is significant because of the number of small, private colleges and universities in the higher education industry and the number of students attending those colleges and universities. This study provides an in-depth examination of how one institution implements a strategic plan during a critical time in the industry of higher education.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This study analyzed the strategic planning implementation process at a small, private institution of higher education. I reviewed the history of small, private colleges and universities; the current state of higher education; the latest U.S. economic recession; and the revenue sources of small, private colleges and universities. Additionally, this chapter reviewed information about small, private college administrators and then concludes with an in-depth review of strategic planning and implementation processes.

In addition, I reviewed the research literature on implementation of strategic plans, the communication associated with the implementation process, the individuals charged with implementing strategic plans, and reasons why some colleges and universities have failed when implementing strategic plans. The purpose of this section is to provide a comprehensive understanding of all areas associated with strategic planning implementation at small, private colleges and universities during the 21st century and to review and summarize previous research on the topic of strategic plan implementation within higher education.

History of Small, Private Institutions

The section reviewed the history of small, private colleges and universities of higher education, including the purpose of these colleges and universities, the difficult economic challenges they have experienced, and their role in higher education. It is important to understand how small, private colleges and universities fit into the industry of higher education, especially in light of the fact that other colleges and universities may have lower admissions standards and lower tuition rates. Small, private colleges and
universities play a vital role in higher education, and understanding their place in the industry allows readers to understand the necessity of studying their strategic planning practices.

**Purpose of colleges.** Colleges and universities in the United States began in the mid-1600s with Harvard University (Oakley, 1992). Numerous colleges and universities were created after Harvard, many of which still exist today. For example, Princeton University, The University of Pennsylvania, The University of Georgia, and The University of North Carolina were all colleges and universities created before the turn of the 19th century. The growth of higher education did not stop in the 1800s as westward movement allowed individual communities access to local higher education because many towns viewed a college as one of the first necessities. Without the financing to build large universities, cities built much smaller colleges and universities (Schmidt, 1962). Many of these new colleges were religiously based and designed to educate the young men of a specific religious order. In the Dartmouth Case of 1819, the courts ruled that private colleges and universities were like private companies and not required to follow governmental regulations (Shulman, 1974). Rulings from the Dartmouth case allowed private universities to continue their growth and expansion; however, the Morrill Act of 1862 expanded the growth of public colleges and universities by providing land grants, which created large, public colleges and universities (Shulman, 1974).

The purpose of private colleges and universities during the 1800s was to develop leaders for these communities across the United States. Religious orders wanted their children raised with a set of beliefs and a level of education that would enable them to grow up and lead their respective communities. As enrollments grew after the Civil War
and world wars, private colleges and universities raised their admissions criteria and became increasingly selective (Shulman, 1974). “By the opening of the Civil War, however, perhaps twenty to twenty-five thousand young men and a few hundred young women were being given the current version of a liberal education” (Schmidt, 1957, p. 76).

The 1900s was a period of unpredictable trends in the enrollment and growth of colleges and universities. As settlers found new areas of the country in the west, they took the opportunity to build private colleges in their communities to provide access to education for different social classes, not just the elite. With more colleges and universities and greater access, enrollment in higher education grew rapidly.

Ashcroft, Kerr, and the Education Commission of the States (1990) noted the following:

The private sector of higher education… has been a major force in setting the pattern for all of higher education as the best system in the world – a productive combination of diversity, of dynamic change, of high quality, of institutional autonomy, of academic freedom, of individual attention to the student. (p. 2)

The purpose of small, private colleges and universities today is to provide an alternative to students. Small, private colleges and universities offer intimate settings in which students are able to learn and grow as individuals, not just academically as students. Because of the size of the student body and the size of the physical campus, these colleges and universities provide students with opportunities to personally meet their
classmates, professors, and campus personnel. The purpose of education at small, private colleges and universities is to develop teenagers into adults and to provide them with an education to start their careers in their field of choice.

**Tough times.** Small, private colleges and universities have experienced difficult times during the course of their existence. Schmidt (1957) found that of the 40+ Ohio colleges and universities created between 1790 and 1860, more than half were forced to shut down. States like Georgia and Missouri had even higher rates of closure for their small, private colleges and universities during the same time period. However, the main form of education during the 1800s was a liberal education as evidenced by the fact that approximately 70% of students were enrolled in programs that led to a liberal arts degree (Ferrall, 2011). Public universities were still being built and developed, and small, private universities were leading the way in educating the majority of American students. However, after the Civil War, public colleges and universities began to receive attention because of their tuition costs and ability to educate a larger number and wider variety of students.

The 20th century was a rocky period for small, private colleges and universities because of the emergence of public colleges and universities and community colleges. The ending of World War I and World War II saw increases in the number of college students enrolled both in public and private colleges and universities. However, the Great Depression and increases in citizen taxes slowed down any enrollment spurts (Shulman, 1974). Enrollment slowdowns generally caused concern for small, private colleges and universities that used tuition revenue as their key to survival. Small, private colleges and
universities sought donations from wealthy citizens or past graduates to get through tough times (Shulman, 1974). Also, as large, public universities began to develop, state monies that were once partially assigned to small, private colleges and universities began to diminish and be redirected to their public school counterparts (Shulman, 1974).

Mayhew (1969) found the following:

Until approximately 1956-57, the majority of all students received their education in privately supported colleges and universities; the images of these colleges and universities were (and still are) the stereotypical idea of what a collegiate institution really is… however, the power is changing.

At a rate of approximately 2 per cent a year, the proportion of those attending public colleges and universities is increasing over the proportion of students attending private colleges and universities. (p. 111)

There are numerous examples of small, private colleges and universities struggling due to financial hardships. Many colleges and universities have been forced to close their doors because of a lack of revenue or poor financial management. In the 1970s, a report found that more than 50 private colleges had to cease operations, another 20-plus decided to merge with other colleges and universities, and another handful became public colleges and universities in order to remain open for business (Ferrell, 2011). Another report found that more than 160 private colleges and universities closed between the 1960s and the 1990s (Ferrell, 2011).

As small, private colleges and universities realized this frightening period was upon them in the mid-1900s some colleges and universities increased their tuition to make up for annual enrollments decreases. The tuition gap between public and private
colleges and universities began to change as small, private colleges and universities began to experience a lack of tuition revenue and government support. This decrease in funding forced small, private colleges and universities to triple their tuition, while public school tuition doubled (Shulman, 1974). Some colleges and universities would give a scholarship to a student in exchange for a family donation to help build facilities on campus (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990).

More recently, small, private colleges and universities have encountered more forms of competition and increased reductions in state and federal funding. The increased legitimacy of online education mixed with the willingness of students to attend campus-based colleges and universities outside of the region where they live has threatened small, private colleges and universities. With the average tuition costing just under $22,000 per year (and with the tuition of numerous colleges and universities costing more than $40,000), small, private, not-for-profit colleges and universities have been forced to find ways to cut costs, enroll more students, or find new revenue streams (College Affordability and Transparency Center, 2013).

There are numerous examples of small, private colleges and universities confronting decisions that impact their ability to continue educating students. The College of Charleston, located in South Carolina, was once a private institution that was struggling and had an enrollment of only 500 students. The state government wanted to build a public school in the same area, but the College of Charleston president convinced the government to convert the institution into a public school, thus increasing resources and enrollment to several thousand students (Brown, 2011).

There is a long history of Antioch College in Ohio closing and reopening due to
financial hardships. “Four times – in 1863, 1881, 1919 and 2008 – it has had to close” (Donahue, 2011, p. 1). The institution, which opened in 1853, reopened in 2011 with a new plan to increase enrollment and return to its prior place in the industry of higher education.

Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, encountered a situation where the members of the board of trustees wanted to close the institution, but the former graduates sued the institution to keep the doors open. After a strategic plan was created, the administrators decided to keep the school open and change its enrollment and recruiting practices (Armacost, 2011). The institution is now planning to develop a plan to build their athletic programs in addition to growing the institution’s overall enrollment to 1,000 with a 2012-2015 strategic plan (Wilson College, 2013). Wilson College also plans to renovate their library and residence halls through capital campaigns (Wilson College, 2013).

Bradford College, a small, non-selective, low-endowment school, evolved over the years from a single-sex, two-year school into a traditional four-year, coeducational institution. “At small colleges like Bradford, having ten fewer students than expected in the fall or spring is a serious financial problem. Having thirty fewer is a disaster” (Levine, 2011, p. 23). Bradford College attempted to take out loan money to build additional campus facilities with the hope of attracting more students. When enrollments did not increase, the school was forced to shut down (Levine, 2011).

Today’s small, private colleges and universities face many of the same issues and decisions faced by colleges and universities like Bradford, Antioch, and Wilson. With the current state of higher education and the increasing competition that small, private
colleges and universities face, many key decisions will be made in the coming decades. Hunter (2012) found that small, private colleges and universities with larger enrollments, greater cash reserves, and larger potential donor bases scored higher than their counterparts on the DOE Test of Financial Strength, making these characteristics important to the vitality of a small, private colleges. Schools without these attributes must change their current practices or figure out how to offer what they currently provide in a more attractive way to students and families.

**Role in higher education.** Small, private colleges and universities were at the forefront of the American system of higher education when it first began. As the country grew, so too did the number of small, private colleges and universities in communities across the country. Institutions were initially created in association with a particular religion, and as wars ensued and the population increased, colleges and universities either raised their admissions standards or enrolled additional students, or both.

Today’s small, private colleges and universities have been forced to compete with a variety of colleges and universities, and most of these colleges and universities provide educational products and services that small, private colleges and universities are unable to offer to their students. Large, public universities offer name recognition, online colleges and universities offer more flexibility, and community colleges are much cheaper. “Almost every other type of higher education appeals to more people than does liberal arts” (Ferrall, 2011, p. 66). Small, private colleges and universities stay open by reinventing themselves, changing their financial aid tactics, creating academic programs, constructing new facilities, or choosing to admit students from different demographic populations.
The landscape of small, private colleges and universities in this second decade of the 21st century varies; there are those small, private colleges and universities that are stretching their boundaries and taking risks. There are also those colleges and universities that are staying true to their original mission and trying to do what they do best, just trying to do it better. These colleges and universities want to recreate what they have been doing their entire existence yet provide those services in the current educational and economic environment. In the middle of this portion of the industry are those small, private colleges and universities which are undecided or unwilling take risks.

For many small, private colleges and universities, institutional mission is what drives their everyday activities (Ferrari, & Velcoff, 2006). Schools with a small campus, where everyone knows everyone's name, often rely on their mission statement to give purpose to the students, staff members, and faculty members (Ferrari, & Velcoff, 2006). In times of trouble, many administrators consider changing the mission to cater to a different clientele. “There are many four-year colleges and universities that call themselves liberal arts colleges when in fact they look and operate more like comprehensive colleges and universities… This mission creep has and will continue to reduce the number of true liberal arts colleges and universities” (Kretovics, 2010, p. 29). The altering of academic offerings, away from liberal arts to more professional programs, can cause tension among faculty members (Breneman, 1990). Small, private colleges and universities need to weigh the positives and negatives of changing their direction as a strategy for working through economic difficulties.

**Current State of Higher Education**

The industry of higher education currently has been fixated on several major
issues such as enrollment concerns, competition, globalization, value, and accountability. Small, private colleges and universities have experienced the most pressure because of their small endowments, inconsistent enrollments, and declining resources with which to respond to today’s challenges. Administrators must figure out how to increase or maintain their revenue at a time when online colleges and universities can reach a wider audience, large public colleges and universities have more resources to enroll more students, and community colleges typically offer general education coursework at a significantly reduced cost. The issue for small, private colleges and universities is how or if they can capitalize on this expansion in the number of students while navigating the economic and financial challenges facing their colleges and universities.

**Enrollments.** Enrollment is up at every type of institution as more citizens view a college degree as a requirement to landing a job that will provide them with financial security. More high school graduates are attending some form of postsecondary education and more adults are returning to school to find a new career or earn their degree for the first time. “In 2005, almost 70 percent of high school completers chose to participate in post-secondary education, up from 49 percent in 1972” (Kretovics, 2010, p. 12). “Between 2000 and 2010, undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary colleges and universities increased by 37 percent, from 13.2 to 18.1 million students” (NCES, 2013). This increase in college enrollment benefited all sectors of higher education. To remain relevant, private higher education has attempted to find creative ways to keep their market share, even with increased postsecondary options for students. Small, private colleges and universities have adjusted their sticker price, financial aid offerings and academic programs to attempt to attract high performing students (Cohen,
According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) the number of students enrolled at degree-granting colleges and universities was approximately 8 million in 1970 but will increase to over 20 million by 2020. The number of traditional and nontraditional students continues to grow as students have greater access to education and have additional options to choose from when considering whether or not to pursue a postsecondary education.

In 2011, there were fewer than 5,000 degree granting colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). The number of four-year, not-for-profit, private colleges and universities with fewer than 5,000 students and that primarily offer bachelor’s degrees is approximately 1,400 colleges and universities, which represents approximately 29% of all educational colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015c). Although small, private colleges and universities may not be widely known by students outside of their general geographic region, they are a significant part of higher education and provide the education and experience some students need to be successful.

In the last forty years “enrollment at private colleges and universities nearly quadrupled . . . enrollment at private colleges and universities increased from 0.4 to 1.5 million students . . . since fall 1970, enrollment at private colleges and universities has grown at a faster rate than at public colleges and universities” (Postbaccalaureate Enrollment, n.d., p. 3). Small, private colleges and universities have managed to find ways to keep their enrollments up during a time of increasing competition and decreasing family incomes.

**Competition.** Large, public universities and community colleges have always
been viewed as competition by small, private colleges and universities, and more recently, online colleges and universities have created even more competition among small, private colleges and universities attempting to attract students all across the United States. Many colleges and universities have added an enormous number of online courses and programs to their curriculum, while at the same time other colleges and universities are offering what have been referred to as MOOCs, Massive Online Open Courses, to citizens (Lewin, 2012a & Lewin, 2012b). These programs do not currently offer degrees or provide grades for most courses, but they could alter the way higher education colleges and universities offer credit in the future. MOOCs offer the benefit of educating a large numbers of students at one time without forcing students into educational debt. However, these programs still need to find a way to offer credentials to students, generate revenue, and verify academic quality. Schools are still deciding whether MOOCs provide a viable educational delivery option (Online Learning Consortium, 2012). Some colleges and universities have started planning for how to implement MOOCs for their school, while others are seemingly waiting to see how this trend evolves over the next decade.

Online enrollment has increased substantially as more mainstream students participate in online courses at traditional colleges and universities. In fact, 30% of students in degree-granting postsecondary colleges and universities indicated that they had enrolled in at least one online course (Allen, Seaman, Babson Survey Research Group, & Quahog Research Group, 2013). Providing online options for students helps colleges and universities reduce costs and provide flexibility to their students. Colleges and universities are giving students the option of online education mixed with the traditional classroom experience. By providing these options, colleges are not only being
flexible in response to the needs and preferences of today’s students, but they are also
learning which styles works best for their students and their respective colleges and
universities.

**Globalization.** In addition to online education domestically, colleges and
universities in the United States have explored globalization to increase their student
population. Institutions such as Arizona State University, Columbia University, and
Carnegie Mellon University have all started exploring ways to increase their program
offerings internationally (DeMillo, 2011). Institutions have been experimenting with
international programs and campuses for the past 20 years. In the majority of instances,
these programs have been expanded in order to increase revenues and exposure in
different parts of the world (Lane, 2011).

There are skeptics that question the ability of higher education to provide enough
skilled workers to support the United States economy (Kochan, Finegold, & Osterman,
2012). As factories and assembly lines run by people decrease and technology-driven
careers fields increase, the U.S. will require a higher education and skill level to fill open
positions (Kochan, Finegold, & Osterman, 2012). This issue may force companies to
outsource jobs if enough qualified candidates are not produced from the U.S educational
system. The U.S. is currently behind China, India, and Canada in percentage of citizens
acquiring a postsecondary education (Corbett Broad, 2011). Much of the recent
presidential election focused on the United States’ ability to reduce outsourcing of jobs
overseas and its capability of providing a useful education to the next generation of
professionals.

**Questioning of value.** Today’s postsecondary landscape offers many options for
students to choose from to pursue their educational and career goals. A college degree in the 21st century is a necessity to compete for jobs in the current economy (Lucas, 1994; Newman, Couturier & Scurry, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, there has been much concern over the quality of higher education. Some in academia have (a) questioned the validity of online education because of the potential for cheating (Young, 2013) and (b) questioned the value of individual instruction and attention paid to students (Carlson, 2013). Parents and students have questioned the nature of the product that students actually receive when they finish with their degrees while amassing thousands of dollars of debt (Berger, 2013). The value of education and the quality of education being offered are being questioned by everyone involved in higher education and many outside of the industry (Berger, 2013).

The variety of educational options has led some small, private colleges and universities to offer lucrative financial aid packages or decrease admissions standards in order to enroll more students and meet annual enrollment goals (Kretovics, 2010). This is one reason colleges and universities are acting more like businesses and treating students more like consumers (Kretovics, 2010). Additionally, Kretovics has noted that students are like customers because of how they are treated by college admissions personnel; students and families are presented with marketing materials in an attempt to attract attention and entice students to enroll. The combination of marketing materials, generous financial aid packages, and potentially decreased admissions standards is designed to help a college or university's annual enrollment.

Small, private colleges and universities strive for national rankings, name recognition, and prestige to help increase visibility, enrollment, and revenue (Kretovics,
One way colleges and universities achieve these is by increasing their tuition and fees (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010). Students and parents who may be uneducated about the school selection process may assume that a higher cost means higher quality. Other families may also subscribe to this belief but may not think that the educational product being offered is worth the cost, or they may not be able to afford the expense, regardless of their perception of the value of attending a highly ranked school. Some of the national college rankings are based on retention rates, graduation rates, costs, and availability of academic programs as well as many other variables (U.S. News and World Report, 2013). The rankings do not necessarily provide a measure of return on investment or likelihood of obtaining employment. However, paying a high tuition may increase a school’s quality in the minds of families as well as increasing the college or university in the national rankings (Bok, 2006; Kamenetz, 2010). Students and parents are challenged in the school selection process because of the number of factors to consider and the options available to them (Kelly, 2010).

In 2006, the Department of Education released a report indicating that higher education needs to change from a “system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance” (Action Plan for Higher Education, 2006, para. 1). One question about the quality of education is the ability for a college degree to provide a return on investment. Human resource professionals have reported not being able to find enough qualified applicants to fill open positions in the workforce (Cappelli, 2011). The Spellings Commission on Higher Education pointed out inconsistent quality in higher education from school to school and professor to professor (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Future college students are wary of accumulating student loan debt in order to potentially receive an
average education that will not impress an employer or lead to a career (Hoover, 2013).

Another question that relates to the quality of education is the amount of money spent towards teaching and learning as opposed to recruitment of students. There has been a concern that college and university administrators are making decisions about budgets that do not benefit the education of current students (Wellman, 2008). College and university administrators grapple between spending their revenues on recruiting an incoming class to ensure tuition revenue or using current revenues to update educational technology, improve academic facilities, or hire additional faculty.

With a struggling economy, increases in tuition, and decreases in revenue sources, many have questioned the value of a college education (Supiano, 2011). More progressive thinkers have wondered whether MOOCs can provide the education needed to be successful in today’s workforce or whether a more traditional education focused on developing critical thinking and reasoning skills is needed. Others have wondered whether businesses will value a traditional degree as much as they have valued it in the past and whether they may consider different ways of finding or evaluating skilled workers. Spending four to five years on a college campus at a total cost of nearly $100,000 developing intangible skills should serve as a foundation for a successful career. However, students and parents are questioning whether the extra dollars they pay for tuition are worth it, compared to less expensive options (Hoover, 2013). Yet the question in today’s postsecondary education marketplace is where to go to college, not whether to go to college because “we as a society believe that higher education makes better students and better students make a better society and a better society makes a better economy” (Kelling & Hersh, 2011, p. 6).
**Accountability.** Higher education is being questioned about academic quality and increasing costs. There is blame placed on secondary education for not producing college-ready students (Adams, 2013). There are questions raised on government funding for colleges and universities and the efficiency with which colleges and universities spend those dollars (Alexander, 2000). There are questions for colleges and universities about what the tuition increases actually pay for and why tuition is increasing at an alarming rate (Berger, 2013). The heightened sense of accountability has been increasing in higher education as everyone wants to know more specifics about the business practices of colleges (Alexander, 2000).

The current organizational structures of colleges and universities have become increasingly complex. The number of staff members and administrative professionals have increased in colleges and universities compared to the past (Vedder, 2004). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, non-faculty employees increased by more than 50% at colleges and universities (Farrell, 1993). Some tuition and fee increases were needed to pay the salaries and benefits of these employees, and the cost was shifted to the students. Colleges and universities have become aware of the need to redefine job roles and responsibilities as a way of determining whether inefficiencies exist and then eliminating those deficiencies through layoffs or process changes. Colleges and universities need to find ways to save money to counter revenue shortages (Ferrall, 2011; Shulman, 1974; Wellman, 2008).

Many colleges that were successful in the 20th century have not yet adapted to the current economy or to the needs of today’s college student (Jelski, 2012). According to Farrell (1993), some colleges and universities offer antiquated or outdated academic
programs based on tradition, not realizing that this practice is impractical, costly, and ineffective. Likewise, they often provide duplicate, overlapping, or redundant services and employees without considering the effect that this has on the budget or the relevance to the education of the students (Farrell). Institutions have begun to rethink the way they do business by considering the option of cutting academic programs that are underperforming, underutilized, or not producing enough revenue.

Institutions have been asked to streamline their processes or justify the way they carry out organizational activities (Kamenetz, 2010; Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004; Wellman, 2008). Schools also have been encouraged to work more closely with businesses to identify the specific skills college graduates should have when they complete their degrees. Seemingly, the days of blindly trusting colleges and universities to provide what is desired to support and grow the domestic economy are over. Taxpayers, government officials, and students have demanded greater transparency from higher education, especially at the current cost of obtaining a college degree (Fischer, 2011; Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004).

Many colleges and universities have been trying to find ways to cut costs, increase the value of their educational offerings, and increase profits: “Small investments in updating traditional teaching methods could bring huge payoffs… experimenting with new technology and emphasizing collaboration among faculty, colleges can pursue both excellence and efficiency” (Wiseman, 2011, p. 2). Asking faculty members and staff members to be more efficient has been a new practice in higher education, but it will be required to show students and families that they are receiving a quality, useful degree at a good value and that the return on investment will pay off in the future.
Declining family incomes. As the U.S. economy has battled back from the recession, family incomes have been increasing for some families and stagnant for others. The job market has returned slowly but has not yet approached pre-recession levels. Because of the slow recovery, family income levels have not been increasing at the rate they had before the recession. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income for all households between 2006 and 2007 rose by more than 1% (Bernstein, 2008); however, median incomes declined by 2.5% between 2010 and 2011 (Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage, 2012). This reduction in family incomes forced individuals to consider less expensive purchases for their families. In the case of small, private colleges and universities, it may have resulted in students attending a different college or university for a period of time or a different college or university altogether, especially if expensive colleges or universities were unable to explain the benefits or justify the cost of the tuition at their institution.

The declining incomes of families in the United States can hamper certain types of colleges and universities even if college enrollments increase during a recession. Students may not have the combination of federal financial aid, non-federal student loans, and family income to afford a high-priced school (Tuby, 2012). Colleges and universities have been working to increase affordability, explain the value that students receive, emphasize the quality of the education they offer, and provide a rationale for why students should consider them for their education (DeMillo, 2011; Kahn, 2011; Newman, et al., 2004). However, in some cases, the cost may just be too high for students and families to justify.

Rising cost of college. During a recession, many colleges and universities expect
to see increased enrollment as traditional and adult students are reminded of the value of a college degree in a competitive job market. However, where students choose to attend can be influenced by the institution’s cost, students’ income, and available forms of financial aid. According to Trends in Higher Education (2013) the listed tuition and fees for private, four-year, nonprofit colleges and universities was just over $30,000 for 2013-2014 (p. 10). The tuition, fee, room and board annual increase from 2003-2004 to 2013-2014 for private, four-year, nonprofit colleges and universities was approximately 2.1% (Trends in Higher Education, 2013, p. 14). However, the annual increase for four-year public colleges and universities was 3.2% from 2003-2004 to 2013-2014 (Trends in Higher Education, 2013, p. 14). The cost of college has increased significantly over the past 10 years as college and universities have expanded the size of their faculty and staff, the cost of doing business has increased, and colleges and universities have spent millions updating their facilities to grow enrollments and increase tuition revenue.

The rising cost of college can force students and families to consider other educational options instead of the more traditional path leading straight from high school to college. Some students have chosen to attend a local community college for a year or two and take courses that satisfy their general education curriculum requirements (de Vise, 2011). This option is usually less expensive because community college tuition costs are generally lower and students are able to live at home. Also, some students may choose online education for some of the same reasons (Blair, 2013). There are other students who may decide to join the workforce for a period of time after high school to save enough money to enroll in a college or university. Regardless of the path students choose, most Americans still believe that a four-year college education is necessary and
“Smaller private colleges would be under the most pressure among higher-education colleges and universities… the best-managed colleges and universities have opportunities to thrive in the current market” (Carlson, 2011, p. 2). Small, private colleges and universities have to work with students and families to understand why their cost is higher than other colleges and universities and what the education they provide means for students’ careers after they graduate. Students and families need to be convinced that the education is worth the cost and is an investment that will more than pay for itself over the course of the recipient’s professional career.

**Need for education and jobs.** In most cases, students need an education to secure a job in their desired field. In 2011, earnings were more than 60% higher for college graduates than for high school completers, which was the biggest discrepancy since before 1920 (United States Department of Treasury, n.d.). However, colleges and universities have not produced the type of employees or the knowledge levels desired by industries that are hiring the next generation of workers (Liveris, 2011). Some businesses have looked internationally to find qualified job candidates because many foreign students have passed American students in terms of their attractiveness to employers (Vlasenko, 2010). This situation emphasizes the need for students and families to be selective when choosing an educational institution.

**Small, Private College Funding Sources**

The way that small, private colleges and universities operate is different from their public counterparts in terms of where they get their revenue to operate. During recessions, higher education colleges and universities look for new ways to generate
revenue, especially as colleges and universities experience decreases in tuition revenue and dips in their fundraising totals. According to Kaufman and Wogom (2008), the main sources of revenue for small, private colleges are “payments by full-paying students, payments by students on financial aid, the annual (Alumni) fund, and spending from endowment” (p. 201). The following section outlines the different types of funding sources used by small, private colleges and universities to fund their day-to-day operational budgets and to finance long-term projects.

**Tuition.** According to Loomis Hubbell, Massa, and Lapovsky (2002), “All but a handful of independent colleges and universities are dependent on tuition and fee income to finance the bulk of their operating budgets” (p. 1). Each and every year, small, private colleges and universities are focused on recruiting reports as they try to determine whether they are going to have enough students matriculate to pay the bills. And although the purpose of colleges and universities of higher education is not necessarily to make a profit, tuition revenue is needed to allow small, private colleges and universities to stay open for business year after year (Ekman, 2006).

As tuition sticker prices have increased, so too has the practice of tuition discounting, whereby colleges and universities monitor their average discounted price. Students and families could seemingly rarely afford the full cost of attending a small, private institution, especially during times of economic hardship. Tuition discounting ideally has been used to maximize tuition revenue and enroll a diverse student body, both practices which must align with the institutional mission. However, tuition discounting when used incorrectly can work against a school if administrators are not able to attract the students they want to enroll and if they do so at a price that does not generate
Small, private colleges and universities enroll low-income students at a similar rate as do public colleges and universities, yet the average incomes of families at small, private colleges and universities is less than families at public colleges and universities (Ekman, 2006). This situation translates into enrolling a higher percentage of students who are available for federal grant aid yet not necessarily enough aid to cover the gap between the tuition and fees of private colleges and universities and the tuition and fees of public colleges and universities. Students who attend small, private colleges and universities have been charged higher tuition and fees, have smaller family incomes, and generally receive more federal grant aid. Because of these reasons, small, private colleges and universities must use tuition discounting to offer a more attractive and competitive price point to attract and enroll students.

The revenue sources between private and public colleges and universities differ. While public colleges and universities obtain nearly 50% of their revenue from governments, private colleges and universities receive less than 20% from that source (NCES, 2012). Private colleges and universities obtain approximately 75% of their revenues from tuition, fundraising, educational activities and return on endowments, making those activities important to the success of small, private colleges and universities (NCES, 2012). The differences in funding sources drive the daily activities of both types of colleges and universities and illustrate the responsibilities that small, private colleges and universities have to enroll students, raise funds, and manage their endowment.

**Fundraising.** Fundraising is critical for small, private colleges and universities to help build the endowment and fund large-capital campus projects. Many donations from
private donors are based on the stock market and personal investments, making the recession a difficult time for colleges and universities to raise money. In 2009, higher education saw a decrease in private contributions, yet 2010 and 2011 reversed the trend as both years saw increases in private giving (Tuby, 2012). In order for small, private colleges and universities to be successful, they must be able to raise funds from their alumni and local philanthropists.

Since fundraising is one of the main sources of revenue for small, private colleges and universities, many of these colleges and universities have invested considerable amounts of time and energy into their advancement departments. Most gifts from donors are small amounts that are used to help support the day-to-day operating budget. According to Kaufman and Wogom (2008), larger gifts generally are assigned to a specific project and can come with restrictions from the donor.

Schools also have begun to expand their giving programs as times have progressed and students and families have changed. In today’s world, some parents are extremely involved in their child’s life and will go to great lengths to help them succeed. Schools have started parental giving programs to allow parents to become involved in the advancement of the school their son or daughter attends. According to Quizon (2011), hundreds of colleges and universities have adopted this type of program in an attempt to increase parental involvement and to show prospective students and families the satisfaction levels of current students. The goal of this type of program is to show that if current students and families are satisfied and happy to the point of giving additional money beyond tuition and fees back to the school, prospective students and families know they are making a good investment.
Although colleges and universities are sometimes desperate for new funds, there can be situations where colleges and universities will turn away gifts. Some donors will require that their gifts be used for very specific purposes or not used at all. When fundraisers are wary of the restrictions that may not work towards the institutional mission or gifts that may require too much monitoring, they may refuse a donation from a private source (Bellfleur, 2010). Small, private colleges and universities view fundraising as an important source of revenue and use monies to support their educational activities and advance their institution (Carlson, 2011). These gifts are increasingly important as the number of educational options continues to rise and colleges and universities may experience enrollment swings annually.

**Endowments.** An endowment is a fund of money that is used by colleges and universities to help support their budget and daily operations. It consists of monies that are used as investments, and generally only the return on investment is included in the budget (Schumacher, 2003). Much like fundraising figures, endowments lost significant value during the recession but rebounded in 2010 with a double-digit percentage gain in value (Ensign, 2010). According to Brainard (2011), the majority of colleges and universities increased their spending rate during the recession to help with financial aid and the operating budget.

Endowments typically grow, even during periods of poor economic performance across the country (Bellfleur, 2010). However, the rate at which money from the endowment is spent must be set before the return on investment is known (Kaufman & Wogom, 2008). The reasoning behind this is to make sure the endowment is equally available for future students. Boards of trustees that overspend for one generation are
jeopardizing the funding available for future generations of students.

The accountability of certain aspects of colleges and universities has recently been called into question (Chance, & Williams, 2009; Rowley et al., 1997; Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). External constituents have asked colleges and universities why they do not increase their spending rate on their endowment returns during times of economic adversity or, if they did increase it, why they did not increase it more (Kaufman & Wogom, 2008). Because costs have continued to increase, and in some cases endowments have continued to grow, outsiders want to know why colleges and universities have not helped students and families instead of shifting the costs to those with declining incomes and employment issues.

According to Christensen and Eyring (2011), small, private colleges and universities must spend considerable amounts of time managing their endowments to ensure they are being used as effectively as possible: “Private universities without national recognition and large endowments are at a great risk (p. 18). Schools that focus not only on the endowment but also other sources of revenue have been most successful. Small, private colleges and universities without large endowments must learn how to effectively spend and manage their endowment to ensure the current and future state of the institution is solid (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kaufman & Woglom, 2005).

**Other sources.** Today’s small, private colleges and universities have been looking for new ways to generate revenue (Blumenstyk, 2008). With limited amounts of attractive facilities, budgets at their breaking point, and colleges and universities doing everything they can to enroll more students, colleges and universities have not been certain about the best course of action. In non-higher education business, companies have
always encouraged their employees to find ways both to reduce costs and improve quality (Vedder, 2004). In higher education, there are rarely incentives for employees to find ways to be more efficient; efficiency might mean a need for fewer employees. Yet another source of revenue for today’s colleges and universities of higher education would be to encourage cost-reducing practices and empower employees to improve their current practices.

While student enrollment has been the key to the success of many colleges and universities, other areas of revenue generation are important. “A 2008 survey of colleges presidents showed that fundraising, endowments, availability of student aid and student enrollment were at the top of the list of concerns for private colleges” (Dessoff, 2009, p. 3). Some colleges and universities have suggested increasing collaboration among area colleges and universities to offer a wider variety of courses and reduce duplication. Some colleges and universities have explored the possibility of sharing enrollment information to better recruit their target students (Tilsley, 2010). Other colleges and universities have combined extracurricular programs; some programs may be small at one school, but when they are combined with regional colleges and universities, these programs become more cost effective. Institutions also have considered implementing faculty development programs across campuses to reduce costs (Tilsley, 2010). All of these actions could help colleges and universities save money and free up money to spend on increasing the ability of colleges and universities to generate additional revenue.

**Conclusion**

Small, private colleges and universities need to find creative ways to remain financially viable in today’s marketplace. Grandgenett (2007) found that most small,
private colleges and universities in the Midwest have struggled to find effective strategies to navigate today’s complex economic landscape. Institutions must find ways to highlight their unique features in order to generate the revenue needed to stay in business. Grandgenett (2007) also suggested investigating new organizational structures that fit the needs of each specific situation. Small, private colleges and universities need to constantly analyze their own situation to ensure they are making decisions to compete in the marketplace and generate revenue.

**Small, Private College and University Administrators**

Today’s colleges and universities are different than the colleges and universities of even the last decade. Institutions have been faced with increased competition from other colleges and universities and a greater need for maximizing current sources of revenue (Newman, et al., 2004). The college president of 2013 has expectations different from most of his or her predecessors (Cook, 2012). Choban, Choban, & Choban (2008) noted that today’s presidents are held increasingly accountable for the financial success of the institution, more so than the fulfillment of the mission. In order to remain viable in today’s marketplace, small, private colleges and universities have been forced to analyze their internal and external situations constantly.

In the middle of the 20th century, college presidents were supposed to be everything to everyone on campus (Stover, 1974). They were to be educated more than anyone else at the institution yet be a seasoned salesman with the ability to raise enough funds for the institution to grow. College presidents were heavily involved with the academic side of the institution and more often than not spent a considerable amount of their careers teaching at the collegiate level (Sontz, 1991). The college president of
yesteryear was able to review the holdings of a college library and know which departments and colleges were successful based on their holdings (Stover, 1974). College presidents were mostly white males around the age of 50 (Cohen, March, & Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1974). They were almost always married to women who resembled the First Lady, and the wives of college presidents were actively involved in presidential social activities. The college president of the 20th century was almost a mythical figure who was poised to take the institution to new heights and was able to meet each and every requirement issued by members of the board of trustees.

In the 1980s and 1990s, presidents began to stay in their positions longer, and their backgrounds usually consisted of the social sciences as opposed to the engineering and pure science backgrounds of presidents in the preceding decades (Dennison, 2001). Some boards of trustees also began looking outside of faculty administrators for their presidents because the skills required to lead colleges and universities began to change. Presidents needed to have more than teaching experience to operate and lead a university. Additionally, the racial and gender makeup of presidents began to change as the number of minorities and female presidents increased in the 1990s (Cook, 2012). Education was also the most common academic background for presidents, and most received their Ph. D. degrees or Ed.D. degrees during this time period (Robert & Paul, 2001). Most colleges today use a professional search company to execute their presidential search, but 30 to 50 years ago, most colleges and universities performed the search internally (Cook, 2012).

Many college presidents today have been recruited primarily from other senior administrative college positions on the same or other campuses. However, Cook (2012) has noted that while most presidents are hired from within the industry of higher
education, the percentage of individuals who were hired as presidents and whose last role was outside of higher education almost doubled in the mid-2000s. Another change in the role of college presidents has been their main responsibilities, which have changed over the years. Before the turn of the 21st century, many college presidents split their time between academic involvement and administrative tasks. Cook (2012) found that college presidents spend the majority of their time on strategic initiatives, raising money, budgeting, and developing relationships within the community to foster institutional growth.

Senior private college administrators have more diverse backgrounds than college presidents. Counting all types of colleges and universities, a study in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2008) found that almost half of the senior administrators were female and nearly half were between the ages of 51 to 60. The race make up of senior administrators is mostly white, which is similar to the race make up for the office of the president (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008). According to HigherEdJobs.com, most chief administrators earn six-figure salaries at their colleges and universities (2015). The education level and specialty of senior administrators varies drastically. For example, current university employees studied a wide variety of academic topics and hold a variety of degrees.

The curricula of the top doctoral and master’s degree higher education programs across the United States reflect a variety of academic coursework that could prepare today’s administrators for current and future leadership roles. Obviously, not all higher education senior administrators have educational backgrounds in higher education administration, management, and/or leadership. However, for those individuals who have
studied higher education, a review of the top higher education graduate programs (Higher Education Administration, 2015) has indicated an absence of strategic planning-related coursework across the curriculum. Course listings from these programs include topics such as student development, research, current topics in higher education, teaching, policy creation and policy development, and many others. However, specific strategic planning courses rarely appear in the listing of courses on the websites of top programs.

Many references to planning on the websites of top programs reflect curriculum or program planning by administrators. For example, the University of Georgia offers a course called Strategy and Management (Institute of Higher Education, n.d.), and Harvard University lists a course called Thinking Strategically about Educational Reform (Higher Education, 2013). Vanderbilt University explains that its program teaches students to be aware of “broader strategic concerns” as they relate directly to enrollment management (Vanderbilt University, 2013, para. 1). Since there are those who argue the strategic planning background of current administrators may be lacking, it will important for academic programs to address this area of higher education (Hunt et al., 1997).

Seemingly, all universities adopt some type of a strategic planning initiative, and the education and experience of their administrators is important to its success.

The industry of higher education has recently branched out and considered new methods of finding future leaders, potentially because higher education has recently been operated more and more like a traditional private business. As this shift has occurred, boards of trustees have experimented with non-traditional potential candidates. For example, the Catholic University of America’s Columbus School of Law hired a private-practice lawyer to fill the position of dean, and the Brooklyn Law School did the same
(Hammond, 2013). When Mount Marty College was conducting a search for its college president the members of the search committee specifically stated they were looking for an individual who was able to address both the academic and business concerns of the university (Rae, 2011). Some colleges and universities involved in selecting a new president have done so because of past poor fiscal management, and therefore a new president is required to be business savvy in order to be successful. In addition to the fact that colleges and universities have looked outside of education to find leaders, colleges and universities also have begun to create new positions to deal with non-traditional issues, such as vice presidents in charge of economic development and provosts for online learning (Hammond, 2013).

Today’s small, private college administrators have become more diverse and have been asked to be more knowledgeable than their predecessors. For those current administrators looking to further their education through a graduate degree in higher education, coursework to help them become knowledgeable in strategic planning has been lacking. This deficiency of curriculum and knowledge focused on strategic planning skills has encouraged search committees to look outside of higher education for the leaders of tomorrow. The task for today’s colleges is to determine whether they have the administrators to effectively manage their business according to the principles of a successful strategic plan in order to be successful in the current economic climate or whether they need to look outside the world of academia to find such leaders.

**Strategic Planning in Higher Education**

Regardless of the time period during which strategic planning gained popularity, the components and benefits have varied substantially depending on the individual
developing the planning initiative. Chance and Williams (2009) described strategic planning as a process that “enhances practices, provides guidance [and] develops a process for seeking opportunity” (p. 38). Thompson and Martin (2005) suggested that strategic planning sets “appropriate targets and milestones (and establishes) a suitable organizational structure” (p. 688). Some researchers have indicated that the true value of strategic planning is not the end result but rather the process of going through an evaluation of an institution’s current market position (Bryson & Bromiley, 1993). Leslie and Fretwell (1996) stated that strategic planning works best “as a continual process of experimentation that allows multiple decisions to emerge on many different fronts simultaneously” (as cited in Chance & Williams, 2009, p. 41). Allison and Kaye (2005) have defined strategic planning as the practice of making decisions, being purposeful about implementing those decisions, and using those decisions to determine how to allocate resources. According to Keller (1983), strategic planning occurs when a school is aware of its external environment and makes decisions in response to that environment to better the current and future state of the institution. Chaffee (1984) noted the importance of conducting market analysis when going through the strategic planning process to enable colleges and universities to monitor developments in the industry. Bumham (2007) noted four requirements when creating a strategic plan: the plan must be tied to the mission, resources must be allocated appropriately, the plan must be assessed, and the plan must be visible for others to see. Hignite (2007) suggested that “scenario building” (p. 50) also must be included in the strategic planning process to ensure that a variety of situations are considered. All of these perspectives contribute to an understanding of exactly what concepts and processes should go into a strategic plan. Each institution has
its own set of variables and may need to stress certain aspects more than others. As a way of narrowing the definition of “strategic planning,” Keller (1983) noted what strategic planning is not:

- It is not the production of a blueprint…
- It is not a set of platitudes…
- It is not the personal vision of the president or board of trustees…
- It is not a collection of departmental plans, compiled and edited…
- Strategic decision making is not done by planners…
- It is not a substitution of numbers for important intangibles…
- It is not a form of surrender to market conditions and trends…
- Strategic planning is not something done on an annual retreat…
- It is not a way of eliminating risks…
- It is not an attempt to read tea leaves and outwit the future. (p. 140-142).

Many times, senior administrators, faculty members and staff members have preconceived notions about the strategic planning process. It is important to avoid some of these common misunderstandings in order to maximize the possibility of the successful creation and implementation of a strategic plan.

**History.** The term “strategic planning” has been defined by some as an intentional, continuous process whereby colleges and universities attempt to achieve goals in response to their external environment, allocate resources towards those goals, and assess the progress of the plan (Allison & Kaye, 2005; Chance, 2010; Hunt, 1997; Rowley et al., 1997). The concept of strategic planning has been around for more than 50 years and has been referred to by a number of different monikers. The strengths and weaknesses of strategic planning have been dependent upon the industry, the organization, and the organization’s current situation while creating and implementing
the plan. This section will discuss the history of strategic planning, some related terms, how strategic processes are carried out on college campuses, and some negative aspects of higher education strategic planning. The final portion of this section specifically examines the implementation of strategic plans.

The concept of strategic planning can be traced as far back as 500 BC in texts like *Art of War* by Sun Tzu (Sun, 2006). “For centuries the *Art of War* has held a preeminent position among both Chinese and Japanese strategists” (Michaelson et al., 2010, p. xv). The *Art of War* was used as a guide for warfare strategy and is still used today by individuals in the business world to plan strategically. Sun Tzu’s text “emphasizes winning through vastly superior positioning so that the actual conflict is anti-climactic” (Boar, 1995, p. 1). Sun Tzu’s text includes sections on “laying plans” and “weak points and strong” (Sun, 2006, p.3). Sun Tzu’s writings have served as a basis for many other works of strategic planning.

Strategic planning was also evident in the 5th century Ancient Greek warfare when soldiers would forecast future attacks by enemies of Greece. Themistocles, who was a Greek soldier and statesman, worked hard to make the citizens of Greece recognize future potential dangers (Halsall, 1999; Rodgers, 1964). To persuade the government of Greece to plan ahead of time, Themistocles created a myth that Greece might be invaded by Persia. This myth caused the government council to meet and “discuss plans for resistance” (Rodgers, 1964, p.59). It was this type of thinking that laid the groundwork for future strategic planning process for all types of organizations.

In addition to Sun Tzu, others also wrote topics related to leadership, management and strategic planning. “In 1500, in Florence, Italy, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, a book
that provides extraordinarily deep insights into the psychology and means of leadership
during periods of change and conflict” (Boar, 1995, p. 1). Machiavelli “famously asserted
that good rulers sometimes have to learn ‘not to be good.’ They have to be willing to set
aside ethical concerns of justice, honesty, and kindness in order to maintain the stability
of the state” (Wheeler, n.d., p.1). Although some may not agree with Machiavelli’s
opinions, he wrote many texts on strategy and leadership during his lifetime.

In the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower was “a student of strategy [and]
believed in the value of the initiative” (Metz, 1993, p.1). Eisenhower had to navigate two
different types of situations in the United States; he had to be both a wartime strategist
and a “deterrent strategist” (Metz, 1993, p.1). Both of the situations required President
Eisenhower to strategically consider how as to keep the country safe, not deplete excess
resources, and carefully evaluate the use of nuclear weapons (Metz, 1993). Within
Eisenhower’s administration, one individual held the title “Director of Strategic Target
Planning” (p.4) and was in charge of creating an operations plan and target list for
potential future strikes (Rosenberg, 1983).

Mintzberg (1994) reported that strategic planning, in its current form, has been
around since the 1950s but mostly has been used for budgeting purposes. Mintzberg
stressed that for a strategic plan to be successful, organizations must coordinate their
future activities rationally. Other researchers have placed the origins of strategic
management in the 1960s and 1970s and suggested that, for the most part, educational
colleges and universities have not been as successful as for-profit businesses (Dooris,
Kelley, & Trainer, 2004; Rowley et al., 1997). Harvard University began teaching a
course titled Business Policy that covered strategy and management in the 1960s (D.
Yoffie, personal communication, January 5, 2014). Chance and Williams (2009) noted that a similar process, referred to as “long term planning,” originated during the 1970s and 1980s in higher education. Glaister and Flashaw (1999) also noted that strategic planning was around in the 1970s but lost popularity by the end of the decade and did not re-emerge until the 1990s.

In 1993, The United States federal government mandated strategic planning in all of their agencies through the Government Performance and Result Act. The purpose was to increase confidence of American citizens that “waste and inefficiency” (p. S-20-1) would be reduced in the federal government (Government performance and results act, 1993). Federal agencies are required to update their plan every three years and address goals and objectives and how those goals and objectives would be achieved (Government performance and results act, 1993). In 2010, an update was made to the GPRA of 1993, called the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 requiring federal agencies to display their plan on a public website (Government performance and results act modernization act, 2010).

Strategic planning has been around for decades, helping colleges and universities of higher education successfully navigate environmental challenges. Many colleges and universities realized the need to examine more closely the decisions they were making and the path they wanted to take. As enrollments grew and campuses needed to expand, it became important for colleges and universities to plan out a strategic path in order to accommodate that expansion and to ensure that the funding would be available to build additional buildings or hire additional faculty members.

**Strategic planning on college campuses.** Strategic planning is popular in
business because it allows companies to plan activities that generate revenue. Businesses became involved in strategic planning before higher education did. However, as competition increased for students and students began to look beyond their local colleges and universities for educational options, it became important for colleges and universities to think strategically about their activities. Today, almost all colleges and universities have some sort of strategic planning initiative on their campuses, yet the process decided on and the importance placed on the process vary from school to school.

One author has noted that there are five different types of planning areas that are carried out by colleges and universities: colleges and universities evaluating their strategic planning efforts, information technology planning, facility planning, financial planning, and academic planning (Rudden, 2008). At some colleges and universities, all of these areas may be combined into one master campus strategic plan that addresses all initiatives simultaneously. Many think that strategic planning should be an ongoing process, not a set of objectives with a deadline in place. Hunt et al. (1997) has emphasized that strategic planning should not be an activity that is repeated once every couple of years. As the external environment changes, so too does the need for the strategic plan to be adjusted. Those colleges and universities that decide on a course of action and continue on that course without giving consideration to their competition or to their customers will be unsuccessful.

Institutions of higher education differ in many respects from for-profit businesses. Businesses conduct strategic planning initiatives oftentimes without input from front-line staff members (Rowley et al., 1997). Executives decide on the best course of action for the company in order to maximize profits, and these decisions are transmitted to those
who actually carry out the plan on a day-to-day basis. Business executives, in many
cases, are not concerned with buy-in from lower level employees because the end goal is
to generate additional revenue, and strategic plans are created and designed to accomplish
that goal. Colleges and universities are different than most businesses, which can alter the
way strategic planning is carried out (Keller, 1983).

Colleges and universities have complex organizational structures that many times
do not translate into a top-down mentality. Front-line employees and managers are
consulted and asked for input to create buy-in before any decisions are made or
announced (Rowley et al., 1997). Secondly, faculty and staff question ideas and plans
before they are finalized, which means that many ideas are excluded prior to
implementing them (Rowley et al., 1997). This process can be beneficial in terms of
identifying potential downfalls but may also hinder opportunities because those
questioning a particular management decision do not directly benefit and therefore may
not fully support the decision. Finally, colleges and universities are also mission driven.
Colleges and universities would not include in their mission a desire to generate revenue
to bolster their budget and improve the campus (Rowley et al., 1997). Mission statements
many times refer to academic teaching and personal learning as goals for students.

Negative aspects. Strategic planning works differently on college campuses than
it does in for-profit businesses. The differences in opinion between faculty members and
staff members at a university create a variety of problematic issues. For example, faculty
members and staff members usually differ in their opinions about best practices,
depending on this issue being discussed. On many campuses, faculty members and staff
members do not work well together, but yet they are forced to communicate and interact
during the strategic planning process and must agree on a strategic direction (Rowley et al., 1997). Some experts have noted that the value of strategic planning is found in the process of actually creating the plan; however, the process can cause higher levels of conflict within an institution (Chance & Williams, 2009). This conflict may never be resolved if the end result of the strategic plan benefits one group of constituents and takes resources away from another group.

There is also a lack of clarity, a lack of vision, and a lack of transparency in many strategic planning processes (Chance, 2010; Choban, Choban, & Choban, 2008; Rowley et al., 1997). These absences can result in miscommunication of a strategic plan and stop any progress before it even starts. These communication misunderstandings can damage trust between administrators and faculty members, which inevitably sidetracks efforts toward progress (Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). Fierbaugh (2012) found that administrators need to work on improving communication at each and every level of the organizational structure and that communication is an indicator of employee job satisfaction. Many times, faculty members and staff members are not receptive to new courses of action because they do not feel they have all the information they need to form an opinion. In addition to faculty members and staff members, communication is important to prospective students. Watkins (2002) reported that those colleges and universities that were better able to define their school through the strategic planning process increased their enrollment and retention of students. Communication at all levels is an important component of strategic planning and implementation success.

Another differing aspect of businesses and colleges and universities of higher education are that colleges and universities of higher education are not set up to be
extremely flexible or to adjust to new trends in the industry. Organizational structures and accreditation bodies typically make changes very slowly and consider numerous viewpoints to ensure that all sides of an issue are discussed in depth. (Breneman, 1994; Rowley et al., 1997). One essential characteristic of successful strategic planning is the ability to adapt and change course depending on external influences; however, higher education traditionally has not been set up to make changes in a timely manner.

The final issue is that the managers who are asked to implement the strategic plans on a daily basis may not agree with the decisions being made (Thompson & Martin, 2005). These managers either (a) may not have been included in the initial discussion and feel left out or (b) were a part of the discussion but their opinions did not align with the final decision. Because of these potential differences of opinions, these managers may ignore or disregard portions of the implementation of the strategic plan (Chance, 2010). Front-line managers are critical to the success of a strategic plan, and without their buy-in and leadership skills, strategic plans cannot be implemented to their full capability.

Dooris, Kelley, and Trainer (2004) noted that some individuals suggest that strategic plans succeed only 10% of the time they are created and implemented. Planning is similar to other managerial activities in that it can be done effectively or ineffectively. It also has been considered by some faculty members and staff members on college campuses to be a management trend that will evenly fade away (Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). College and university personnel are cautious when a new administrator is hired and wants to make changes to their institution. This resistance to change is common in higher education because many colleges and universities have maintained practices for decades and traditionally have been reluctant to change. In many instances,
something drastic needs to happen for an institution to feel motivated to change (Chance, 2010). All of these issues can contribute to unsuccessful strategic planning initiatives.

**Implementing strategic plans.** The research literature on strategic planning consists of many studies that focus on a wide variety of topics that pertain to higher education. Some explore the best ways to implement a strategic planning process (Batista, 1992; Evans, 1987; Jaggers, 1985; Park, 1997; Pisel, 2001; Walker, 1987) rather than the actual implementation of the strategic plan itself. Other studies explore the implementation of strategic plans (Grant, 2010; Puppala, 2011), but very few have focused specifically on small, private colleges and universities.

This section will discuss the various aspects that should be considered when implementing a strategic plan at a college or university. Implementation as it relates to strategic planning has been defined various ways. According to Noble (1999), implementation has been defined as a management technique in which individuals in charge must oversee and control organizational processes. Another definition suggests that implementation is the “relatively straightforward operationalization of a clearly articulated strategic plan” (Noble, 1999, p. 119). Regardless of the definition, Sterling (2003) has suggested that “effective implementation of an average strategy beats mediocre implementation of a great strategy every time” (p. 27). Leaders must understand the reasons for success and failure of strategic plans at their specific companies in order to realize their full potential. This section will report the results of previous studies that have been conducted on strategic plan implementation inside and outside of higher education and the different internal roles that are involved when implementing a strategic plan.
Strategic plans fail for a variety of reasons. One aspect of strategic planning that can derail a successfully created plan is poor implementation (Aldehayyat & Anchor, 2010; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Corboy & O’Corrbui, 1999; Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008; Hunt, 1997; Johnson, 2004; Sterling, 2003). Institutions spend countless hours analyzing external data, evaluating internal resources, and debating courses of action only to see their ideas fail to realize their full potential. One reason could be the lack of sources that higher education administrators have on strategic planning. “There is a general lack of literature on methods for implementing higher education strategic planning” (Chance & Williams, 2009, p. 43).

In the private sector, studies have been conducted on the best ways of implementing strategic plans. A 2010 (Aldehayyat & Anchor) study of Jordanian banks, service companies, and industrial companies found that the most common problems with implementation were due to the time it took to complete the change and responding to additional crises that arose while implementing a strategic plan, which ironically diverted attention away from the strategic plan. In Aldehayyat and Anchor’s (2010) study, daily employee performance was affected by having the employees spend time with new strategic directions in addition to their normal responsibilities.

Beer and Eisenstat (2000) summarized what they referred to as the silent killers of strategy implementation. These authors have noted that implementation can be hampered by poor/ineffective management styles, unclear or conflicting strategies, poor vertical communication, poor coordination across the company, and poor development of internal potential leaders. When any of these areas are ignored or given insufficient attention, the strategic plan can falter. Companies must provide the communication and leaders needed
to make employees feel engaged and empowered to carry out their strategic initiatives. The article also mentions the need to collect data on potential pitfalls as well as internal strengths to ensure the plan can be implemented effectively. For example, Beer and Eisenstat (2000) discovered that at Hewlett Packard an internal task force of employees was formed to evaluate the strategic plan created by the senior management team. According to Beer and Eisenstat, their role was to identify potential problems that would arise during implementation and make suggestions for adjusting the strategy as needed. Because middle managers and employees were involved in the strategic planning process, their commitment to the plan increased. A 2007 study in the nonprofit health care industry found the same results, that is, when frontline employees are engaged in the strategic planning process, their attitudes and performance improve (Ye & Singh, 2007).

Rowley et al., (1997) noted that the number of individuals involved with strategic planning is often drastically reduced during the implementation phase, causing a decrease in the ability to execute and implement activities that were originally included in the strategic plan. It is important to involve those who will be implementing the plan in the creation and development of the strategic plan to help them understand the rationale behind the decisions that were made. Faculty members and staff members who are presented with a strategic plan but who are also provided with minimal reasoning or rationale for that plan often lose focus, skip steps, and generally feel less motivated to implement the plan. Some higher education administrators have operated under the misconception that strategic planning will make broad sweeping changes and fully address all the problems that an organization faces. Strategic planning, when done correctly, helps an institution chart a general direction to help respond to the external
environment. Faculty members and staff members may get frustrated if they are given a “general direction” but are not provided with answers to their pressing questions. “The goal of strategic planning is that change happens over time, sometimes without anyone noticing, as opposed to traditional planning, where an immediate changes takes place to the attention of everyone” (Rowley et al., 1997, p. 39).

Allison and Kaye (2005) have identified two barriers to the successful implementation of a strategic plan. The first barrier is the difficulty in translating large, broad ideas into daily operational activities, and the second difficulty is actually implementing procedures and processes that were identified in the planning phase (Allison & Kaye, 2005). The first barrier deals with clarity and transparency of the strategic plan. If the large ideas created by senior management are not explained to front-line employees in a way that enables them to understand how the plan affects their daily functions, the implementation will lose momentum. Tromp and Ruben (2004) also have indicated the importance of communicating strategic plan. They have indicated that “action plans are core activities” in the planning process of every institution (p. 9). Senior administrators must explain the plan in detail in order for it to be carried out successfully by front-line employees.

Souza’s (2007) study on factors contributing to effective implementation of strategic plans identified three factors that lead to successful implementation of strategic plans. The first factor is a clear understanding of the reasons why the change is necessary and the goals for making the change happen. The second factor is having leadership that brings the various campus constituents together and aligns the plan with the institution’s identity and culture. The last factor is the involvement of as many individuals as possible
and the use of as many communication methods as possible as well as addressing resistance early in the course of the implementation (Souza, 2007).

Sharp and Brock (2012) conducted a study of Yad Sarah, an Israeli voluntary organization that started creating and implementing a strategic plan in 2001. The authors interviewed employees and reviewed strategic planning documents two years after its implementation. The process started with the appointment of a new CEO and a new strategic direction, which was not received well by senior management. Due to the senior management resistance, the new CEO decided to use external sources to build a new strategic direction for the company. The researchers found that even though there was a lack of involvement in the planning process, senior managers successfully implemented the strategic plan because of their involvement during implementation. The non-direct and non-specific nature of strategic planning allowed the senior managers to make the necessary adjustments during the implementation phase. This flexibility created commitment and resulted in the eventual success of the strategic plan.

**Communication.** Research has suggested that communication is a pivotal part of any strategic planning process and implementation (Bryson, & Bromiley, 1993; Rowley et al., 1997; Tromp & Ruben, 2004; Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). Typically, those not involved with the formulation of the strategic plan who are not communicated with, will not buy in or commit to the plan. Yet those who are kept informed and understand how the plan relates to their daily activities will be an integral and positive part of its implementation. Bryson and Bromiley (1993) indicated that the amount of communication required usually depends on the number of staff members involved in the planning and their knowledge and abilities. These authors also noted that it is critical for
planners to initiate communication and create an atmosphere that encourages problem solving. Both communication and problem solving are directly related to successful outcomes in the strategic planning process (Bryson & Bromiley, 1993).

Corboy and O’Corrbui (1999) stated the every strategic plan should include a plan to ensure that necessary communication takes place among the appropriate personnel at each stage of the implementation process. This communication should include not only the current status of the implementation, but it also should clearly outline responsibilities of those charged with implementing their portion of the plan. Once these individuals have understood their respective roles in the implementation process, they also must know when and how they will be evaluated.

Naidoo and Wu (2011), in a study of higher education colleges and universities, found that the communication between middle managers and senior management is critical in order to help the middle managers understand their role in the strategic direction of the university. Naidoo and Wu received 570 completed questionnaires from marketing managers who had attempted to recruit international students, and they also conducted interviews with marketing managers. They found that marketing managers often failed to see the connection between their role and the overall strategic direction of the institution. These researchers concluded that the marketing manager’s daily performance is impacted directly by their commitment to their job and the strategic plan.

Crittenden and Crittenden (2008) reported that 95% of employees are unaware of their company’s strategic direction. Their study of multiple decades of corporate research found that strategies are implemented using structure and based on managerial skills. According to Crittenden and Crittenden, these managerial skills often contribute to the
successful implementation of a strategic plan. Crittenden and Crittenden suggested eight “levers” that are required to successfully implement a strategic plan: actions, programs, systems, policies, interacting, allocating, monitoring and organizing. When all of these areas are given proper attention, a strategic plan can be implemented successfully.

**Senior administrators.** After a strategic plan has been created and approved, the senior administrator’s job is to communicate the plan to the appropriate middle managers. However, there are numerous articles in the literature that discuss how often a created strategic plan is actually implemented. Mintzberg (1987a) estimated that fewer than 1 in 10 strategic plans are implemented successfully. The process of creating and implementing a strategic plan is an area that needs to be researched, and senior administrators play a vital role in increasing the chances of success.

Senior administrators must motivate their staff and clearly articulate the actions that need to be performed to execute the plan. Senior administrators will inevitably run into resistance due to several common errors (Chance & Williams, 2009). For example, oftentimes a strategic plan is not received by middle managers and/or frontline staff because they have been excluded from the planning process or because a rationale for the decision to implement a strategic plan has not yet been made clear and, as a result, employees become resistant. Hunt et al. (1997) noted that it is important to include team members in the process of developing and implementing a strategic plan to ensure acceptance of the plan.

Furthermore, Stronz’s (2005) case study of strategic planning implementation pointed out that the individuals who formulate a strategic plan often do not implement it, and, likewise, the individuals who implement the plan do not help formulate the plan.
(Mintzberg, 1987b). There seems to be a discrepancy between the goals that a strategic plan is designed to accomplish and how that plan is implemented on a daily basis. Senior administrators have spent large amounts of time, often with external consultants, trying to define institutional direction and identity in order to successfully implement a strategic plan (Stronz, 2005).

The leadership of the president of the institution can be a determining factor in the success or failure of a strategic plan on small, private college and university campuses. Perkins (2007) found that presidents, who have a clear vision, implement change slowly, and work to unify the institution, will be most successful. Higher education is an arena where faculty members and staff members are key players in successfully implementing a strategic plan, and the ability of the president to lead them in the right direction is critical. According to Rojas (2009), successfully implementing a strategic plan can be accomplished by promoting teamwork, involving as many individuals as possible in the process, and clearly communicating benefits as they are realized throughout the implementation.

Huy (2011) conducted a study of a large Canadian information technology (IT) company that was involved with the strategic planning process. More than 200 interviews were conducted with approximately 200 employees. Huy found that senior executives could increase the chances of successful implementation by paying greater attention to the emotions of their middle management team. The emotions of these managers dictated the reaction and commitment to recommended change.

**Middle managers.** Middle managers supervise, motivate, and direct the efforts of the frontline staff members at colleges and universities. Skilled middle managers are able
to manage communications between their supervisors and those they supervise. Quy Nguyen (2001) identified several areas in which a middle manager can exercise influence over an organization. First, middle managers have the ability to contribute ideas that are both practical as well as “entrepreneurial” because of their interaction and familiarity with daily operations (p. 73). They also are better at bridging the gap between senior administrators and frontline employees while paying attention to their employees’ feelings and opinions. Lastly, according to Quy Nguyen, they are adept at managing the balance between permanence and change and communicating the rationale for both. Middle managers who are able to effectively carry out these tasks are better able to facilitate the implementation of a strategic plan.

According to Stronz (2005), middle managers, in some cases, are more skilled at strategic thinking than their senior administrator counterparts. This may be due to their familiarity with daily tasks and responsibilities and their ability to implement ideas. However, there are instances where the failure of a strategic plan could be the result of resistant middle managers (Quy Nguyen, 2001). To be successful, middle managers need as much communication as possible from senior executives in order to effectively implement a strategic plan (Quy Nguyen, 2001). If middle managers are not informed of specific details it may be difficult to implement a strategic plan successfully. Those who have formulated the plan may not clearly communicate the desired end result or suggestions for implementation.

A recent study of Fortune 500 companies examined the influence of middle managers on the strategic implementation process. Ahearne, Lam, and Kraus (2013) tried to identify the impact of middle managers and their ability to influence individuals
involved in the implementation process. The study revealed that middle managers can have an impact by leveraging their developed social capital. The authors noted that middle managers are able to implement a strategic plan in an adaptive way based on their ability to empower their direct reports. Middle managers can use their social capital and personal knowledge to ensure implementation is successful.

**Frontline employees.** According to Allison and Kaye (2005), in some cases, frontline employees do not agree with the strategic direction of the institution and choose not to implement the plan the way it was intended. Employees are not given clear direction, and therefore the plan is unable to be converted into an action plan. According to Stronz (2005), “In practice, not enough is known about who the implementers are, the tactics they employ, and the results they achieve. The connection between what is formulated and what is effectively implemented remains elusive” (p. 15). Johnson (2004) found that involving front line employees in the strategic formulation process helps give them a sense of ownership. Johnson further noted that involving all employees early in the process established credibility and commitment during the implementation phase.

**Campus Culture.** “Change is especially difficult to accept at the universities, because by nature universities are about preservation” (Lerner, 1999). Small, private colleges and universities have a campus culture that varies from school to school depending on the history of the school, the makeup of the employees, and the mission of each institution. Because each campus is unique, so too is each school’s approach to strategic planning and therefore its success. Sommerville (2006) found in her study on communication that some traditional styles of leaderships may not fit the American higher education culture.
A 2012 study of bank members found a direct relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of strategic plans (Akbar Ahmadi, Salamzadeh, Daraei, & Akbari, 2012). The study indicated that this direct relationship may be due to today’s organizations and their ability to react to external influences. If an organization’s culture is set up in a way to accept change and deal with problems as they arise, their ability to implement strategic plans will be enhanced.

During strategic planning efforts at Bradford College in the 1980s, new leadership implemented methods that higher education was not accustomed to seeing (Green, 1990). When different leaders with more traditional views arrived, they had to “heal the painful wounds inflicted by inexperienced leadership that truly did not understand the dynamics and traditions of academe [and] lessen the anxiety about whether the college would close down” (Green, 1990, p. 40). The faculty members, in the case of Bradford College, were planning to unionize until the new leadership was put into place and began making changes to revert back to the old ways of the school. Understanding the culture of the campus is important to implementing a strategic plan (Bresciani, 2010). Those involved with the planning and implementation must realize who the key stakeholders are at the lower levels of the organizational structure. This will allow ideas and plans to be implemented with those who have influence throughout the campus community.

**Summary**

Small, private colleges and universities of higher education began hundreds of years ago and still exist today to help educate college students in the United States. While these colleges and universities were at first highly selective, small, private colleges have evolved over time, and now colleges and universities engage in varying levels of
selectivity. These colleges and universities have experienced difficult times during which competition increased and resources decreased (Fullan, & Scott, 2009). Their current role in higher education is to provide another option for today’s students. Small, private colleges and universities are not desirable to all types of students for a variety of reasons like cost and size, but many students choose this experience over other options. However, there is additional competition for small, private colleges and universities because of the Internet and online colleges and universities and the increasing preference of students to attend colleges and universities well outside of the geographic region where they were raised (Lewin, 2012a; Tuby, 2012). Additionally, small, private colleges and universities have been questioned regarding their value and whether the high tuition and fees provide the return on investment students and their families have come to expect (Adam, 2012).

Small, private colleges and universities also have battled against the recent economic recession, which has affected the ability of families to afford the cost of college (Altbach, Gumport, & Johnstone; 2001). Even parents who want their students to attend small, private colleges and universities may have become recently unemployed or underemployed and are financially unable to help their child pay for college. At the same time, the cost for colleges to conduct business has increased, forcing colleges to raise tuition or change their business practices to increase accountability (Demillo, 2011). Small, private colleges and universities get the majority of their funding from tuition revenue and donations, making it critical for colleges to plan ways to increase or maintain their enrollment and fundraising activities (Kretovics, 2010).

The history of small, private colleges and universities is filled with high and low points and the strategic planning of these colleges and universities will depict their future
success. A lack of additional research on the implementation of strategic plans could lead to increased skepticism within higher education. Furthermore, since Mintzberg (1987a) noted the low percentage of successful implementations of strategic plans, this research is needed to increase knowledge of implementations for higher education administrators to increase the likelihood of future success.

The administrators working in higher education have diverse backgrounds, many of which contain little to no business coursework or experience. This may create a problem in the future because small, private colleges may be forced to think more like businesses and plan ahead to ensure they are financially able to stay open (Hunt et al., 1997; Kretovics, 2010; Rowley et al., 1997). Strategic planning has evolved over time in higher education, and although it may be viewed negatively by some members of the campus community as an activity that does not produce results, when done correctly, strategic planning can help prepare small, private colleges for the future successfully (Bryson, & Bromiley, 1993; Falk, & Blaylock, 2010; Hunt et al., 1997; Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). Successful implementation of a strategic plan depends on middle and frontline supervisors. The literature is full of documented obstacles to successful implementation: poor communication, poor planning, and lack of employee commitment are a few of those mentioned (Bresciani, 2010; Bryson, & Bromiley, 1993; Chance, & Williams, 2009; Rowley et al., 1997; Welsh, Nunez, & Petrosko, 2006). As the world of academia considers, and in some cases already adopted, business models of strategic planning, additional research is needed to find effective leadership practices that fit the college culture, including successfully implementing a plan.

The literature shows that small, private colleges and universities have experienced
difficult times in history and are primarily tuition-driven. Additionally, research shows
competition is increasing and the value of a college degree is being questioned more than
ever. Studying how small, private colleges and universities implement their strategic
plans is critical considering the current state of higher education.
Chapter Three

Methods

In the review of the literature chapter, Chapter 2, I recounted the history of small, private colleges and universities as well as their current role within the industry of higher education. In that chapter, and also in Chapter 1, I explored strategic planning from a business and educational perspective, with a focus on implementation. This chapter describes the various components that were required to execute this study. This chapter first presents the overall research design of the study, followed by the details of the study, such as the site, participants, method of data collection, and method of data analysis. The purpose of this study was to investigate the process that the College used when implementing its strategic plan. In this chapter, I present the design of the study and the overarching research questions. I then explain why a case study design was the most appropriate choice for this study and the ways in which I collect and analyze data.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How is a strategic plan implemented at a small, private institution?

RQ2: What can be learned from how a strategic plan is implemented?

The research questions were designed to generate results that inform individuals who may be interested in the implementation of strategic plans. More specifically, the first research question was designed to explore the general process of implementing a strategic plan. I was interested in how strategic plans were organized and implemented at a single institution. The second research question was designed to identify leadership or management aspects of the implementation of a strategic plan by exploring the methods
and tactics used by administrators during implementation. Higher education strategic planners may be able to use the findings associated with both research questions at their institutions to create and implement strategic plans.

**Context and Site Selection**

The nature of qualitative research revolves around several important characteristics that relate directly to this study. First, Stake (1995) has suggested that qualitative studies are necessary for researchers who want to understand connections in the world. According to Stake, qualitative researchers emphasizes the individuality of the case under investigation and its context. When studying small, private institutions of higher education, researchers must realize the uniqueness of each school and consider this uniqueness when analyzing the results and providing recommendations to other professionals in the industry. This study was designed to explore context from two different perspectives. First, I considered the larger context of the financial status of the United States. Secondly, I examined the more narrow context of the specific institution being studied. Consideration of both contexts guided the study and not only helped provide an understanding of the need for the information to be collected but also why certain actions were taken during the implementation.

The context for this study necessarily included the recent state of the U.S. economy. The personal financial resources of many families has sharply declined since 2007 but recently leveled off. Colleges and universities have seen their tuition revenues decrease and have been forced to cut costs or adopt more aggressive approaches to recruiting. Between 2006 and 2011, college enrollments increased as individuals returning to school to improve their skills or change careers.
indicated that enrollments declined by nearly 500,000 students in the fall of 2012 (Bernstein, 2013). The industry of postsecondary education has experienced an increase in competition as community colleges have become more attractive for cash-strapped students and a sensible option for adult students. For-profit colleges have become mainstream and provide a practical option for students with transportation and schedule dilemmas. With family incomes in a state a flux, colleges constantly examining their budgets, more students needing education, and competition between colleges and universities at an all-time high, analyzing the implementation process of a strategic plan within an institution of higher education provides colleges and universities with information that allows them to plan for their future.

The criteria used to select the site for this study included three primary components. First, the institution was required to be a small, private institution. Second, the institution was required (a) to be in the midst of implementing a strategic plan or (b) to have recently implemented a strategic plan. The rationale for these two criteria was that they allowed for data collection while the implementation experience was recent and in the minds of those who were involved with the implementation. Third, I needed to have access to sensitive documents used in the strategic planning implementation process. These three criteria were essential in selecting an institution and collecting data.

A small, private college in Michigan was the institution under investigation for this research project. At the time the study was conducted, the student body consisted of approximately 1,600 students. The College was selected, in part, because of its unique features, which include the recent implementation of a 2005-2010 strategic plan and ambitious goals. In 2011 and 2012, U.S. News and World Report ranked the College as a
top midwest college (J. Compton, personal communication, December 5, 2015). The top midwest college “formula uses quantitative measures that education experts have proposed as reliable indicators of academic quality, and it's based on our researched view of what matters in education” (Morse & Flanigan, 2013, p. 1). Some of the specific factors used to measure academic quality include high school performance of incoming students and graduation rates (Morse & Flanigan, 2013).

Additionally, the College was ranked as an “Up and Coming Midwest College” by *U.S. News and World Report* (J. Compton, personal communication, December 5, 2015). The “Up and Coming” ranking is awarded by *U.S. News and World Report* to institutions based on feedback from a survey of college presidents and deans indicating which institutions have made meaningful and innovative improvements (Morse, 2013). The College has steadily increased enrollment since 2005 and has constructed a number of new buildings on campus. The College built a multipurpose outdoor field and ice arena on campus to help increase enrollment and develop numerous athletic programs. The outdoor field is used by the football team, the men’s and women’s soccer team, and the men’s and women’s lacrosse teams. The ice arena is used by the five men’s and women’s hockey teams as well as the women’s synchronized skating team. The new buildings on campus and the increased focus on recruitment resulted in recent enrollment increases. The 2005 strategic planning document also emphasized recruiting students with a higher academic profile by providing financial aid and reaching out to high schools and alumni. The College focused on enrollment, recruitment, and retention as well as physical plant improvements to help drive its strategic initiatives.

The Renaissance I strategic plan spanned 2005 - 2010 and primarily was designed
to grow enrollment and enhance the physical structures of campus, mostly athletic structures. Upon completion of Renaissance I was a second strategic plan called Renaissance II, with a time frame of 2011 - 2015. Renaissance II had strategic goals of enhancing the academic profile of the College, through additional building renovations and increased resources for the academic programs of the college.

Some of those who helped guide these strategic initiatives were senior administrators who were part of the 2005-2010 strategic planning implementation and were still employed at the institution at the time this study was conducted. This pattern of low turnover among senior administrators helped the College implement its strategic plan because the individuals responsible for the implementation held a unique and historic understanding of the institution. The College is physically located near other colleges and universities, which provides increased local and regional competition. The city in which the College is located is home to two other institutions. Approximately 12 other colleges and universities are located within an hour’s drive of the campus. The enrollment of the College during the fall of 2013 was more than 1,600 students, compared to fewer than 900 students in 2004 and slightly more than 1,000 students in the fall of 2006 (J. Wright, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

The president of the College granted me access to individuals, information, and documentation from the college in support of this research study. In studying this particular college I was provided with an opportunity to describe and explain the process of implementing a strategic plan as well as the ability to draw conclusions that apply to this particular setting and individuals involved within the case study.

The timing of the study was ideal because I was able to reflect on the recent
national economic troubles and evaluate their influence on a small, private institution during implementation of a strategic plan to help answer my research questions. If this study had been conducted prior to 2010, there would have been many unknowns and unanswered questions. If this study were conducted after 2015, some members of the administration may have been different, and the study would have required senior administrators to remember aspects from years past, resulting in less reliable data. The context in which the study was conducted yielded the most beneficial information.

**Case Study Design**

This project used a descriptive case study design to explore how a small, private university implemented a strategic plan. “[A]pplied research is concerned primarily with addressing an existing problem or issue” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 5). I used an applied research, case study design, along with Hunt et al.’s (1997) framework for understanding the steps required to implement a strategic plan. According to Stake (1995), “Case study is the study of particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Studying the implementation of a strategic plan provided insight into the process.

There are four primary reasons a case study was an appropriate method for this study. First, a descriptive case study design allows participants to be observed in authentic, real-life contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). This was important because studying participants in real-life contexts allowed me to obtain in-depth explanations and information about the development and implementation of the strategic plan. More specifically, these explanations helped me understand, analyze, and explain how a strategic plan was implemented at a single institution.
Second, a case study was the most effective design for this study because it allowed me to study a small, private institution in its natural setting (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003). Studying this institution in its natural setting was important to better understand the context of the institution and its present-day activities. Third, a case study was a particularly effective choice for this study because it is often used by researchers interested in people and programs (Stake, 1995). Using a case study approach was appropriate because it helped me better understand how the strategic plan was implemented and those who were directly involved with the implementation. Last, a case study was used because of its broad focus and emphasis on process (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bromley, 1986; Yin, 2003).

Quantitative studies use “standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined responses categories” (Patton & Patton, 2002, p. 14). When studying the implementation of strategic plans, the varying perspectives of participants is important data not to limit in order to understand the people and process. If the purpose of this study were to explore the number of times the planning committee met, the number of drafts completed in the creation of a strategic plan, or other numerical data, a quantitative study may have been more applicable; however, because I was interested in the actions and processes of senior administrators implementing a strategic plan, a qualitative study was ideal (Patton & Patton, 2002).

According to Creswell (1998), “Educational processes, problems and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice” (p. 41). This study examined the process of implementing a strategic
plan and identified the series of events in the strategic planning implementation process at one particular college in order to understand internal and the external influences on the implementation process and therefore advance understanding and knowledge of strategic planning.

Merriam (2009) have noted that if the phenomenon under investigation is not bounded, it is not a case, which means that the phenomenon under investigation needs to be defined and kept within certain limits. Using a case study method for this dissertation research project provided an effective approach because the bounds of the case were easily defined; the strategic plan at one small, private institution. Additionally, the case was bounded by time, referring to the time frame in which the strategic plan was developed and implemented as well as the objectives the plan was designed to meet. The case study approach was the most applicable for this study because it provided a method for clearly understanding the implementation process at a small, private institution and to understand the impact of this process (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003).

**Participant Selection**

The participants selected for interviews were (a) those who participated in implementing the 2005-2010 strategic plan or (b) those who were involved in implementing the current strategic plan. The sampling method for this study was purposeful sampling because the majority of individuals selected were involved with the implementation of the strategic plan from 2005 through 2010. Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals who had specific experience in the area desired, in this case, the development and implementation of strategic plans (Creswell, 2009). This sampling method provided “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton & Patton, 2002, p.
Random sampling was not appropriate for this study because it did not guarantee that the individuals selected as participants were involved with the implementation of the strategic plan (Patton & Patton, 2002). In addition to purposeful sampling, convenience sampling was also used because I was offered access to the individuals involved with the implementation at the institution under investigation. Even though a convenience sample was used rather than a random sample, I was still able to collect the desired data because the participants met the inclusion criteria of implementing a strategic plan at a small, private institution.

I started by contacting the president, discussing my study, and explaining the goals and purpose. In my initial meeting with the president, I asked him to confirm that the individuals and meetings I previously selected were the most appropriate and beneficial for the purposes of this study, and the president confirmed they were. I then asked the president for a list of names of members of the board of trustees who were involved with the implementation of the 2005-2010 strategic plan, and the president provided a list of participants he felt would be most beneficial. Additionally, I encouraged the president to suggest additional individuals to interview and meetings to attend that I was not aware of that also would be beneficial for my study, and the president suggested two former College vice presidents to add to my list of participants that were interviewed but he did not suggest any additional meetings to attend.

The participants to be interviewed included four members of the board of trustees, the president, two former vice presidents and the four current vice presidents. I contacted these individuals via phone, email, or personal office visit to schedule interview times and locations. I then interviewed the participants selected for this study in one-on-one
interviews and observed them in campus meetings.

**Study Approval and Ethical Considerations**

I obtained approval from the University of Toledo Department of Human Research Protections and Institutional Review Boards as well as the research site. I followed the University of Toledo’s protocol for interviewing human subjects and performing observations at the institution that served as the research site.

I provided a list of questions to participants prior to conducting interviews and observations. I also provided general information to participants related to the overarching area of study, the reasons why this particular institution was selected, the researcher’s intent to publish the results, the timeline for the study’s completion, and my background and research interests. I ensured that each participant read, fully understood, and signed an informed consent form before participating in the study (see Appendix K).

**Data Collection Procedures**

I used a variety of methods to collect data. I analyzed historical strategic planning documents and observed meetings of committees in which implementation of the strategic plan was discussed, directly or indirectly. In addition, I conducted individual interviews. Using a variety of data collection techniques provided validity by triangulating the data to compare and confirm results. Figure 1 illustrates a roadmap of how I collected, coded, and analyzed the data.
Figure 1. Data collection and analysis workflow (SPI = Strategic Planning Implementation).

**Document analysis procedures.** According to Stake (1995), “Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing” (p. 68). Stake (1995) noted that while researchers should be open minded when reviewing and analyzing documents, they also should analyze documents specifically to find answers to previously created research questions. The documents I analyzed included those used by the president and vice presidents to guide their interpretation of the strategic plan and its implementation. Documents included not only the strategic plan itself but also implementation plans used during the implementation process.
By analyzing these documents, I gained an understanding of how this particular institution’s strategic plans were documented and how senior administrators use such documentation. For this study, I analyzed various documents that related directly or indirectly to the strategic plan. For instance, I analyzed the original strategic planning document and subsequent drafts that were developed and modified over the years. I obtained access to these documents because of my professional relationship with the president of the institution; he agreed to provide me with access to strategic planning documents in order to conduct this study. The strategic plan was analyzed to corroborate the actions and words of the participants.

After receiving the documents from the president of the institution, I analyzed the documents and create specific interview questions about implementing a strategic plan. By reviewing these documents first, I was able to determine whether the initial plans were actually executed and whether changes were made after the plan had been created. Additionally, analyzing strategic planning documents allowed me to retroactively gain an understanding of the values, goals, and objectives that informed the strategic planning process and the ways administrators anticipated and planned for the implementation during the early stages of strategic planning.

Stake (1995) noted that documents are useful when an observer is unable to attend the specific event the documents represent. I analyzed the implementation of the 2005-2010 strategic plan in retrospect because I was unable to observe or interview administrators during the initial planning and development of the strategic plan. I analyzed all documents made available by identifying dominant and frequently used terms and phrases. I identified those terms and phrases by using the Nvivo coding
software which allowed me to code different terms and phrases. During the interviews, I was able to periodically determine whether the initial documentation matched what actually happened during the implementation.

**Meeting observations.** “Through direct observations the inquirer is better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact” (Patton & Patton, 2002, p. 262). In addition, Stake (1995) noted that any observation performed needs to be applicable to the case and that the researcher needs to keep non-debatable notes for future interpretation. Non-debatable notes are ones that should be straight and to the point so that interpretation can be injected but in a way that does not skew the findings (Stake, 1995). At the suggestion of the president, I attended weekly senior staff meetings and board of trustees meetings in which observation provided valuable data. Prior to these meetings, I obtained written consent from individuals involved with the meetings who were authorized to grant such permission. I observed the interactions among administrators in order to observe the frequency and depth with which administrators at this college discussed the implementation of its current strategic plan. I was interested in the process by which the College employees discussed implementation in meetings. By observing their process in 2014, I was able to understand how the 2005-2010 strategic plan was implemented. Observations were useful because they allowed participants to carry out their normal activities in their everyday setting, allowing the researcher to gather rich and accurate data (Hatch, 2002).

For this study, I was not actively involved in the meeting proceedings during the observations. I merely observed meetings that pertained directly or indirectly to the strategic plan in an attempt to observe the manner in which it was discussed. More
specifically, I was interested in determining whether the strategic implementation plan was directly identified as such or whether it was referred to as an unidentified action item. Additionally, I observed how frequently the strategic plan was discussed and the level of detail with which it was discussed. When observing meetings, I took careful notes using a pen and a notebook rather than an audio recorder. Using an audio recorder may have altered the data being gathered because the participants would have been aware that they were being recorded. I took notes of important items that captured the essence of the discussion, and I identified which individuals made which particular comments (Boeije, 2010). I also observed and noted verbal and nonverbal clues by participants during meetings.

Observations, in addition to interviews, allowed me first-hand access to the daily activities at the institution. These observations provided insight into how the strategic plan was carried out and implemented across the institution. I attended high-level meetings to observe the process with which the strategic plan was discussed. The recommendations from the president about which participants to interview and which meetings to attend allowed me to attend those meetings in which the strategic plan was frequently discussed.

Interviews. According to Saldana (2011), “[Interviewing participants] is an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their words, an individual’s or group’s perspective, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives” (p. 32). Hatch (2002) noted that interviews are used in qualitative research when researchers want to know how the individuals involved in the case are making sense of their world. I used
interviews in this study to understand why administrators take certain actions when implementing their portion of the institution’s strategic plan.

The main instrument I used was a list of semi-structured interview questions. During the first round of interviews, I used questions created directly from Hunt et al.’s (1997) conceptual framework. The framework identified five areas that Hunt et al.’s (1997) stated were needed to successfully implement a strategic plan. The participants were asked several questions from each area of the framework; these areas included employee evaluation, building relationships, gaining commitment, leadership, and providing rewards. Follow-up questions were asked during the first interview(s) to develop a better understanding of the answers provided or for clarification purposes. The interview questions for the second interviews were developed out of the collective answers of all participants from the first round of interviews, meaning the second interview allowed me the ability to go more in-depth about something a participant mentioned during the first interview. It also allowed me to ask other participants questions in an effort to confirm information gathered.

All interview questions were designed to gain a better understanding of the implementation of the Renaissance I strategic plan. The interviews for this study were conducted to obtain information that could not reasonably and realistically be gathered by other research methods. The manner in which senior administrators carried out and implemented the strategic plan was grounded in their individual leadership and management styles in conjunction within the context of the unique campus culture. Interviewing members of the board of trustees, the president, and vice presidents allowed me to gain access to information most likely not documented anywhere.
I began by interviewing the current president and spent approximately 30 minutes discussing the structure of the strategic planning process. I informed the president of the names of individuals I intended to interview based on the individuals I believed were involved with the implementation of the strategic plan. I asked the president at that time if he thought I was overlooking any potential participants who would provide beneficial insight. Once I selected the potential participants, I then scheduled the interviews. If the participants were available and in their offices, I requested an interview with them in person and returned at the agreed-upon time. If they were not immediately available, I scheduled the interview date and time through phone calls or emails.

There are two main types of interview agendas that researchers use when conducting interviews. Researchers can develop a set of structured questions and ask them in order without any probing or follow-up questions, or there can be a general set of questions and the researcher can ask these follow-up questions based on the answers received from participants (Merriam, 2009). I used a semi-structured approach to interviewing administrators that allowed for in-depth exploration of ideas and concepts using follow-up questions. The interviews began with a list of questions developed using Hunt et al.’s framework (see Appendix B & C). As answers were collected, new questions were added to the question list, and the order of questions remained flexible. I planned on the initial interviews being approximately one hour and follow-up interviews were scheduled as needed, when and if further clarification was needed.

I initially planned to interview only the four current vice presidents, the president, and four members of the board of trustees two separate times; however, two adjustments were made. First, I felt as though the current vice presidents did not all have an in-depth
knowledge of Renaissance I because not all had worked at the College during that time period. Because of this, I contacted the president and identified the two former vice presidents I wished to interview instead because they had played an important role in Renaissance I. With his approval, I scheduled two interviews with each of them.

Secondly, after my first round of interviews with four members of the board of trustees, I realized their main role had been to hire the president and that they had very little, if anything, to do with the implementation of the strategic plan, Renaissance I. Because of this, I subsequently, limited my interviews with the members of the board of trustees to one interview. This modification to my data collection method resulted in one interview with each of the four members of the board of trustees and two interviews with the president, current vice presidents, and two former vice presidents.

I conducted in-person interviews on campus in the office of the participant I was interviewing. If participants were unavailable to meet in person, I conducted interviews using the telephone. I audio recorded all interviews, which enabled me to review participants’ answers several times to determine whether I should schedule follow-up interviews based on their responses. I obtained signed consent forms from each participant. I began each interview reviewing general information and discussing my interest in the topic and the overall nature of the study. I also informed participants about the reasons I had selected this particular institution and what I intended to do with the findings of the study, which was to document the implementation process of Renaissance I for other institutions to potentially use on their campus. I asked each participant the semi-structured interview questions based on the interview protocol as well as any follow-up questions. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews
were audio recorded so that I would be able to review them multiple times, if necessary, and formulate conclusions. Recording interviews, as opposed to taking notes, allowed me to focus on potential follow-up questions while the participants were speaking (Stake, 1995).

I began each interview with general questions (Merriam, 2009) related to the level of involvement the participants had in the planning and development of the strategic plan. I then asked questions related directly to the implementation of the strategic plan. The questions were open-ended to spur conversation and allow me to gain insight into participants’ actions (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). I was prepared with follow-up questions designed to elicit additional information about specific actions that participants took as well as tactics and methods participants used during the implementation of the strategic plan (Stake, 1995).

I evaluated the interviews immediately after the interview concluded to draw initial impressions while the information was fresh. Specifically, I listened to the interview recording and began writing down my initial impressions of what was most important. When I interviewed participants and collected data, it was important not only to analyze the responses directly but also to interpret the meaning behind the responses (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Immediate review of each interview audio recording was helpful in formulating additional questions for the participants who had not yet been interviewed. The audio recordings were transcribed by a third party company, which resulted in a written document of each interview.

Because I was unable to be present for meetings between 2005 and 2010 in which the Renaissance I Strategic Plan was discussed, I observed meetings related to
Renaissance II. My intention was to understand the practices and processes the College used to implement strategic plans in general. Table 1 identifies which data source (meeting observations, interviews, document analysis) related to which strategic plan (Renaissance I, Renaissance II).

Table 1  

*Focus of Data Source by Data Type*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Strategic plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting observations</td>
<td>Renaissance II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Renaissance I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Renaissance I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combination of interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis provided a variety of data that allowed me to better understand how a small, private institution developed and implemented a strategic plan.

**Data Analysis and Coding**

“Analysis consists of segmenting the data and reassembling them with the aim of transforming the data into findings” (Boeije, 2010, p. 94). The practice of analyzing the data started with organizing it in a manner that allowed for themes to be constructed and explored (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I asked open-ended questions during the interviews to elicit rich data that could be analyzed and interpreted (Creswell, 2009). Answers to open-ended questions increased the likelihood of discovering new categories I may not have initially considered important. Merriam (2009) suggested creating numerous tentative categories before beginning the data analysis process. I adjusted the categories during the course of the data analysis process, but starting with groupings was helpful in the process of coding initial collections of information.
Creswell (2009) created a flowchart with step-by-step procedures for analyzing qualitative data. For this study, I followed the general process Creswell (2009) laid out. First, I obtained existing documents, interview transcripts, and observation notes. Second, I organized this information in one location. Third, I read through all of the information to familiarize myself with information I had obtained at the beginning and end of the data collection process. It was important to analyze the data continually in order to plan follow-up interviews or add relevant questions to be asked during the interviews that occurred later in the data collection process. During step three, I began the process of pre-coding, in which I highlighted and identified dominant themes, words, or phrases I noticed early in the data analysis process (Saldana, 2009).

Fourth, I then coded the data. “A code in a qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based on visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). The process I used when coding began with the pre-coding I completed during step three, followed by multiple cycles of coding to decrease and broaden the number of categories identified (Saldana, 2009).

Fifth, I identified themes and created descriptions. The themes and descriptions allowed me to categorize the data and understand how the data fit together (Lewins & Silver, 2007). Understanding how the information about the strategic plan was created and understood by campus constituents illuminated the strategic planning implementation process and how it was communicated. Sixth, I continued to analyze the complete collection of data and code it appropriately. Seventh, I drew conclusions about the various themes that emerged. Analyzing the data in this manner allowed me to
understand how the strategic plan was viewed by constituents across the campus and how this view facilitated or hindered the implementation.

I used the process outlined above when coding and analyzing data collected from interviews and observations. When reviewing the strategic planning documents, my strategy was to analyze them “for frequencies or contingencies” (Stake, 1995, p. 68). According to Merriam (1998), “Using document material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations” (p. 120). Merriam also noted that the document analysis process starts with finding relevant documents and examining their accuracy. Once the documents were collected, they were “summarized and interpreted in order to address the research questions under investigation” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 56).

I reviewed the strategic planning documents to identify not only how the plan was intended to be implemented but also to learn about how these strategic planning documents compare to information in the research literature indicating what is required for a successful implementation.

According to Patton and Patton (2002), the difficulty with analyzing documents typically revolves around gaining access to documents, evaluating their accuracy, and interpreting their meaning. However, because administrators who created the plan were still employed at the institution, I was able to ask them to clarify any ambiguous or vague language. Additionally, since I was able to communicate directly with the president, I did not anticipate restricted access to documents. The institutional cooperation I received helped mitigate difficulties often encountered when analyzing historical documents.

Additionally, I analyzed data not only within each particular method of data collection but also between methods. For example, my analysis compared the results of
two separate interviews (within methods) but also how their actions or tactics compared with information gathered using strategic planning document (between methods).
Likewise, analyzing the notes I took while observing meetings helped confirm and/or challenge information in the strategic planning documents.

**Validation.** The research method included not only historical document analysis, observation of meetings, and interviews, but it also included triangulation of the collected data to ensure validity. I performed member-checking during the interview process as well as peer-debriefing to ensure the data I collected was accurate. The combination of these methods was designed to accurately document the implementation of the 2005-2010 strategic plan at the College. According to Bush (2002), “The concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon which it is intended to describe” (p. 65). The ability of researchers to continually “pursue” (p. 13) validity is extremely important in qualitative research (Brinberg & McGrath, 1985). The ways in which validity can be established are numerous and should be used when collecting and reporting data. The validity of data gathered in this study was found in the variety of sources used to gather the information. The study design specifically allowed for follow-up interviews and questions in order to pinpoint collected information. Creswell and Miller (2000) discussed nine different types of validation methods, several of which were used in this study. These methods included triangulation, member-checking, rich/thick descriptions, peer-debriefing in addition to disclosing personal beliefs, biases, and prior knowledge.

The first method of validation that was used in this study was triangulation. For this study, triangulation was used by collecting data from a variety of sources in order to
ensure that the data collected was as accurate as possible. I conducted interviews with members of the board of trustees, the president, the four vice presidents, and two former vice presidents. The researcher also conducted observations and took notes from various campus meetings in addition to institutional documents directly related to the current strategic plan. Using each of these forms of data helped confirm and validate findings that emerged from each method of data collection. If the data revealed inconsistencies or conflicting reports, I conducted additional data collection to resolve these discrepancies.

Triangulation allowed for a greater degree of validity and reliability because it “provide[s] corroborating evidence” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). Triangulation allowed me to use data “from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). Triangulation allowed me to collect data using several different methods and ensure the findings were consistent and that any discrepancies were accounted for. Combining data from all three data collection methods brought the dominant themes to the forefront and gives readers a vibrant sense of what actually happened during the implementation of this institution’s strategic plan.

The second method of validation that was used in this study was member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking is a process by which participants are asked to double check the initial data and the assumptions drawn from that data to ensure the correct interpretations were gathered. In other words, for the purposes of this study, it was important to confirm that what the participants said is what they intended to say. Participants reviewed their comments not only after the data was transcribed but also after the analysis had been completed. My interpretations may have misrepresented the intentions of participants, and it was critical that statements and intentions of participants
were represented accurately. Participants were individually provided with four options to help with the member-checking process. Option one included emailing the transcripts to each participant for review. Option two was to email the participants the themes which arose out of the interviews for their review. Option three was to send the participant the entire chapter four from this study for their review. Option four was to implement all three previously listed options. Below (Table 2) are the selections made by those interviewed. This member-checking process was completed during the summer of 2015.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Option 1 = review interview transcripts; Option 2 = review analysis of interview transcripts; Option 3 = review chapter four analysis; Option 4 = review all options.

The third method of validation that was used in this study was providing thick, rich descriptions of the implementation of the strategic plan (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Patton and Patton (2002), “Good description takes the reader into the
setting being described” (p. 437). For this study, descriptions were critical because they provide “the foundation for qualitative analysis” (Patton & Patton, 2002, p. 437).

The fourth method of validation that was used in this study was the practice of peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Since this study was conducted to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral degree, the dissertation committee helped serve as peer debriefers to help critique and challenge the study’s findings.

The fifth method of validation that was used in this study was to disclose personal beliefs, biases, and prior knowledge that influence the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This increased validity by ensuring that I was not basing my conclusions purely on my personal knowledge but rather deriving the findings as a result of data collected through multiple methods, analyzed and intertwined with personal experiences.

According to Creswell (2009), “Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). All of the procedures listed above ensured that the processes I used to collect and interpret data were valid. The validity protocols employed in this study helped increase validity and provide high-quality information for other readers, scholars, administrators, and researchers.

**Researcher Bias**

I currently work for the College, which has both positive and negative ramifications in terms of this particular study. Being an employee of the institution serving as the research site potentially could have caused a conflict of interest when studying the implementation of a strategic plan. However, the strategic plan being studied for this project ended in 2010, prior to my employment at the institution. Furthermore,
during my initial discussions with senior administrators at the College, the 2005-2010 strategic plan was considered a success, which allowed my study to potentially identify shortcomings without personal repercussions at the College. A positive benefit of working at the institution serving as the research site is first and foremost the access I was granted to data in multiple formats (e.g., meetings, documents, interviews).

Additionally, my research bias for this study consisted of the fact that I previously have worked in several small, private colleges and universities and understand their uniqueness. This could have caused me to generalize or categorize certain data into themes or constructs that I previously had considered as a result of my prior experience. Exposure to information during the interview process that I could relate to a prior personal experience could have caused me to make assumptions. Additionally, although I had fairly limited knowledge of the College prior to my employment, I knew employees from the institution and was familiar with past news stories and institutional developments. I also knew that my experience would allow me to understand that each campus is different and not to make immediate assumptions during interviews or observations. In the process of conducting this study, I did not consciously use my bias to analyze the findings.

I accounted for my personal bias by immediately writing down my impressions after each interview. I then compared it against what I knew about small, private colleges and universities; and determined whether I could relate it to a previous experience. This process allowed me to find a balance between (a) using my personal experience to help with analysis and (b) not letting all of my assumptions skew the data. The purpose of writing down my impressions was to identify what my immediate assumptions were and
how they may have influenced my interpretation. I used these notes during my analysis to make sure I looked beyond my personal theories and took a step back to enhance the analysis. This process was crucial to the research because assuming an action was taken or a process was created for a specific reason during the strategic planning or implementation process may have been unfactual. At the same time, however, my background helped me analyze the meaning and purpose behind an action or process or comment provide by participants, even if a participant perhaps did not make the point clear. The assumptions I made contributed to the analysis of the study to the extent that they were not the only method of analysis I used to understand the process of implementing a strategic plan.

**Summary**

The goal of this study was to identify the practices and processes that were used by a small, private institution of higher education to implement a strategic plan. By focusing on a single institution and using a case study method, I was able to ask specific questions about how the strategic plan was implemented. My conceptual framework helped guide my research by breaking down the process of implementation. Because I was interested in the individuals who were close to the process of conducting meetings, sending informational memos, gaining buy-in, and engaging in other relevant actions, a case study design provided the most reasonable opportunity to collect meaningful data. The study allowed me to examine the individual processes and leadership styles of small, college administrators. By combining what I learned from analyzing documents, observing meetings, and asking specific follow-up interview questions, I was able to identify the actions and policies that made the implementation of this strategic plan
successful.
Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of how one small, private institution implemented its 2005-2010 strategic plan, called “Renaissance I.” The two research questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: How is a strategic plan implemented at a small, private institution?

RQ2: What can be learned from how a strategic plan is implemented?

These research questions were answered by analyzing participants’ responses to interview questions, attending meetings related to strategic planning and analyzing the observational notes that were taken during these meetings, and analyzing historical strategic planning documents. This chapter presents the findings of the study in four sections; (a) overall description of data analysis, (b) individual data set analysis and findings, (c) cross analysis of data sets, and (d) summary of findings. The individual data set analysis and findings sections are each divided into four sections (a) description of the data set, (b) discussion of the coding and analysis, (c) discussion of the findings, and (d) a summary of the findings.

I coded the data using NVivo 8 software and identified themes from each data source (interview transcripts, observational notes, and strategic planning documents) the themes are organized by data set. When appropriate, quotations are used to highlight and support themes from the data. To preserve confidentiality, participants were not assigned individual identifying codes because certain quotations may make it easier to identify individual participants. Instead I identified participants by one of the two groups, with the president being separate: (a) vice presidents or (b) member of the board of trustees.
**Overall Description of Data Analysis**

The process of coding the data began by importing the following Microsoft Word documents into the NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis application: (a) 18 interview transcripts, (b) 5 documents containing observational notes from meetings I attended, and (c) 11 strategic planning documents. Using NVivo 8, I identified text segments that were relevant to the research questions and/or the conceptual framework used for the study. Then, I used free nodes, which is the NVivo 8 term for codes. I attached a free node (or code) to each text segment (identified as relevant or recurring) and coded it with a particular identifying word or phrase. These free nodes were then used to descriptively code the text segments into categories that would later be used to identify patterns. After coding the data, I organized the codes into broader pattern codes in all three data sets (interview transcripts, observational meeting notes, and strategic planning documents). During the coding and analysis process, I continually organized and reorganized descriptive codes to ensure that the patterns most accurately reflected the data collected. Once pattern codes were established, I identified major themes from the analysis and created assertions based on those major themes using specific text segments.

For example, a text segment from an interview transcript was “but what did change was the expectation. And so one would take from that that people are working harder and have a higher level and measure of excellence.” I then assigned a free node of setting of expectations to this text segment. I then placed this text code of setting of expectations into the broader pattern code of expectations.

According to Creswell (1998) case study data collection should be “extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents”
(p. 62). Once data are collected, “a detailed description of the case emerges, as do an analysis of themes . . . and . . . assertions about the case by the researcher” (p. 63).

**Interview Analysis**

The following section provides details about the interviews I conducted. In this section, I describe the participants I interviewed and the rationale for selecting them. Additionally, I provide an explanation of the coding and analysis processes and then concludes with a presentation of the findings that resulted from analyzing the interview transcripts.

**Description of interviews.** The participants I interviewed, in addition to the president of the College, can be categorized into two groups: (a) the current and former vice presidents, and (b) current members of the board of trustees. The vice presidents included the current vice presidents and two former vice presidents. All four members of the board of trustees interviewed for the study are still on the board of trustees and have been since before the 2005 – 2010 strategic plan was created and implemented.

**College president.** The current president is an individual in his early 50s who came to the College after working for several institutions on the east coast of the United States. The president’s career started in higher education in the student life arena and was a hall director and dean of students. This individual became an assistant to the president at an east coast institution before becoming the president of the College used for this study. The president is an extremely charismatic individual and always makes an attempt to include everyone around in the conversation. This professional is quick with a smile and a handshake and takes the time to stop and talk to most people walking by in the hallway. The president is an extremely likeable individual with a charming personality,
but never afraid to turn a conversation serious if expectations are not being met. In the meetings I observed while gathering data for this study, the president always sat at the head of the table and held a commanding presence. The president addressed concerns as they arose, often speaking up instantly when a meeting participant provided an update or answered a question. The president verbally led most meetings, periodically calling on individuals within the meeting to cover an agenda item.

**Former college vice president #1.** The former vice president of the College currently serves as president for a different small, private institution. The current College president and this former vice president both worked together at a previous institution before coming to the College used in this study. The former vice president is a professional who has been described by the president as the “right hand man.” This individual handled the day-to-day operations of the college while the president was out fundraising in the early years of Renaissance I. The former vice president’s past performance earned a favorable reputation on campus; in fact, a street was named after this former vice president on campus. This individual is an extremely honest and forthright professional known for being aggressive and direct in communications. During interactions I had with employees, who were employed at the College while the former vice president worked at the College, this individual was described as a hard-driving individual who got things accomplished. This former vice president has a methodical way of speaking, always gathering thoughts before responding to a question or telling a story. Although I only spoke with this individual only on the phone while conducting the interviews for this study, this former vice president fit my perception of today’s college presidents (middle-aged professional who is highly educated). During our two interviews,
this individual answered in detail every question I asked and spent more time answering my questions than any other participant except the current president of the College.

**Former college vice president #2.** This former vice president currently serves as the president for a Community College in Michigan and was formerly employed by the City of Boston for many years in various capacities, for example, working with budgets, contracts, and technical services. The individual then transitioned into higher education and worked at a public University in Michigan as a program director before coming to the College. As president of a Community College, the former executive vice president has worked to raise more than $30 million during the first 5 years serving as president. This former vice president is a musician and was an American Council on Education (ACE) fellow with the current president of the College in the mid-2000s. While speaking with this individual on the phone, I could sense excitement and enthusiasm for success in this individual’s voice. The former vice president told stories about accomplishments at the College and how this individual viewed being a college president. There was then a discussion about achievements in this professional’s current role as president, amounts of fundraising conducted, and the construction of new buildings on campus. The tone of voice gave the former vice president credibility and this individual was confident in all statements, explanations, and descriptions provided. The former vice president also was able to articulate clearly why the College has been successful and provide thoughts about the characteristics of successful presidents. When the topic of music came up, this individual’s tone of voice was enthusiastic and excited. The former vice president made me feel as though we had been friends for a long time.

**College vice president #1.** This current vice president’s career at the College
began as a professor and this individual earned a graduate degree from a public
University in Michigan. While first employed as a faculty member at the College before
assuming the vice presidential position, this vice president has been employed at the
College since 1996. This individual assumed the official role of vice president in 2010
after having served as the interim vice president for a period of time. Prior to being
named vice president, this professional worked at the College in various capacities,
including stints as a professor and as a mentor. This individual provided a very useful
perspective for this study because of service in various roles at the institution and was
able to view issues from a variety of perspectives. This vice president was honest,
forthright, and unafraid to discuss controversial topics. Much like the president, this vice
president was charismatic and thoughtful, but took the role very seriously and was able to
discuss controversial or difficult issues fluidly and with facility.

        **College vice president #2.** This current vice president came to the College in
2011, after working in a variety of enrollment management roles at different institutions.
This vice president earned an advanced degree from an international university.
Additionally, this individual earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration and a
master’s degree in human resource development. Because this current vice president had
been involved with the strategic plan, has worked in enrollment, and has worked at
several similar colleges, the vice president provided insight into some of the reasons why
the strategic planning implementation process was successful at the College. This
individual frequently referenced other institutions and pointed out the ways in which the
College operates differently. This vice president passionately discussed enrollment and
identified areas that need improvement and conveyed a strong desire to be successful.
College vice president #3. The current vice president has been involved with the College since 2009, having served as a consultant prior to being hired as the vice president. This vice president had previous employment stints at AT&T and Compuware prior to coming to the College. This individual earned a finance degree from a public institution in Michigan and a graduate degree from a public institution in Illinois. This vice president provided a view of strategic planning from a focused perspective, relating most answers back to this vice president’s specific area of the College. This current vice president periodically infuses comedy into responses to ensure a personal relationship is developed and to establish a connection.

College vice president #4. This current vice president began a career at the College in 2006 and also was involved with other roles prior to being named a vice president. In 2011, this vice president assumed the role of assistant vice president and in January of 2013 was named vice president. A graduate of the College, the current vice president is extremely personable, frequently telling personal stories or stories about graduates of the College to convey a story or point. This vice president never rushed through a conversation or a response, but rather spent time making sure I received an appropriate response to all of my questions. Like other vice presidents, this vice president provided a unique perspective due to being a graduate of the College being studied. This vice president served as an entry-level employee, and is now a vice president. Frequently wearing a smile, this vice president interacts with everyone this individual comes into contact with, always stopping to say “hi” and have a brief conversation.

All of the individuals selected for interviews either played a role in the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan called Renaissance I or are currently employed at the College. Those
currently employed at the College were able to recollect stories of Renaissance I and/or explain how their area of the college was impacted by the strategic plan. I elected not to provide descriptions of the members of the board of trustees as they did not play a role in the implementation of Renaissance I. The following section presents an analysis of their responses to interview questions and identifies the major themes.

**Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Interview Transcripts**

Table 3 illustrates the process used to transition from text segment to descriptive code to pattern code to theme to assertion.

Table 3

*Interview Coding, Theme Development, and Assertion Development Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text segment</th>
<th>Descriptive code</th>
<th>Pattern code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Assertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was just the expectation of just this is what you’re going to do and you come here, you do the job that’s expected of you, your reward is having a contract to do your job again for the next year.</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>The College places a high level of importance on hiring employees and setting expectations.</td>
<td>While the College made an effort to reward people for their work through public announcements of appreciation and monetary increases, the practice of giving rewards was inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say we have a pretty limited system but there is a reward structure. And it’s generally tied to compensation and or promotion. I've been part of organizations that have had a much</td>
<td>Reward system</td>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>The College places a high level of importance on hiring employees and setting expectations.</td>
<td>While the College made an effort to reward people for their work through public announcements of appreciation and monetary increases, the practice of giving rewards was inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text segment</td>
<td>Descriptive code</td>
<td>Pattern code</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Assertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more elaborate system for reward.</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>The College places a high level of importance on hiring employees and setting expectations.</td>
<td>While the College made an effort to reward people for their work through public announcements of appreciation and monetary increases, the practice of giving rewards was inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think I was a very good VP with so many reports relative to making sure that they were acknowledged as the people who did the day to day work to make, to implement everything that needed to be implemented, I was very, very quick with compliments, gratitude, and compensation.

During the coding process for the interview analysis, (which I discuss in more detail below) I followed 12 steps; (a) read the transcripts, which were transcribed by a third party, (b) imported the transcripts into NVivo8, (c) identified and highlighted key words and phrases, (d) coded key words and phrases, (e) identified and highlighted additional key words and phrases, (f) exported findings into Microsoft Excel, (g) grouped codes into pattern codes, (h) sorted patterns codes and transferred to Microsoft Word, (i) added quotations to the appropriate pattern code group, (j) re-read quotations, (k) developed themes, and (l) created assertions.

I first provide a general description of the coding process and then conclude this section with a specific example of how I coded the data. I began the coding process by (a) reading the interview transcripts at least twice to gain familiarity with the text of the
interview transcripts. After (b) importing the transcripts into NVivo 8, the coding software used in this study, I read through every word of the transcript (c) looking for keywords and phrases. As words and phrases were identified as recurring and or relevant to the topic of the study, those words and phrases were (d) coded meaning highlighted in NVivo 8 and assigned a word or phrase to best describe its content. After completing all of the descriptive coding of the transcripts, (e) I went back through the interview transcripts in NVivo 8 and skimmed the data for additional keywords or phrases. The purpose of going through the data a second time was to identify words or phrases that increased in frequency as I concluded my first round of analysis. Once the descriptive coding was complete, the findings were (f) exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that referenced the various codes and the number of times the code was mentioned by a participant. These descriptive codes were then (g) grouped into pattern codes by highlighting, in different colors, the different Microsoft Excel cells to group the data. Once the data were highlighted and sorted into separate pattern coding groups, I created a (h) separate Microsoft Word document with the various pattern codes. Quotations were identified from the original transcripts by pattern and descriptive code groupings and organized by pattern code area. I then (i) pulled quotes from the interview transcripts and began to develop individual themes. Once all quotations were contained within the Microsoft Word document, (j) I re-read the quotations that were grouped by pattern codes. From this analysis, (k) themes were developed based on the groupings of the data collected. I developed themes by identifying the larger groups of data and analyzing trends. Once the theme development was complete, (l) I created assertions that best captured the text segments gathered within each theme.
The topic of employee expectations was mentioned by all of the participants with the exception of 3 board members. The following text segment is one example of a vice president explaining expectations at the College: “It was the expectation of just . . . this is what you’re going to do, and you come here, and you do the job that’s expected of you.” This text segment was coded as “expectations” because of its clear link to employee expectations laid out by the institution. Text segments were then grouped and descriptively coded with “human resources” because of their connection to other aspects of College employees. While the findings suggested it was important to set expectations, there also was a discussion of the specific rewards for meeting those expectations, the rewards system at the College in general, and the implications of not meeting those expectations. The theme of the “College places a high level of importance on hiring employees and setting expectations” was created to encompass the findings from the interview transcripts. The rationale for this theme was that the College president as well as current and former vice presidents all referred to human resources on multiple occasions and noted its importance in implementing the strategic plan. The assertion developed was designed to interpret the College’s rewards system and its inconsistency in addition to the setting of expectations.

Presentation of the Findings from the Interview Transcripts

The following section identifies the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. The themes are rank ordered based upon frequency of discussion as it related to the implementation of the strategic plan. Each of the six themes from the interview transcripts is comprised of sub-themes that address more specific details of the theme. The sub-themes emerged as separate categories within each larger theme.
Theme #1 - Human resources: Hiring, firing, setting expectations, the president’s involvement, and rewarding employees. The theme of human resources contains several sub-themes that help explain why this area was important in implementing the strategic plan. College administrators focus on the employees they hire and the expectations they set for these employees, both at the vice presidential level and the presidential level. Additionally, the College terminates individuals who do not meet those expectations, yet there were differing opinions among participants regarding the rewards system for those employees who meet expectations and choose to remain employed at the institution.

A thorough review of the interview transcripts indicated that the College places a high degree of importance on human resources as indicated by the frequency with which this topic was mentioned by participants. This theme was ranked as number one because all participants discussed one or more of the sub-themes in this section. The institution sets high expectations for its employees, and when those expectations are not met, leaders and administrators separate individuals from the institution and hire new employees. These new employees are given clear expectations and rewarded if they meet those expectations and separated from their position if the expectations are not met. This theme emerged as the most relevant from the interview transcripts because human resource decisions and expectations occur on the College’s campus on a daily basis and are central to the ability of the college to implement its strategic initiatives.

The College demonstrates its commitment to using human resources to carry out strategic plan initiatives in the following ways. The president of the college is involved with the majority of final personnel interviews on campus, and the institution has
demonstrated an historical pattern of firing employees who do not meet expectations. Among those participants who discussed the reward system, five (more than half of those who responded) participants described the College as having an adequate system of rewards for its employees. The findings in this section suggest human resources is a key element in the implementation of the College’s strategic plan because it drives all other themes identified in the data analysis process. Hiring the right individuals helps communication, accountability, and commitment to the strategic plan to ensure its success. This section discusses the practice of hiring good employees, the setting of expectations, the president’s involvement in human resource decisions, the firing of employees, and the rewards system at the College. This section then concludes with a summary of the findings.

**Hiring good employees.** The College places a strong emphasis on accountability and responsibility ever since the strategic plan was created in 2005. However, because the institution has focused on hiring high-quality employees, the need to enforce accountability has been reduced. One vice president noted that “if you hire great people, accountability goes away because you’ve hired great people.” Another vice president pointed out the advantages of not only hiring high-quality employees but also associating with high-quality people: “I think the president has hired well . . . surrounded himself with good people.” In addition to hiring high-quality employees, several vice presidents noted that the president does not place as much emphasis on prior relevant experience as he does simply on being a good employee. According to one vice president, the president “tried to hire the best person available and not necessarily someone who has experience in a certain field to help carry out (the) strategic plan.”
Vice presidents commented that the institution has hired good employees since the start of Renaissance I in 2005; one explanation for having good employees may be the institution’s desire to hire from within. One vice president said he felt that employees who are promoted from within already have a good understanding of the strategic plan and what is expected of them; therefore, they are likely to be better employees in helping implement the objectives of the strategic plan. Another vice president echoed this sentiment: “Everything else being equal, if someone has the core skill-set competencies, I’ll always hire from internally.” Another vice president noted that hiring from within “does make it easier to implement our strategic plan . . . because people tend to have a good sense of what the plan is, and so we’re not having to translate that for someone from the outside.” According to one vice president, “I think depending on the positions that we have had open in our office, hiring internally has been good because there’s a person already familiar with what we’re doing, the expectations, the speed, the accountability . . . all that.” Even though three vice presidents said that the College has a “desire to hire from within,” not all those interviewed felt the same way. For example, one vice president explained, “I think it is very healthy for organizations to bring in outside people to help look and question and shift and reallocate.”

**Setting expectations.** Since the beginning of Renaissance I in 2005, the College has used a consistent language regarding the expectations that the college has placed on its employees and the (negative) consequences of failing to meet those expectations as well as the (positive) consequences of meeting or exceeding those expectations. Regardless of when employees were hired by the institution, meaning whether in the early stages of Renaissance I or in the latter stages, the president and vice presidents
reported that administrators made employees aware of the expectations placed upon them in their respective roles: “That was rule number one, you had to get the job done, and that meant results, not talking about results, not thinking about it, not meeting about it, but results.” Another vice president commented that while hiring quality employees was important, it was “also raising the bar of expectations, that we expected people to work harder and achieve more.” One vice president reported that during the interview process, the College is “very very clear with them [potential employees] . . . if you are not really willing to work hard to get the job done, this is not a good fit for you.” Administrators and human resources personnel who are involved in the hiring process at the College not only set expectations during the interview process but also promote individuals from within the college who are able to adhere to those expectations.

**President’s involvement.** All but one of the vice presidents referenced the expectations set by the president of the College. All of the current vice presidents noted the president’s involvement during the final stages of interviewing potential employees and his role in the selection of candidates. For example, one vice president reported, “He plays a real big part. He wants, short of someone who we’re hiring to cut the grass, he wants to see and meet everyone we’re hiring in.” Another vice president discussed the positive impact of having the president involved with interviews and hiring decisions: “I think it’s real important because then you get a real good sense from leadership.” Additionally, one vice president commented on the importance of being on the same page with the president: “[the President] and I had a real understanding, and I knew exactly the image he wanted to have represent and portray” this institution. While the president is and was involved in hiring decisions and expectations are made clear from the beginning,
the College did have employees who did not meet those requirements and had to be separated from the College.

**Firing employees.** At the College, vice presidents reiterated that since expectations are made clear to new employees, failure to meet those expectations results in consequences. For example, the president said when discussing employees reaction to certain employees being let go, “I think those that were still standing went ‘whoa, he will do it; he’s not kidding.’ And I wasn’t, and I’m still not.” One vice president reported that when he was hired, expectations as well as consequences were made very clear: the president “came in and was very honest and open that this was going to be a culture of accountability and you were expected to do your job, and if you didn’t do your job, you weren’t going to have a job.”

Other participants mentioned that employees may have been afraid of being fired by the new administration. One vice president said, “There was sort of a thinking . . . ‘this guy is going to come in and fire people, and so we’re afraid.’ ” College employees witnessed the firing of some of their co-workers, which contributed to the fear of being fired themselves. However, one vice president noted that some of the employees who were fired during the initial stages of Renaissance I had “been there forever, and they just were not . . . they weren’t anything that was of value to the institution. And I think over time, [those employees] realized that.” The president provided an interesting insight regarding the motivation for increased performance: “I don’t know if people work harder because either they’re afraid that I might fire them or I’ve hired a lot of people that have set the bar higher.” According to participants, the College employees have a clear understanding of the expectations that have been placed upon them and the consequences
of failing to meet those expectations. Some participants further reported that those employees who successfully complete their job requirements are rewarded appropriately.

**Reward systems.** The discussion of rewards systems is divided into two perspectives, the president who shares his views on rewards and then the vice presidential perspective. The rewards received by the College employees vary based on individual definitions and perceptions of what constitutes a reward. The president’s perception was that “a lot of the reward [employees] got was simply seeing the changes around them and feeling like ‘OK, I’m seeing more kids, there’s more bookstore sales, there’s more kids walking around in swag that says the College’s name.’” According to the president, some College employees felt rewarded merely by seeing the college experience success and increased enrollment.

According to one vice president, rewards were not always provided in monetary form. For example, some employees were rewarded with tickets to professional sporting events if they achieved their goals for the year. One vice president reported that the College president is “very gracious and generous, and I think he loves to reward people with compensation and multiple-year contracts, and [he] lets them know that he appreciates a job well done.”

As it relates to salary increases, the College sets an average percentage salary increase for supervisors to use as a starting point for annual salary increases. Any salary increase above the average is required to be evened out by a lower percentage salary increase for a different employee within the same department. The president said that “some people might be getting 5% or 6% and some people 1% or 2%,” meaning that although there was an average percentage raise for all departments, supervisors were
given the discretion to decide individual raises for individual employees.

One vice president noted that this reward can vary on a discretionary basis: “I have the prerogative to give folks an amount that’s greater than that, but I have to balance that with giving someone an amount that’s less than that.” The College allows supervisors the discretion to award larger raises and titles to productive employees but must currently balance any increases with proportional decreases.

While some vice presidents indicated employees were rewarded appropriately with promotion or compensation, one vice president indicated that the College has “a pretty limited system, but there is a reward structure, and it’s generally tied to compensation and or promotion.” Additionally, another vice president felt no reward structure existed, saying that “your reward is having a contract to do your job again for the next year.” Another vice president said that “I don’t believe there were any rewards” besides the board of trustees giving compliments to the president, the president giving compliments to his direct reports, and the vice president's passing the compliments down the organizational chart. Based on the responses of vice presidents, the perception of the effectiveness of the rewards system at the College depends on the individual vice president. In other words, some vice presidents viewed verbal compliments and praise as rewards, and others did not. While the College made an effort to reward employees for their work through public announcements of appreciation and monetary increases, other vice presidents reported that they perceived the reward system as limited.

Summary of Theme #1. The president of the College places an emphasis on hiring high-quality employees and ensuring that these employees understand the expectations that will be placed on them during their employment. Even though
expectations at the College are made clear when employees are initially hired, some employees are not able to meet those expectations and may be fired. For those employees who remain employed, the perceived value of their reward depends on their individual definitions of “reward,” and decisions about their annual compensation increases are made by individual supervisors.

**Theme #2 - Accountability: Holding employees accountable and employees’ commitment.** Since the 2005 strategic plan was created and implemented, there has been an increase in the level of commitment and accountability, according to participants in this study. After human resources, accountability was the second most frequently mentioned concept by the president and vice presidents in terms of the number of times it was referenced and the number of participants that referenced accountability. It was a theme not only referenced but also quoted; meaning vice presidents referenced statements made by the president about his expectations regarding accountability and the culture of accountability on campus. Faculty members and staff members are held accountable for the expectations placed upon them and in turn feel a level of commitment back to the institution and its success. Although this commitment was attributed to a variety of factors, vice presidents confirmed the existence of this commitment. They further reported that accountability was created through constant communication regarding expectations and the definition of accountability which resulted in a culture around campus where new and current employees understood what was expected of them on a daily basis.

Accountability emerged from the data and was evident from the beginning of the strategic planning process of Renaissance I at the College. The culture of accountability
at the College took a dramatic turn by the College standards and in the world of higher education. As one member of the board of trustees noted, the president came to the College with a business model in mind for implementation. The rationale behind the theme of accountability and its number-two ranking is the frequency with which it was discussed by participants. This section begins by discussing accountability and concludes with findings related to employees’ commitment to the institution.

**Accountability.** At the College, accountability starts the top of the organizational chart with the president. The accountability metrics that are used to measure the president’s performance are established by the president and presented to the board of trustees during annual evaluations. One member of the board of trustees reported that the president “has established some very specific benchmarks in the areas of fundraising and also in student enrollment, retention, and recruitment.” While the president is held accountable to the board of trustees, other employees of the organization are held accountable in a similar manner. One vice president reported that accountability occurs through one-on-one meetings with the president, through senior staff meetings, through direct reports, and through individual meetings. One vice president reported that he views accountability as a process and a concept that needs to be communicated to ensure that the members of each department are meeting their expectations: “I look at my direct reports as an extension of me, and what I’m accountable for is what they’re accountable for.” The College employs a practice of openly discussing accountability in group and individual meetings.

In addition to communicating expectations and holding employees accountable, the College also maintains a culture of accountability. This culture of accountability was
reflected in the way that communication about accountability occurs. In many organizations, accountability is discussed in connection with particular individuals or events. For example, employee X is responsible for outcome Y. However, even when specific expectations or individuals are not being discussed in terms of accountability, the definition of accountability was being discussed by the president, senior administrators, and employees. One vice president said, “Accountability here really means that, and the president has said this many, many times . . . that you do what you say.” Another vice president reported the positive influence of accountability on the ability to identify a problem: “If we have issues with enrollment, we know, at least in terms of accountability, where those issues reside.” In other words the accountability metrics developed in the enrollment area allow the institution to pinpoint which employees are and are not meeting or exceeding performance expectations. Additionally, a vice president noted that “accountability really means doing what you’re supposed to do, achieving goals and showing outcomes and measures and showing evidence of success.” The College’s president has made clear his definition of accountability, which translates into a culture of hard work and achievement.

Commitment. Commitment to achieving the goals identified in the strategic plan at the College exists for numerous reasons. Commitment exists for some as a result of witnessing the president’s commitment and his ability to lead by example. One vice president noted that frontline employees buy into the decisions made at the College because the senior staff members are “accessible.” Faculty members and staff members feel a connection to senior staff members and know that if they share an idea, it will be respected and considered by senior staff members. A second vice president reported that
suggestions are always given due consideration at the College: “They might not be implemented, but they were never . . . I never felt pushed aside . . . I think that’s different in other places that I’ve been at.”

In addition to feeling like their ideas are valued, employees of the College are committed because of the success of the institution. According to one vice president, employees have “actually witnessed some of the continued development of the college. So there’s a really strong appreciation for the fact that things are good.” Administrators at the College reported having heard stories about other institutions that have not awarded raises for extended periods of time, and as a result, these employees reported feeling more committed to the College because they have in fact received annual raises. Furthermore, the College employs a practice of promoting from within. One vice president reported that promoting from within creates commitment because “it builds a sense that this [College] isn’t just a place someone could have a job, that you can actually be a part of something and continue to be a part of it for as long as you can.” College faculty members and staff members reported that they were committed to Renaissance I because of the change in the campus culture and the institution’s success.

**Summary of Theme #2.** Accountability at the College is made clear from the time employees are hired and throughout their employment the College. This concept is emphasized by the president and communicated down through the vice presidents and ultimately to faculty members and staff members. Holding employees accountable on campus is seen as a critical component in the implementation of the strategic plan. Additionally, employees at the College are committed to the success of the strategic plan because of the president’s leadership and personal commitment, the accessibility and
willingness of senior staff members to respect suggestions and ideas, and the mentality of
promoting from within at the College.

**Theme #3 - The strategic plan: The plan, the culture, and the role of**

**enrollment and athletics.** The strategic plan was ranked as the third theme based on the
findings from the interview transcripts. While leaders at the institution not only hired the
right people and held them accountable, they also provided them with a clear, narrow
plan that clearly communicated the college’s intentions. All the participants in this study
referenced the strategic plan in one way or another. They reported that the keys to
Renaissance I included the plan’s (a) laser-like focus on the objectives that were defined, (b)
specific references to holding employees accountable, and (c) ability to create a sense
of urgency among employees. The strategic plan was described by the president and
multiple vice presidents as a non-traditional strategic plan and not one that likely would
be found in modern business textbooks. This section outlines the strategic plan directly,
the culture of the College as it relates to the creation and implementation of the strategic
plan, and a discussion of the specific enrollment and athletic portions of the strategic
plan.

**The strategic plan.** The president and all but one vice president reported that the
strategic plan was successful because it was short, to the point, and focused on several
keys issues. One vice president reported that “the plan was not very complex. It was
pretty simple and was pretty prescribed.” The president noted that the success of the plan
was due, in part, to its brevity and succinctness: “I think it was successful because it was
very short,” and “I think it was successful because it was very clear.” One vice president
also identified the president’s simplicity in wording that helped with the implementation
of the strategic plan: “It’s mostly, ‘We said we’re going to do this, this and this. Let’s get these things accomplished.’ ” Referring to the strategic planning document, another vice president said, “Don’t make it fluffy, and don’t make it with statements no one can measure and do and know what you did. Make it clear, make it precise, and make it realizable and doable.”

The strategic plan was also written and implemented fairly quickly, according to the president: “I thought it was successful because we wrote it fairly quickly.” The strategic planning committees met in August and set a goal of finishing the plan by November. “We didn’t lose momentum, [and] we didn’t have a problem of people forgetting what exactly we were doing.” In addition to its quick creation, one vice president referred to the plan’s focus on its objectives: “I will say that the college had a plan, and it stuck to the plan. It didn’t allow issues or other ideas to diverge itself from the plan, which was to grow enrollment and then to improve retention.”

Labeled “Renaissance I,” this phase of the strategic plan focused on increasing the enrollment of the institution and improving retention of its current student population. One vice president reported that increasing enrollment was “the impetus and the priority for the first strategic plan.” The Renaissance I plan was designed not only to grow enrollment but also to establish a path for the future of the institution. A second vice president noted that Renaissance I was set up to “build up the enrollment, create funding, and create revenue sources that could be parlayed into Renaissance II.” A third vice president indicated that “Renaissance I… fixed enrollment, fix[ed] how campus works, and [began] to position this institution for Renaissance II.” The College strategic plan was considered successful because it was short, clearly written, and focused on the
objectives of enrolling and retaining students.

Culture. The Renaissance I strategic plan not only featured simple objectives and was designed to set the institution up for the future, but it also created a sense of urgency for all administrators, faculty members, and staff members on campus. One vice president said, “Most institutions honestly take at least a year, maybe even more” researching their institution and studying where they are and where they want to be in the future. Another vice president commented that the strategic plan was “very quick; it was very fast, [and] they didn’t do it like anything you read in the books; it was a quick and decisive action.” One vice president noted that the president was trying to “create a kind of sense of campus community but also sell students on why they should come to this institution.” It was also noted that the president was “pretty aggressive with timelines. That’s one of the interesting things here is in sort of a positive aggressive way.” While the president is aggressive with timelines and projects, this vice president did not view that as a negative but rather an exciting, positive expectation to get projects done and see the results of the hard work that was put into meeting expectations. The culture of the College changed when the president was hired and the institution began to change how enrollment and retention activities were conducted.

Enrollment and athletics. Although this study focused on the implementation of the strategic plan, it is essential to discuss some of the strategic plan’s details. Renaissance I was a strategic plan primarily focused on creating and growing athletic programs as a method of increasing enrollment. Athletic coaches were held accountable for recruiting athletes; much in the same way other colleges and universities hold their admissions representatives responsible for enrolling a certain number of students. By
holding coaches responsible for enrollment numbers, the institution essentially increased its admissions staff from 6 to 30 recruiters.

The College’s strategic plan was focused on growing the enrollment of the institution to generate revenue. The plan specifically outlined strategies for increasing enrollment and identified the role that athletics played in that growth: “The priority was to raise enrollment and retention, and if we had switches in a residence hall that made the Internet a little slow, we could all live with that; it was a matter of financial prioritization.” The president, all but one vice president, and all board members recounted the enrollment situation at the College prior to the Renaissance I strategic plan. According to one member of the board of trustees, it was an institution with an enrollment “down to about 800 students” and had an initial goal of growing enrollment to 1,400 students. In order to accomplish that goal, one member of the board of trustees said, “We’ve got to give him [the coaches] some expectations. They take the load off of the admissions staff.” Another vice president noted that “the key to success to implementing the strategic plan was . . . the coaches and their requirements and their accountability to recruit.” A different vice president indicated that every athletic team had a full-time head coach and a part-time assistant, both responsible for recruiting students. The College was direct in identifying enrollment as the main objective of its strategic plan, and holding athletic coaches accountable for recruiting helped the College achieve its goals.

**Summary of Theme #3.** The strategic plan at the College, Renaissance I, was noted as being focused, concise and not a traditional strategic plan. The College then used this plan to develop a culture of urgency in implementing the plan to change the
institution. The main points of the strategic plan revolved around enrollment and athletics and the institution’s specific accountability measures and goals. The strategic plan was created quickly, implemented with a sense of urgency, and focused on enrollment and enrollment goals.

**Theme #4 - Leadership: The skills and responsibilities of the president, the president’s expectations, and the view of the president.** The fourth theme of leadership was discussed passionately by all participants. The leadership skills and behavior displayed by the president were considered the key to the successful implementation of Renaissance I. This theme emerged from the data analysis because the president’s leadership skills and abilities were discussed by members of the board of trustees during the interview process and have continued to be displayed during the president’s time at the College.

The College president was hired by members of the board of trustees to be a “change agent,” according to one Board member. The strategic plan represented a departure from the College’s past plans, and the new leader of the institution made changes. Members of the board of trustees and vice presidents outlined the skills required to be successful as a president and identified which of those skills the president displayed. This section discusses the skills and responsibilities of the president, the expectations he has of faculty members and staff members, and how he is viewed by current and former employees on campus.

**Skills and responsibilities.** All the members of the board of trustees and vice presidents who participated in the study mentioned the president’s leadership skills, although many highlighted different attributes they felt were essential to his success. One
vice president reported an incident that occurred during a time before the current president assumed the office of president: “He sent me a congratulations note. He wasn’t even the president yet, and it [a research article] had come out about six months before he ever knew about the College.” All of the vice presidents and the president reported the importance of having “vision” and the need to be “decisive.” Two additional vice presidents reported that the president had “guts.” One member of the board of trustees said that “he’s got good judgment. He is aggressive, plans well, [and] executes better than anybody I’ve ever known in a college presidency. You know, basically if the College says they’re going to do something, they do it.” The same member of the board of trustees also said, “I think so many people have great looking strategic plans and they just can’t get them done.”

Another characteristic that two vice presidents attributed to the current president is his attention to detail: “There is a pretty strong attention to detail… detail in terms of how things get accomplished. There’s a culture here, and we want things to be done a certain way with a certain look. He really immerses himself in the details of execution, and that’s probably the biggest difference between him and any other CEO-level person I’ve worked with in the past.” Additionally, a different vice president commented on the president’s communication skills, sales ability, and ability to execute a plan.

While participants were asked about the president’s skill set, the president himself was asked about his responsibilities in implementing the strategic plan. The president noted that early in the process, he was involved with communicating the progress of the plan to the board of trustees, hiring individuals, monitoring the cash flow, overseeing the building and renovation planning, and entertaining individuals at the president’s house.
He also noted that he spent time walking around campus and talking to employees about their roles and the strategic plan’s progress. He described his role as that of a visionary leader: “My primary role was to establish the vision, articulate it to the community, [and] make sure that all people understood exactly what the vision was and their role in fulfilling it.” He also noted that he was in charge of “cheerleading” and making sure everyone supported the new strategic direction of the institution: “I was really in charge of setting the benchmarks [and] holding people accountable.” The College has a president who is involved with the majority of aspects of the strategic plan.

**Presidential expectations.** Participants were asked about the president’s expectations of his staff members and of employees of the college. The president made clear what the “senior staff priorities are.” In addition to making expectations clear, the president also takes action when needed. One vice president said, “If something happens, he’s got his hands sort of all over it, and it doesn’t mean he’s micromanaging it necessarily.” The same vice president said, “I think he challenges people, and he sets a pretty high standard that he expects people to meet.” A different vice president reported that the president of the College is “out in front.” The College has a president who defines priorities and expectations and takes an active role in implementation.

**View of the president.** The president of the College has been viewed in a positive and negative light. While some participants viewed the president as a visionary who provided hope and leadership, other participants noted there were faculty members and staff members who viewed the president as a “jerk” and “abrasive.” Two vice presidents pointed out that the president has created a culture of accountability and that most of the faculty members “are pretty scared of him.” Vice presidents reported that the College’s
president is not liked by everyone and is feared by some on campus.

The state of the College when the president began his employment was viewed as needing a “strong, dynamic leader,” which the current president provided. One board member reported that the board of trustees was “blown away” by his vision during the interview process. One vice president reported that when the president arrived, the campus was “hungry beyond belief for dynamic leadership.” All but one vice president said the current president was the type of leader that the College needed to implement Renaissance I, and he was viewed as a “proven leader” whose vision provided hope to the faculty members and staff members.

**Summary of theme #4.** At the College, strategic initiatives start with the president and work through the board of trustees and down through the vice presidents. The president is viewed as having many skills that contribute to his ability to lead and implement the strategic plan. The president has high expectations for every employee on campus. His leadership style is viewed both in a positive and negative light based on which employees are asked. The president is seen more positively on campus by staff members than by faculty members.

**Theme #5 - Challenges: Potential missed opportunities, doubts, frustrations, and changes.** This theme highlights the challenges that the College faced before, during, and after implementing the Renaissance I strategic plan. The reason behind the ranking of fifth for challenges is that while the challenges theme identifies missed opportunities, members of the board of trustees felt Renaissance I went as planned and that nothing should have been done differently. The theme of challenges emerged from the data analysis in part because all participants offered a clear opinion when asked what they
thought should have been done differently with Renaissance I. In some cases, items that were scheduled to be implemented were not, and in other cases, vice presidents felt opportunities may have been missed. Additionally, vice presidents in some instances reported feeling frustrated with certain communication aspects of the plan. However, no vice president or board member provided examples of activities or tasks they would have handled differently. This section discusses missed opportunities, doubts individuals around campus had about the plan and the president, the frustration expressed by vice presidents, and changes that should have been made regarding the implementation of the strategic plan.

**Potential missed opportunities.** The College may have missed out on some opportunities during Renaissance I. One vice president said, “A certain number of people can only handle so many projects at once.” While that vice president referred to the general idea of missed opportunities, other vice presidents provided specific examples. One vice president noted that in one case, the institution raised money for a swimming pool that was never built (and does not exist on the College’s campus today). Another vice president reported that the College explored the “feasibility of nursing,” but the addition of a nursing program being added to the academic curriculum did not come to fruition. Also, a women’s field hockey team was started, but “it didn’t pan out; it didn’t recruit well.” According to vice presidents and members of the board of trustees, although some items were not implemented, or existed only for a short period of time, they were not items that hindered the college’s ability to execute the overall strategic plan.

**Doubts.** The Renaissance I strategic plan was a step in a new direction for an
institution whose enrollment had fallen to the mid-800s in 2005. When the current president was hired, some individuals were cautious about the new path on which the college was about to embark. “This [was] a radical departure from what we’ve been doing, and it makes sense, but I hope it works,” said one member of the board of trustees. Participants also commented on the doubts individuals around campus harbored regarding the new plan. In the president’s opinion, faculty “generally do not understand how… building a hockey rink give[s them] more microscopes and more cadavers for [their] cadaver lab.” And while all members of the board of trustees interviewed for this study supported the hiring of the current president, one Board member expressed cautious optimism: “Boy, I hope this is going to work.” No members of the board of trustees indicated that they were opposed to the hiring of the current president or the strategic plan, but rather the member of the board of trustees expressed a slight anxiety once the plan was approved and the institution agreed to borrow large sums of money to get the strategic plan in motion. One member of the board of trustees said, “We were talking about borrowing $30 million dollars.” This Board member further reported that another Board member said in a meeting, “I think it’s a bigger risk not to and continue with the same thing we’ve been doing.” While the College’s board of trustees and others did have their initial doubts, the members of the board of trustees all agreed to proceed with the strategic plan in the early stages of its development.

Frustrations. While some members of the board of trustees expressed doubt that the plan would work, others felt frustration with how the strategic plan was communicated. Some board members felt the decisions made over time should have been better communicated to keep more individuals actively involved in the process.
Regarding the lack of communication about decisions being made, one vice president said that this “created a lot of frustration and upset a lot of people among the faculty.” Another vice president felt that the process of explaining the objectives of the strategic plan could have been better. The College could have done a better job of explaining that “this is why we’re doing the things we’re doing, and here are the results we hope to see through successful implementation,” said one vice president. Furthermore, another vice president noted the current state of communication at the College: “The communication was a disaster, and it still isn’t great here.” According to two vice presidents, the College did have and does have communication weaknesses within its strategic plan.

Changes. At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were asked what they would change about Renaissance I now that the strategic plan has been in place for some time. Some vice presidents reported that information should have been better communicated. One participant specifically stated that the College should have had “a print document that spell(ed) out the strategic plan.” Others described situations that they would have handled differently. For example, the president noted, “I would have handled some personnel issues differently. Not that I would not have gotten rid of people, but I would have gotten rid of people differently.” The president also reported, “I probably would have done a few more things on the academic side to help people understand that at the end of the day, it was going to be about education and academics.”

None of the board members commented on issues or procedures they would have changed regarding the strategic plan. One member of the board of trustees noted that “it was an incredible culture change . . . and the results speak for themselves.” Another Board member said, “I can’t think of any strategic thing that didn’t go as planned.” A
different member of the board of trustees said, “I’m not sure I would have changed anything. I think . . . Renaissance I got us where we wanted to go.” Two more members of the board of trustees said, “I wouldn’t change a thing” and “there’s very little that could’ve, would’ve, or should’ve been changed.” Although problematic issues arose during the implementation of the strategic plan, the majority of the College’s board of trustees and senior staff members would not have changed anything about the Renaissance I strategic plan.

Summary of theme #5. The College’s strategic plan from 2005 was designed to put the institution through dramatic changes in an effort to provide financial stability. There were those at the College who had their doubts about the possible success of the plan but supported taking the calculated risk. As the plan was being implemented, there were individuals who felt opportunities were missed. However, the main frustration noted by the vice presidents was with the communication of the strategic plan. When asked if anything should have been changed regarding the implementation of Renaissance I, members of the board of trustees reported that they would not have changed anything about the plan.

Theme #6 - Communication: Senior staff communication, board of trustees communication, employee expectations and interpreting the strategic plan. The final theme that emerged from analyzing the interview transcripts focuses on communication, and this theme was ranked last because it was the most infrequently mentioned theme. It is included as a theme because of its importance to the strategic plan. As I discuss the findings, the reader will see the president’s view of the role of communication in the implementation of Renaissance I. The theme emerged as vice presidents discussed their
views on the effectiveness of current communication on campus, their views of how Renaissance I was communicated and their views of the communication between senior staff members and the members of the board of trustees. All vice presidents referenced the importance of communication in one way or another. It was noted that communication is an essential component of implementing a strategic plan. Communication at the College is not relegated to only speaking directly to one’s supervisor. Communication is encouraged to occur between all levels of the organizational chart, meaning members of the board of trustees can talk to vice presidents without having to go through the president first. This section focuses on the communication among senior staff members, the communication among members of the board of trustees, and the communication of the strategic plan to those on and off campus at the beginning of Renaissance I.

**Senior staff-level communication.** The senior staff meetings held by the president provided an opportunity for department heads to be made aware of or updated on projects in other areas. One vice president reported that this is a time when any cross-projects are discussed. A different vice president referenced the fact that at the College, vice presidents have direct access to the president and do not move forward with ideas unless they have spoken with the president directly and received approval. The same vice president noted that this saves time compared to other institutions that require multiple levels of approval for projects and may later see resource requests denied. In addition to the communication provided by presidential access, another vice president discussed the relationship between members of the senior staff, excluding the president: “I think it was pretty easy to communicate. We all had the strategic plan, and we worked the plan, so
everyone pretty much know what their job was.”

The College also conducts a monthly college management team meeting, which is comprised of all department supervisors across campus, and approximately 40 individuals are typically in attendance. This event fosters communication between senior staff members and all other employees on campus. The president said, “We probably should have a long time ago done the college management team meetings.” While the College currently conducts meetings to foster communication, there was a time when not all updates were communicated with the broader campus community.

**Board of trustees communication.** In addition to communicating with faculty members and staff members of the College, vice presidents and board members both commented on the positive dialogue and open communication channels between the members of the board of trustees and senior staff members. One member of the board of trustees expressed approval of this communication and that in addition to the tri-annual board meetings, “the president regularly reached out to members of the trustees and met face to face and/or [conducted] telephone meetings.” Furthermore, it was noted by a different member of the board of trustees that there is “a close relationship between the chair of the board and the president, and those two talk.” While some members of the board of trustees suggested that the board of trustees is not involved with the hiring, firing, and evaluation of the vice presidents, participants also noted that communication between the president of the college and the board chair is necessary for the board to stay informed: “By virtue of the structure that exists here, there’s a lot of interaction, at the committee level and at the board level, between board members and vice presidents.” One member of the Board of trustees noted that the overall communication between the
members of the board of trustees and senior staff members (including the president) was “good” and that “I don’t think there’s ever been any… gee, I’m surprised. I wonder why nobody told me this.” The College’s senior staff members and members of the board of trustees communicate frequently and effectively.

**Employee expectations.** In addition to staff-level communication and communication among the board members, participants also indicated that expectations about performance were clearly communicated to employees before they accepted a position at the College. One vice president felt that expectations are communicated through “direct contact with a direct supervisor and then maybe that supervisor’s supervisor.” The president of the College meets with potential candidates and again conveys the expectations of each role and clearly indicates that each individual will be held accountable for those expectations. Not only does the president convey expectations to potential employees, but one vice president pointed out the president’s role in establishing a culture of expectations early in his employment. That vice president said the president “was very honest and open that this was going to be a culture of accountability, and you were expected to do your job, and if you didn’t, you weren’t going to have a job.” The College communicates expectations before and during each employee’s tenure working at the College.

**Communicating and interpreting the strategic plan.** The president of the College noted that his main role was to “establish the vision, articulate it clearly to the community, [and] make sure that all people understood exactly what the vision was and their role in fulfilling it.” The president reported that he was in charge of “cheerleading” and “holding people accountable.” The president explained that he spent a great deal of
time speaking with donors; evaluating reports; and communicating with alumni, foundations, and other local organizations “because I wanted to get the word out.” When asked about the frequency of communicating the strategic plan, the president noted that “it was constantly on the tip of my tongue, constantly being talked about, constantly being sold, constantly being clarified and enumerated to people in terms of what we wanted to accomplish.” The College’s president spent time articulating the plan and ensuring that individuals knew their roles.

One vice president commented on his role and the president’s role in communicating Renaissance I within the college. This vice president noted that the message given to faculty members and staff members was, “If you can’t be loyal and you can’t support the plan, then you need to leave… If you can, great. We’ve got folks who then will be dedicated to making it successful.” One vice president also reported that the president’s “ability to communicate the sense of urgency” regarding the strategic plan was what helped make the plan a success. Another vice president said, “My job was sort of to interpret what [the president] was doing, why it was important.” The College employed individuals who helped interpret the strategic plan to different constituencies.

**Summary of Theme #6.** At the College, the senior staff meets on a weekly basis to provide updates and make decisions about the various strategies and daily activities of the institution. As the next section on meeting observation analysis indicates, the president, vice presidents, and other key players on campus communicate at these senior staff meetings in an effort to avoid miscommunications. As those meetings occur, so do college management team meetings, which serve as a communication mechanism to carry the items from the senior staff meetings to several dozen campus directors and to ensure
consistent communication. There is also an emphasis placed on communicating expectations to employees. Finally, the strategic plan was and is communicated to everyone around campus by the president and his vice presidents. It was initially communicated by the president in many cases, and sometimes it was communicated by the vice presidents to their individual areas for clarification.

The individual interviews provided insight into the Renaissance I strategic plan and how it was implemented at the College. The following section will outline meetings I attended and observed. I took notes during the meetings to document what I observed and to better understand the live implementation of strategic action items and the culture of the College.

**Meeting Analysis**

The following section discusses the specific details of the meetings I attended during the data collection process. I made handwritten notes throughout all of the meetings I attended and the analysis of these notes are presented in this section. In the following pages, I describe the meetings and their purpose, and I provide the rationale for selecting these five meetings. I also discuss the coding process and conclude this section with a presentation of the findings as a result of analyzing the meeting observations.

**Description of Meetings.** The meetings I attended included four senior staff meetings and one board of trustees strategic planning committee meeting. Senior staff meetings typically are held weekly and include the president of the college, all vice presidents, the dean of students, the athletic director, the director of alumni relations and the president’s administrative assistants. The meetings I attended were held on June 10, 2014; August 12, 2014; September 18, 2014 and September 25, 2014. I attended these
senior staff meetings based on the availability; there were times when the president would cancel the regularly scheduled weekly meeting because of other commitments and there were times when I could not attend the meetings because of my professional obligations on the same day and time as the meeting. These meetings were attended by all the main decision makers on campus. The president frequently addresses strategic planning issues during senior staff meetings, and decisions are made about how to proceed with certain projects.

The board of trustees strategic planning committee meetings are scheduled three times a year and are comprised of approximately 15 members of the board of trustees, the president of the college, and all of the current vice presidents. The board of trustees meeting I attended occurred on October 23, 2014. This meeting was selected because while the board of trustees typically meets three times a year, the strategic planning committee is not required to meet each time the board of trustees meets. In the Spring of 2014, no strategic planning committee meeting was held when the rest of the members of the board of trustees met on the College’s campus. Because the Spring 2014 meeting was not held, I attended the Fall 2014 strategic planning committee meeting based on approval by the committee’s chair and because it occurred during a time when I was collecting other data.

In all 5 meetings, I played a silent role and took notes while I observed. I was identified at the beginning of all meetings as an individual who was working on his dissertation and taking notes for research. The board of trustees meeting I attended was mainly a review of past strategic planning initiatives and the current progress of strategic planning items. Topics for the future meetings were deferred for discussion at the next
strategic planning meeting, which was set to occur in Florida in February of 2015. Below is an excerpt from a meeting observation I conducted on September 8th during a senior staff meeting. The typed out notes below (Figure 2) were converted from actual handwritten notes taken during the meetings observed.

**Table 4.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Staff Meeting September 8th, 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President starts meeting by wishing someone a happy birthday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President goes around table and asks everyone for personal updates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Students gives update on Grandparents Weekend upcoming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic director gives updates on recent athletic contests and which teams won or lost. He also discusses which AC teams were on TV in Toledo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President then asks for anyone he needs to write a thank you note to... several people mention names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President asks to discuss preparations for upcoming Board of Trustee meeting. His secretary went through agendas from previous years. VP of Finance asks when he can discuss new student housing with BOT, whether it should be the full board or just the Finance Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP of Academics discusses what will be discussed at the BOT Strategic Planning Committee meeting; she asked everyone around the Senior Staff table to update their portions and send to her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Senior staff meeting observation notes from September 8, 2014.

**Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Meeting Observations**

Table 4 illustrates the process used to transition from text segment to descriptive code to pattern code to theme to assertion.

During the coding process for the meeting observation analysis, (which I discuss in more detail below) I followed 13 steps; (a) converted my notes into a Microsoft Word document, (b) read the typed notes, (c) imported the typed notes into NVivo8, (d) identified and highlighted key words and phrases, (e) coded key words and phrases, (f) identified and highlighted additional key words and phrases, (g) exported findings into Microsoft Excel, (h) grouped codes into pattern codes, (i) sorted patterns codes and transferred to Microsoft Word, (j) added quotations to the appropriate pattern code group, (k) re-read text segments, (l) developed themes, and (m) created assertions.
### Table 4

**Meeting Observation Coding, Theme Development and Assertion Development Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text segment</th>
<th>Descriptive code</th>
<th>Pattern code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Assertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President conducts what he calls &quot;morale&quot;; everyone around the table discusses something personal.</td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The College has developed a culture of appreciation</td>
<td>While the President of the College verbally discusses writing thank you notes for external individuals he also compliments employees publically, which has developed a culture of appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President then asks for anyone he needs to write a thank you note to…several people mention names.</td>
<td>Thank-you notes</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The College has developed a culture of appreciation</td>
<td>While the President of the College verbally discusses writing thank you notes for external individuals he also compliments employees publically, which has developed a culture of appreciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President complimented the Director of Alumni Engagement on a recent project.</td>
<td>Compliments</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>The College has developed a culture of appreciation</td>
<td>While the President of the College verbally discusses writing thank you notes for external individuals he also compliments employees publically, which has developed a culture of appreciation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I first provide a general description of the coding process and then conclude this section with a specific example of how I coded the data. I began the coding process by (a) converting my handwritten notes into a Microsoft Word document and then I (b) read the typed notes twice to gain familiarity with the text of the meetings I attended. After (c)
importing the typed notes into NVivo 8, the coding software used in this study, I read
through every word of the typed notes (d) looking for keywords and phrases. As words
and phrases were identified as recurring and or relevant to the topic of the study, those
words and phrases were (e) coded meaning highlighted in NVivo 8 and assigned a word
or phrase to best describe its content. After completing all of the descriptive coding, (f) I
went back through typed notes in NVivo 8 and skimmed the data for additional keywords
or phrases. The purpose of going through the data a second time was to identify words or
phrases that increased in frequency as I concluded my first round of analysis. Once the
descriptive coding was complete, the findings were (g) exported into a Microsoft Excel
spreadsheet that referenced the various codes and the number of times the code was
mentioned in my notes. These descriptive codes were then (h) grouped into pattern codes
by highlighting, in different colors, the different Microsoft Excel cells to group the data.
Once the data were highlighted and sorted into separate pattern coding groups, I created a
(i) separate Microsoft Word document with the various pattern codes. Quotations were
identified from the original notes by pattern and descriptive code groupings and
organized by pattern code area. I then (j) pulled text segments from the typed notes and
began to develop individual themes. Once all segments were contained within the
Microsoft Word document, (k) I re-read the text segments that were grouped by pattern
codes. From this analysis, (l) themes were developed based on the general sense of the
data collected. Once the theme development was complete, (m) I created assertions that
best captured the text segments gathered within each theme.

Table 4 shows the coding process I used based on the meeting observations. The
observation of the president conducting ‘morale’, a process where the president asks for
personal updates for the senior staff, was identified as an important aspect of the meetings. The president would begin all of the senior staff meetings with this activity, and it was given the descriptive code of “relationship building.” Many times, this part of the meeting led to a personal discussion either between the president and the individual who was providing a personal update or a discussion among the entire group of meeting attendees. This descriptive code was grouped with other descriptive codes, including “thank-you notes” and “compliments,” both of which the president incorporated into most meetings. Together, these descriptive codes were given a pattern code of “culture” because the separate codes collectively reflected a culture of appreciation. The theme of “culture of appreciation” emerged from the president not only discussing appreciation (compliments) and taking action to show appreciation (thank-you notes) but also by his taking the time to get to know employees (morale). Finally, at the end of the data analysis process, assertions were created. In this case, the following assertion was created to encompass all aspects of the culture created within senior staff meetings and around campus: “While the president of the College verbally discusses the importance of writing thank-you notes to employees outside the college, he also compliments employees publicly, which has developed a culture of appreciation.”

**Presentation of the Findings from the Meeting Observations**

The following sections outline the themes that emerged as a result of analyzing the five meetings I attended. The themes are ranked ordered based on their importance to the strategic planning process and the frequency with which they occurred, meaning how often they were mentioned and how many participants mentioned the theme area. Each of the themes contain sub-themes that consist of more specific groupings of related text
segments and further illuminate the larger theme. The sub-themes are outlined as separate categories and make up the overall theme.

**Theme #1: Culture: President’s involvement, accountability, and communication.** A review and analysis of the observation notes gathered from the meetings attended indicated that the culture of the College is influential in the implementation of strategic initiatives. This was the number-one-ranked theme based on my analysis of the meeting observations because of the frequency with which it came to my attention both during the observations and during the data analysis process. This theme developed primarily from the president’s attention to detail and the manner in which he conducts meetings. The president leads every senior staff meeting and frequently displays his focus on small details and reinforcement of accountability.

**President’s involvement.** As indicated in the agendas created for the senior staff meetings, the president wants to be involved with all aspects of campus life. He has requested updates on various items, for example, when the college Christmas card design will be ready for his review as well as which design pattern should be on the floor of the new fitness center on campus. The president of the College regularly and openly discusses the financials and funding of certain projects to ensure everyone knows that projects come with a price tag. When a new program is being discussed by the vice president, the president brings up relevant and specific issues, such as how many additional faculty members must be hired and the additional associated costs required for the program to be created. After one discussion concerning the renovation of the admission house on campus, the president emphasized the importance of this facilities update but then shifted the discussion to a more specific conversation about how the cost
of the new furniture will fit into the budget. The president also addresses topics such as preventative health care and asks the vice president to elaborate on the consumer-driven health care plan and how the College’s version is a “great deal,” meaning the plan offered by the College benefits the employee covered by the plan more so than at other institutions and companies.

The president also asked questions to appropriate individuals in a senior staff meeting concerning why the grass was not cut on a recent campus event day. After discussing the importance of the appearance of campus, he said the staff that is in charge of cutting the grass “needs to do better.” The president mentioned the appearance of the campus multiple times during each meeting, whether it was related to the cutting of the grass or the cleanliness of a newly renovated building on campus and the need to remind the custodial staff of the importance of clean buildings on campus.

The president spent a portion of each meeting discussing upcoming events and ensuring they were properly planned. For example, as the board of trustees meeting approaches, the president typically asks to review the agenda and timeframes for each topic within each meeting. He wants to ensure that the senior staff members are covering the topics appropriately and getting answers they need from the board to move forward with projects and assignments. The College’s president is involved with all aspects of the campus and pays attention to what some may consider the smallest of details.

**Accountability.** The president’s ability to be involved with the details around campus allows for him to ask questions about accountability. He knows where certain projects and assignments should be in terms of completion and checks up on their progress. When one building on campus was being dismantled to eventually be replaced
by a new one, the president mentioned that he drove by the building that morning and expected it to be torn down as promised. He asked for an explanation from his administrative assistant about why the company who had been hired had not yet completed its assignment.

During another board of trustees discussion about enrollment and recruiting, one vice president reviewed the application pool by admissions representative and athletic coach. The application pool report outlines how many inquiries, applications, and admitted students are in the caseload of each coach and admissions representative. The vice president commented on areas that he thought were important and identified certain individuals who should be monitored because they were not fully meeting expectations. The president agreed and reiterated the need for the numbers to improve. The president reinforces his expectations by concluding the discussion with a reaffirmation that the vice president “will get the job done.”

During the board of trustees strategic planning meeting, a discussion of the current strategic plan (Renaissance II) occurred, and the strategic planning document was reviewed. Items were labeled as “completed,” “in progress,” or “abandoned.” Various board members spoke up and asked questions about why an objective had not been completed or why it had been abandoned. The appropriate vice president would reply with an explanation as the rest of the members of the board of trustees listened intently. For example, during one discussion about the enrollment numbers and how many enrollments the institution should strive to achieve, in terms of total student body, the issue of faculty involvement in recruiting was mentioned. The vice president agreed that faculty members need to be more involved in recruiting because it would help recruiting
and retention. In addition to being held accountable during discussions, the word “accountability” was also used on slides presented to the strategic planning committee. The College’s president has created a culture of accountability in which not only he is accountable, but also members of the board of trustees openly question employee performance on projects, which holds employees and others publically accountable.

Communication. The president of the College openly discusses what might be considered by some to be sensitive issues. During one meeting, the president, along with the vice president, discussed the option of faculty buyout offers and the effect that these buyouts could have on the budget. He spoke with an extremely serious tone, switching from the former jovial tone he had adopted when discussing morale. He also suggested other ideas, such as not giving an annual raise and increasing the employee share of medical insurance. These ideas were presented and discussed by all members of the senior staff. There are times when the president thinks out loud and other times when he requests input from the senior staff members, primarily the vice presidents.

The president also discussed potential big ideas he had for the campus, ideas which were seemingly months or years from being implemented. He discussed where the funding for these projects would come from, which, in this case, were promised gifts from external sources. The members of the board of trustees also discussed building a hotel on campus. One vice president suggested selling the land to a builder and allowing the builder to handle the project rather than managing the project internally. The president discussed other institutions that have hotels on campus and the positive and negative implications of this. The College’s president creates an atmosphere of open communication in which he openly discusses sensitive issues and future projects, thus
involving all of his direct reports in the process of making decisions.

**Summary of Theme #1.** The president’s involvement was front and center during my observations, he led the meetings and did not leave any subject out that he wanted to discuss. There is also a culture of accountability, which is led by the president and reinforced by the members of the board of trustees. Another aspect of the culture at the College are the open forms of communication, which allows topics to be discussed openly and freely. The president openly questions members of his staff and informs them of potential projects and asked for their input. The culture at the College is one of openness and honesty.

**Theme #2 - Analysis and new ideas: Competitive analysis and generating new ideas.** This section discusses the process by which the College evaluates and generates ideas for implementation on its campus. While holding employees accountable was the most prevalent theme that emerged within the meetings I attended, the analysis of competitors and the generation and evaluation of ideas were also observed in each of the meetings. These sub-themes emerged from the senior staff and board of trustees meetings where discussions occurred relating to other institutions and their ideas and the open discussion of the College campus based ideas.

**Competitive analysis.** Both during the board of trustees meeting and the multiple senior staff meetings I attended, I noticed that board members focused their comments on other institutions, and some board members distributed journal, magazine, or newspaper articles to consider in terms of strategic directions. Often, board members assigned articles to read prior to meetings in preparation for discussions about whether and how the College might pursue a specific strategic initiative mentioned in the article. At the
board of trustees meeting, the president mentioned how other small, private institutions have struggled in terms of enrollment and revenue generation. He pointed to an article that provided specific examples of other institutions and their hardships. A discussion ensued about the College’s enrollment, tuition costs, and financial aid. One member of the board of trustees mentioned Sears and Walmart and how they tried implementing fewer discounts, but it did not help their business grow. This discussion was made in response to the idea that the College’s tuition price was too high and whether the college should increase its financial aid, thus increasing their discount.

One additional story the president told involved one particular institution, that is not a direct competitor. This institution provided freshmen with textbooks in the dorm rooms in an effort to improve freshman retention by ensuring that all students have their books. He then referenced a different school where students regularly sign up for twice as many classes as they need, attend the first day of class, and then drop the courses that they do not think will be beneficial or interesting. Both of these ideas were addressed to the senior staff in an effort to spawn thinking about students and how to make their experience better by drawing on the strategies that other schools have implemented. The College constantly evaluates its competitors, schools it does not compete with, and companies in other industries in an attempt to improve the College not only for its students but also its employees.

Generating new ideas. The College’s renaissance and growth since the implementation of the strategic plan have resulted in accolades, including an increase in U.S. News and World Report rankings and a 100% increase in enrollment over an 8 year period. Much of this success could be attributed to the generation of ideas by the board of
trustees and senior staff members. During senior staff meetings, the president thinks out loud. One time in particular, he mentioned online education and wondered whether the College should strongly consider this as an option. During another meeting, the president wanted to discuss new academic programs that could be added to the curriculum. The president also considered various partnerships that could be formed between the College and other institutions, much like partnerships he read about between Boston University and Harvard University, a partnership that allows students to enroll in courses at either institution. Sometimes these ideas are brought up by the president to encourage vice presidents and other senior staff members to suggest improvements to his idea, while other times the president presents an idea and wants to begin planning its implementation.

The board also discussed ideas related to gaining publicity for the college. For example, the board discussed the possibility of getting a new loan repayment program, which the College recently implemented, on Fox News and CNN. The goal, according to the president, was to get as much publicity as possible and get the program recognized by the Department of Education secretary and hopefully the president of the United States. The president also discussed how a senator from Michigan recently discussed the program and wondered how the College could present the senator’s comments as a way of generating positive publicity. The College has actively practiced suggesting and discussing ideas that will allow the College to be recognized not only regionally but also nationally.

**Summary of Theme #2.** Even with the College’s success in terms of enrollment and accolades, the members of the board of trustees and senior staff members constantly discusses ideas and competitors in an effort to improve the college. The senior staff meets
regularly and initiates new ideas for potential implementation or looks into what other schools are doing. The mindset of the board members is that if the idea works for other institutions, it also could be beneficial for the College students. The focus on idea generation and competitive analysis was evident at all of the meetings I observed during my data collection at the College.

**Theme #3 - Appreciation and involvement: Thank-you notes, compliments, and fostering involvement.** While portions of the meeting observations focus on the topic of accountability and ensuring employees know the expectations that they will be asked to meet, there is also a culture of appreciation and involvement at the College. This theme was ranked third from the meeting observations because while it was not as dominant as the themes involving accountability, presidential involvement, campus communication, idea generation, and competitive analysis, it still provides important contextual information about how the College operates. The sub-themes emerged from the observations I made of the president, who was the main contributor of data that led to these sub-themes.

*Thank-you notes and compliments.* During the senior staff meetings, the president typically sits at the head of the table and decides the next agenda item to cover. Sometimes the president chooses individual agenda items to discuss that feel are important regardless of their numerical order on the paper agenda, and sometimes he discusses items in the exact order in which they appear on the agenda. One item he prefers to discuss early in the meetings is an agenda item called “thank you notes.” The president elicits input from members of the senior staff about who should get a thank-you note from his office or to whom he would like someone on senior staff to write a thank
you note. Periodically, a senior staff member will mention someone to whom he or she is planning to write a thank you note in case the president would also like to write one to that individual. For example, the president writes thank-you notes to individuals who visit campus to speak with students. The president also writes thank-you notes to individuals working with the College to start up an academic program or to those who donate funds to the institution.

In addition to individual thank-you notes, the president also likes to find other ways to show appreciation to external organizations that help the College. For example, the College played a large public university in a preseason men’s basketball game, and the president asked the College athletic director if a thank-you video could be shown on the arena monitor thanking the other institution for the opportunity to play the game. The president viewed this as an extremely important step in the process of making the game, which was important to the College, a success.

In addition to writing thank-you notes and finding alternative ways to thank individuals and organizations, the president also puts effort into publicly thanking and recognizing employees for their accomplishments. During one meeting, the dean of students had finished providing a summary of Grandparents Day, an event during which grandparents visit the campus to see what college is like for their grandchildren, and the president said, “First, let me say great job.” He then explained to the senior staff that while this was the first year of implementing this event, it went better than expected, and he attributed the success of the event to the dean of students. On another occasion, the president mentioned that he had read a recent publication created by the College’s public relations department. He then commented on how not only that publication, but also other
work completed by the public relations office, exceeded his expectations and that he was happy with the consistency of that particular marketing piece during the last couple years. While the president of the College verbally discusses writing thank-you notes to external individuals, he also compliments employees publicly, which has helped developed a culture of appreciation at the college.

*Fostering involvement.* Both at senior staff meetings and the board of trustees meetings, dialogue occurs that is focused on the agenda issues. Whether the topic of the conversation is personal or professional, the president, at the very least, makes an attempt to ensure everyone is included and involved. At the beginning of senior staff meetings, he facilitates what he refers to as “morale,” a process which requires every individual in the meeting to talk a little bit about themselves. He also spends a few minutes before “morale” sharing a short story about a recent event or trip. The story could be a personal experience or a professional experience related to the college. In one meeting, he mentioned a recent meeting he had conducted with the president of the Michigan College Alliance and a conference he had attended with presidents of other small colleges. These stories attract and hold the attention of everyone in the room because they want to know more about what he is doing and the projects he is working on.

The president also asks for suggestions regarding agenda items once he has either provided context for the agenda item or provided his direct opinion. For example, during one meeting, the president asked whether allowing a semi-professional baseball team to use the College’s facilities was a good idea. Other participants in the meeting raised concern about selling alcohol on campus, and he asked for additional input from the other vice presidents before making a decision. Ultimately, he made a decision and then said,
“I could be talked out of my opinion if anyone has something to add.” As no one else in the meeting spoke up, the president moved onto the next agenda item and the decision had been made.

**Summary of Theme #3.** The College’s president structures his weekly direct-report meetings to learn something personal about his direct reports, thus building relationships between himself and his employees. Additionally, he encourages others to contribute their thoughts and opinions, making everyone feel involved in the process. For those not in the meeting, the president makes sure he knows who to write thank you notes to at the suggestion of his senior staff.

**Summary of meeting observation findings.** At the College, the president goes out of his way to ensure that the individual relationships between him and his employees are positive, cordial, and collegial. Agenda items are specifically designed to foster involvement both on personal and professional levels. While the College’s president holds people accountable and sets expectations, he also makes employees feel appreciated through public acknowledgement and makes an effort to thank as many people as possible. The practice of being actively involved in the events of the college (a) helps keep senior staff members engaged, (b) encourages them to generate new ideas, and (c) helps analyze the competition for the benefit of the College. Additionally, the board of trustees strategic planning committee meeting provides extra analysis from an external perspective, which helps the senior staff identify and implement strategic initiatives.

I was able to see the College’s current process for implementing strategic initiatives by sitting through five different strategic planning type meetings and making observations. To better understand Renaissance I and its specific objectives, I looked
back at strategic planning documents from Renaissance I.

**Document Analysis**

This section includes findings from an analysis of documents related to the strategic planning implementation process at the College. In addition, this section describes the documents I analyzed, presents the rationale for selecting these particular documents, describes the coding process, and presents a discussion of my findings.

**Description of documents.** The 11 documents I analyzed for this study included eight sets of strategic planning committee meeting minutes, the initial drafted strategic planning proposal used by the current president during the hiring process, and two strategic planning documents used to outline institutional and employee objectives. The strategic planning committee meeting minutes were from the following meetings: October 24, 2008; May 8, 2009; February 11, 2010; May 6, 2010; October 21, 2010; February 2011 (no specific date provided on document); May 12, 2011; and May 10, 2013. These specific documents were analyzed based on availability. Meeting minutes prior to October of 2008 were not available for this study. The strategic planning proposal and objective documents were used at the suggestion of the president because they are the most relevant in enhancing the study’s findings. The strategic planning proposal was a document used by the president during his interview process for becoming the president at the College. It gave a general outline of what the president intended to do to grow the enrollment at the College. The strategic planning objective document was developed after the president was hired as president at the College and the document gave specific action items to achieve the strategic objectives.
The reason for using these particular documents was twofold: (a) these were the documents made available to me by the president and (b) the documents provided were the only ones that the administrative assistant to the vice president for academic affairs could locate. This administrative assistant was the employee I was directed to in my search for the minutes from past board of trustees strategic planning meetings. The reason I did not analyze additional strategic planning committee meeting minutes was based solely on the fact that these were the only documents that could be located. All documents that were located were analyzed in the data analysis process. The rationale for including these additional documents in the data analysis was the suggestion from the president to do so. During one conversation with the president, he suggested that in order
to best understand the strategic plan, I should review the documents he provided to me, and no other documents existed that were used in implementing Renaissance I.

**Discussion of the Coding and Analysis of the Documents**

Table 6 illustrates the process used to transition from text segment to descriptive code to pattern code to theme to assertion.

**Table 6**

*Document Analysis Coding, Theme Development, and Assertion Development Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text segment</th>
<th>Descriptive code</th>
<th>Pattern code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Assertion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some coaches are successful recruiters while others do not recruit at all. All coaches will now have clear goals and recruiting requirements. They will be expected to identify and recruit students that would not otherwise attend the College.</td>
<td>Athletic recruiting</td>
<td>Accountability methods</td>
<td>The College has developed and communicated expectations to hold employees accountable.</td>
<td>The College documented metrics and structural changes to hold people accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase freshman enrollment by 10-15% per year.</td>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Accountability methods</td>
<td>The College has developed and communicated expectations to hold employees accountable.</td>
<td>The College documented metrics and structural changes to hold people accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The band director, similar to a coach, will be expected to meet recruiting goals. He/she may hire a work-study assistant to coordinate pep-band performances and special appearances in town.</td>
<td>Enrollment model</td>
<td>Accountability methods</td>
<td>The College has developed and communicated expectations to hold employees accountable.</td>
<td>The College documented metrics and structural changes to hold people accountable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the coding process for the document analysis, (which I discuss in more detail below) I followed 12 steps; (a) read through the Microsoft Word documents, (b) imported the documents into NVivo8, (c) identified and highlighted key words and phrases, (d) coded key words and phrases, (e) identified and highlighted additional key words and phrases, (f) exported findings into Microsoft Excel, (g) grouped codes into pattern codes, (h) sorted patterns codes and transferred to Microsoft Word, (i) added quotations to the appropriate pattern code group, (j) re-read text segments, (k) developed themes, and (l) created assertions.

I first provide a general description of the coding process and then conclude this section with a specific example of how I coded the data. I began the coding process by (a) reading the documents twice to gain familiarity with the context of the historical documents. After (b) importing the documents into NVivo 8, the coding software used in this study, I read through every word (c) looking for keywords and phrases. As words and phrases were identified as recurring and or relevant to the topic of the study, those words and phrases were (d) coded meaning highlighted in NVivo 8 and assigned a word or phrase to best describe its content. After completing all of the descriptive coding of the various documents, (e) I went back through in NVivo 8 and skimmed the data for additional keywords or phrases. The purpose of going through the data a second time was to identify words or phrases that increased in frequency as I concluded my first round of analysis. Once the descriptive coding was complete, the findings were (f) exported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that referenced the various codes and the number of times the code was identified in a document. These descriptive codes were then (g) grouped into pattern codes by highlighting, in different colors, the different Microsoft Excel cells
to group the data. Once the data were highlighted and sorted into separate pattern coding groups, I created a (h) separate Microsoft Word document with the various pattern codes. Text segments were identified from the original documents by pattern and descriptive code groupings and organized by pattern code area. I then (i) pulled text segments from the documents and began to develop individual themes. Once all text segments were contained within the Microsoft Word document, (j) I re-read the text segments that were grouped by pattern codes. From this analysis, (k) themes were developed based on the general sense of the data collected. Once the theme development was complete, (l) I created assertions that best captured the text segments gathered within each theme.

The following quotation emerged from the strategic planning proposal documents as a direct statement of accountability: “All coaches will have clear goals and recruiting requirements.” This statement represented a departure from previous expectations and left no room for debate in terms of what was expected. The descriptive code of “athletic recruiting” was used to specifically identify this statement as one aspect of recruiting but more specifically related to athletic coaches. It was then given a pattern code of “accountability methods” because of its clear link to other text segments and descriptive codes of “enrollment” and “enrollment model,” both of which relate to increasing the number of enrollments at the College. These three descriptive codes combined to form a pattern code of “accountability methods” and served to (a) clarify that this part of the document analysis focused on the need to clearly spell out expectations as they related to increasing the number of enrollments at the College and (b) to make clear that holding employees accountable would be an important part of the strategic plan. The theme of the “College has developed and communicated expectations to hold employees accountable”
was developed to synthesize all three of the descriptive codes and the overall pattern code. Finally, the assertion the “College documented metrics and structural changes to hold people accountable” was created to refer not only to the fact that metrics would be used to hold employees accountable but also refers to the structure of who is responsible for recruiting had changed.

**Presentation of the Findings from the Document Analysis**

This section presents the themes that emerged from analyzing the meeting minutes and other documents. The themes are ranked in order of importance based on the implementation of the strategic plan. Each section contains sub-themes that divide the overarching theme into more specific categories. The documents analyzed for the study all pertain to Renaissance I, the College’s first strategic plan. The themes from this section include the College’s focus on students, accountability of employees and improvements made for employees.

**Theme #1 – Culture: Student focus, accountability, and employee improvements.** The first theme from the document analysis further exemplifies the culture of the College and what the strategic plan was aimed at changing at the College. The text segments of the College’s culture shown in the documents include its focus on students, the referencing of employee accountability and its mentions of improving employees and their work conditions.

**Student focus.** The College’s focus on students and improving their college experience was a driving force in Renaissance I. The strategic planning documents identified facilities as a major weakness of the campus environment. Individuals involved with the strategic planning process noted that athletic facilities needed to be constructed
and that non-athletic facilities needed to be renovated. The strategic planning documents described some of the smaller details related to new or renovated facilities. The strategic plan objectives suggested that satellite television should be installed to replace cable television and that cell phone signal boosters should be added so students would not have to go outside to talk on their cell phones.

Additionally, these documents mention other services on campus and the changes that need to be made to better serve the students on campus. For example, it was noted that students should expect to see an increase in available dining hours and new menus as well as additional housing options. It was also identified, in a more general sense, that students should expect to see an “environment characterized by courtesy, accuracy, and timely assistance that meets their need for individual, personal attention.”

The documents also indicated that an environment would be created in which students felt comfortable sharing their opinions “without worry of retribution.” The campus would develop a “family culture” and be a place where their individual needs would be met. While the College documented changes designed to physically improve the campus, it also put the focus of its services on students and their college experience.

**Accountability.** The second sub-theme from the document analysis suggests that accountability methods are important to the success of the strategic plan. While the first sub-theme focused on providing a quality experience for students when they arrive on campus, the second sub-theme focuses on the steps that faculty members and staff members need to take in order to get the students on campus as well as the manner in which these faculty members and staff members would be held accountable.

The strategic plan objective document specifically mentioned the goal of
increasing the student body at the College by an additional 500 students by 2011. In order to accomplish this goal, the plan projected that the number of freshman enrollments needed to grow by approximately 10% to 15% per year. These two numerical objectives provided the College’s community a goal for the future and a measurable objective for what needed to happen on an annual basis to achieve the overall goal of increasing the study body by an additional 500 students.

The next step for the College was to place individual expectations on employees that were different from the past. The document used by the president during the hiring process suggested that coaches of the athletic teams on campus had historically not been held accountable for recruiting goals for their team rosters. However, that changed as a result of Renaissance I: “All coaches will now have clear goals and recruiting requirements.” This essentially meant increasing the size of the admissions department from approximately 6 recruiters to approximately 30 recruiters. This increase in the number of individuals held accountable for recruiting not only represented a new way for the senior staff at the College to hold the coaches accountable, but it also changed the culture of expectations around campus.

During the board of trustees strategic planning committee meetings, accountability was also discussed. The president asked the trustees for suggestions about how to grow enrollment; while the initial goal was 1,400 students by 2011, the success of the institution spurred the administration to consider increasing the student body goal to 1,700 students or more. In order for the institution to do this, the president requested more meetings to be conducted and more voices and opinions be heard “to hold ourselves accountable for following through with our plans.” The president also informed the
trustees that because of the accountability model in place, he and the senior staff could largely predict enrollment from year to year based on the number of admissions representatives and athletic coaches recruiting students to the College.

The specific goals and accountability measures that were documented, and eventually enforced, allowed the College to provide a structure for successful implementation. The College not only documented numerical metrics to hold employees accountable, but it also changed the culture of expectations.

*Employee improvements*. The final sub-theme from the document analysis revolves around employee improvements. While the College enhanced the student experience around campus and changed the way employees would be held accountable, it also implemented a system to reward employees for their performance.

The strategic planning objective document noted that benchmarks would be used as a guide to evaluate employee salaries and wages. Because employees would be held accountable, the administrators at the College wanted a way to reward employees for meeting the new expectations and goals. These rewards would consist not only of monetary benefits but also work spaces. The documents specifically referenced updating office spaces and increasing storage so that employees would have better work environments in which to complete their assignments.

Furthermore, the documents mentioned that the College should develop hiring priorities for full-time staff as the student body increases and resources around campus improve over time. I interpreted this to mean that as the strategic plan was implemented and the student population increased, one objective was to ensure the college employed a sufficient number of staff members to serve the increased numbers of students on
campus. The documents also indicated a plan to “make good employees,” which referred to setting expectations on a daily basis and that performing well as an employee would lead to rewards. Finally, one objective noted that all faculty members would be trained in the advising process. This objective not only provided a better student experience but also assisted faculty members by providing them with the tools to succeed in completing some of their requirements. The strategic plan documented changes to compensation, professional development, and physical spaces to improve employee work conditions.

The document analysis for Theme #1 focused on three major areas: the student experience, accountability measures, and methods and employee improvements. All three areas were important to the success of the strategic plan. The students needed to have a better experience so they would enroll and persist until graduation, the faculty and staff needed to have clear expectations about outcomes for which they would be held accountable and needed improved work conditions to complete their tasks on a daily basis.

**Summary of Theme #1.** The documents used for Renaissance I noted numerous improvements, for students, faculty and staff. The changes helped change the expectations of what everyone on campus expected from their institution. Additionally, it was made clear that employees would be held accountable for their actions. And while adjustments were being made on campus, the documents also referenced an off campus analysis of other colleges and universities.

**Theme #2 - Competitive analysis: External analysis and Idea generation.** This theme was ranked second because the constant analysis of competitors was evident in the documents as a critical part of the strategic plan. Both sub-themes in this section describe
how the College examined factors both inside and outside of the organization to understand not only what the College’s competition was doing but also how to create, develop, and implement ideas on campus.

*External analysis.* The senior staff of the College, along with members of the board of trustees, purposely investigates other institutions and their ideas as a guide for some of their own actions. During meetings, individuals bring up examples of other schools deciding to take (or not to take) a particular action, and then these decisions are discussed in terms of whether the College should (or should not) take similar action. For example, the College maintains a list of peer and aspirant schools. These are institutions to which the College compares itself as well as institutions the College aspires to more closely emulate at some point in the future. During one meeting, members of the strategic planning committee suggested the College donors be made aware of the endowment because peer and aspirant schools were engaged in this practice. This was in an effort to encourage donations and grow the endowment at the College.

In a second situation, the members of the board of trustees of the strategic planning committee asked the senior staff to compile data from the schools within their athletic conference, the MIAA (Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association). The data requested related to employee salaries and raises, and the information was collected so that the employees at the College could be compensated equally in comparison with schools in the same geographical region. In a later meeting, it was noted that the College was approximately 10% behind in raises for their employees. There were also meeting minutes related to why one school stopped conducting adult educational programs, and another note focused on whether the College should consider initiating a nursing
program, which was not being offered by any of its competitors at the time. Another question posed by a member of the board of trustees asked how the College might adopt a program to cater to a specific demographic, such as establishing a law school in the area.

All of these examples emerged from the document analysis as ways the College looks outside the organization to improve either the student, faculty or staff experience. These documents reflect open discussions about the activities and programs that other institutions are offering (or not offering) as well as discussion about how the College should respond. The College frequently examines its competitors and the higher education marketplace, which allows the college to consider potential strategic directions.

**Idea generation.** The second sub-theme in this section on competitive analysis focuses on the College developing ideas for implementation. The strategic plan and strategic planning committee meetings both identified areas of opportunity for the institution to grow and potentially attract additional students. In the initial strategic plan document, it was mentioned that despite having multiple majors in music, the college did not support a pep band that could play at sporting events and enhance school spirit. This idea also helped increase the number of student enrollments in that it led to enrolling students who wanted to participate in pep band and who would not have attended the College if participating in pep band were not an option for them.

During one strategic planning committee meeting, the president specifically mentioned that “people are attracted to big ideas.” He wanted the committee to remain focused on the next big item for the College to consider and implement. In another instance, the president suggested that the College could differentiate itself by leading discussions on diversity. The documents indicated that the College should address the
issue of diversity more than other institutions have and “dig deeper than race” to enhance students’ perspectives at the College. Finally, the documents reflected a discussion about how the College could recruit 18 year olds. The following two questions were posed: What specialized programs could be added to attract this population of students? How can the College stay competitive? One answer was by adding “niche” programs that other schools do not have in their curriculum.

Throughout the document analysis there was examples of how the College brainstorms for big ideas. The senior staff and members of the board of trustees discussed and analyzed different strategic directions to take in order to improve the institution. The College attempts to explore unique ideas in an effort to increase the enrollment of college students.

**Summary of Theme #2.** The analysis of the strategic planning committee meeting minutes and strategic plan documents yielded information related to the culture of the College and the competitive analysis performed by the senior staff and members of the board of trustees. The strategic planning committee meeting minutes and the strategic plan mirror each other in that many items that were initially documented in the strategic planning documents were carried out and discussed in the board of trustees strategic planning committee meetings. The senior staff and members of the board of trustees considered changing the culture around campus from the outset. The plan aimed to improve the student and staff experience while holding staff accountable for their work performance. Discussion also took place regarding how to improve the institution, which in turn would lead to enrolling more students, which in turn would lead to additional resources, which in turn would ultimately help enhance the student and staff experience.
Analysis Across all Data Types

This study analyzed three separate types of data: interview transcripts, meeting observations notes, and relevant documents from the Renaissance I strategic plan at the College. This section reviews the data collectively and identifies themes found in each type of data; themes found when doing interviews, observing meetings and reading through historical documents. The table below summarizes the themes that emerged from each individual type of data. This information was used to create the following themes.

Table 7 illustrates the different data types of the themes that emerged.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Themes from Data Collected and Analyzed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key assertions method. The data collected for this study came from three sources: meeting observations, interviews, and document analysis. I arrived at 11 different themes from the three different sets of data. These themes were further analyzed and led to the creation of key assertions. These assertions summarize the data collected and aim to answer the research questions for the study. This section reviews the three separate data sets and how the key assertions were identified from all themes developed.

From the interviews conducted for the study I identified six themes: human resources, accountability, the strategic plan, leadership, challenges, and communication. From the meetings observed for the study I identified three themes: culture, analysis and
new ideas, and appreciation and involvement. From t documents analyzed for the study I identified culture and competitive analysis as themes. I first organized all 11 themes within a Microsoft Word document. I then read through the themes, remembering how they emerged from the different data sets. For example, accountability emerged from the interviews because of the multiple times it was mentioned by participants. Some participants noted how they were held accountable, and other participants pointed out how the president held employees accountable and the ramifications of not meeting his expectations. The president also specifically mentioned accountability and how important it was in accomplishing strategic initiatives.

As I continued reading through the 11 themes, I also identified themes that, while recurring in the data, were not, in my opinion, a top-three factor in the implementation of the strategic plan. For example, communication was mentioned during the interviews but was not the reason for the success or failure of the strategic plan. Communication was mentioned by some participants as “good” or “average” compared to other places they had worked and described by others as “not good” at the College in the past as well as at the time this study was conducted. I identified this area as a theme because my conceptual framework mentioned communication as necessary for successful implementation, but it did not seem to be critically needed in the case of the College. The communication during Renaissance I was not one of the primary reasons for its success, and because of that, it was not included as a key assertion.

During the creation of key assertions, I identified and analyzed the factors that came into play during implementation. I asked myself the following questions: Who was the person or persons responsible for the successful implementation? What factors made
the implementation successful? How did the key players successfully implement the strategic plan? The timeframe for the implementation of the strategic plan at the College was 2005-2010 and the president was the main figure. He led the implementation process, and all participants pointed back to him when discussing the success of Renaissance I, whether it was his leadership, vision, or ability to establish clear expectations. He led all of the meetings I observed and played a key role in creating some of the documents I analyzed.

The culture the president developed was the ultimate focal point of my analysis. The culture of completing projects, promoting from within, and setting expectations all contributed to the campus culture. This culture aided the College in swiftly completing its objectives and building on prior successes from the start of the Renaissance I strategic plan.

The final question I asked myself during the assertion analysis was how the strategic plan was implemented. The accountability measures put in place reflected how the president implemented the plan and created a culture. He did this through holding employees accountable by clearly setting expectations and removing employees who did not meet expectations.

As I reviewed the 11 themes and identified which themes were key, I arrived at three key assertions, which are explained in greater detail below. I feel these three key assertions best represent the reasons the College was able to successfully implement the Renaissance I strategic plan.

**Key assertion #1 – culture.** The College went through a dramatic change from the time the president started at the College and Renaissance I was created, revised, and
implemented. Based on the data collected and analyzed, one primary reason for this dramatic change was the creation of a new culture at the College. Based on an analysis of the interview transcripts, employees became aware of the expectations being placed on them and what the consequences would be of not meeting those expectations. There was also a culture created of being rewarded for meeting those expectations. The documents analyzed specifically identified the expectations that would be placed on certain individuals, for example that athletic coaches were required to meet assigned recruitment goals. The strategic planning documents also targeted various improvements needed on campus to improve the student experience. These improvements changed the culture around campus and emphasized focusing on the students, which was a strategy designed to increase enrollment by recruiting and retaining students. As observed in the meetings, the president of the College plays a significant role in all aspects of the college. He was commonly involved in discussions about most issues pertaining to the campus, and this involvement allows him constantly to develop a culture of expectation.

Both mentioned in the interviews and observed in the meetings, the president ensures that he goes out of his way to reward employees and show his appreciation. He requests names from his senior staff to write thank you notes to and offers public praise to individuals during meetings. Participants mentioned his willingness early in the strategic plan to reward those who accomplished their goals.

**Summary of key assertion #1.** The culture of the College is seen through each of these three sets of data. In meetings, the president and members of the board of trustees question employee performance, which sets expectations about how work is to be completed. The documents specifically mention the expectations for certain sets of
employees and place the focus of all improvements on the student experience.
Participants reiterated the constant rhetoric of what the expectations were of the employees on campus. The culture of the College was developed in the strategic planning document created by the president before he was hired, is repeated in meetings to ensure clarity, and was mentioned by those interviewed as an important factor to the success of the strategic plan.

**Key assertion #2 – accountability.** The second theme throughout the analysis process revolved around accountability. While expectations can be set, they might not be taken seriously if employees are not held accountable for meeting the expectations that are being communicated. At the College, the data show that employees are given expectations related to their performance and held accountable to those expectations.

This theme was most evident to me during the interviews, when participants told stories of employees being fired because they were unable to meet expectations. In one particular area, a vice president said that being able to hold individuals accountable made their job easier because it allowed for employees to clearly see their goals and understand that if they were not met, consequences would follow. The notion of being held accountable was mentioned as part of the interview process so that expectations would be clear before new employees began their first day at the College.

In the board of trustees strategic planning meeting, trustee members openly held vice president accountable by asking why certain items had not been completed or why they had been abandoned. This practice not only forced vice presidents to complete the majority of tasks they were assigned prior to the next board meeting but also made them provide detailed explanations of the reasoning behind missed expectations in front of
their peer vice presidents, the president, and other board members.

Finally, the document analysis not only established expectations that athletic coaches and others would be held to recruiting goals, but it also laid out metrics by which the coaches would be evaluated. The strategic planning document detailed the ideal roster size and the expected number of new freshman each year that would be required by each specific sport.

**Summary of key assertion #2.** Accountability is a theme at the College that aligns closely with setting expectations. When these two areas are put together, employees are aware of the expectations placed upon them and understand the consequences of not meeting those expectations. This was apparent in the interviews conducted, the documents collected, and the meetings observed.

**Key assertion #3 – the president of the college.** The last theme that is intertwined between the different types of data collected focuses on the president of the College. Much of the content of the first two themes in this section were driven by the president. He leads by example when it comes to creating a culture on campus. He holds employees accountable and expects his senior staff to hold their direct reports accountable. This section discusses the president and his effect on the implementation of the strategic plan.

During the interviews, two different vice presidents cited the president’s attention to detail as a common factor in the success of the strategic plan. The president is commonly involved in all aspects of the campus, and his familiarity with a wide variety of topics allows him to relate to different departments on campus and communicate with them effectively. Other vice presidents identified the president’s leadership skills as influential to the plan’s success. Regardless of the trait that the president displayed to
effectively implement the strategic plan, all of those interviewed pointed to the president as the main driver, or one of the main drivers, of the strategic plan.

Prior to being hired at the College, the president wrote the majority of Renaissance I on his own and used some of his own ideas and ideas from his past experiences. The president identified specific sports that needed to be created, specific buildings to renovate, and specific accountability measures that could be used to set expectations. The first draft of Renaissance I was a detailed document that impressed the board of trustees on the presidential search committee and ultimately resulted in the hiring of the current president at the College.

In the meetings observed for this study, the president demonstrated many of the skills participants in this study mentioned and the same attention to detail displayed in the strategic planning documents. During meetings, he held individuals accountable and showed appreciation for tasks that were completed according to his expectations. He asked questions about the small details, such as why the grass had not been cut on a particular day.

**Summary of key assertion #3.** The president of the College is the primary figure in the successful implementation of Renaissance I at the College. He documented what he expected in terms of changes to the campus and expectations he had for his direct reports and all employees around campus. During meetings, he reiterated those expectations and complimented those who had accomplished tasks successfully. Participants confirmed that the president held employees accountable and led the way during implementation of the strategic plan by paying attention to details and effectively communicating what he wanted to be done.
Summary of the Findings

This chapter reported the findings of analyses based on three different types of data focusing on the implementation of the 2005-2010 “Renaissance I” strategic plan at the College. I attended five separate meetings that focused on strategic planning, analyzed 11 documents related to the strategic plan or meeting minutes from past strategic planning meetings, and conducted 11 interviews resulting in 18 interview transcripts. All of this data was coded using NVivo8, and themes and assertions were created from the analysis.

Findings from the interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis revealed several major themes. These themes included the involvement of the president around campus in most, if not all, decisions and projects, which allowed him to set expectations and hold employees accountable. Administrators at the College also spent time and resources focused on the human resources requirements of implementing a strategic plan. The president is involved with most final interviews on campus and has the final say in who is and who is not hired. All of the above-mentioned themes (presidential involvement, setting expectations, and accountability) relate to the leadership displayed by the president. He pays attention to small details, is knowledgeable about different areas of the campus, and communicates his expectations.

At the time of this study, the Renaissance I strategic plan had been completed for four years and the institution was in the midst of Renaissance II, a strategic plan that started in 2011 and was set to conclude in 2015. One area of the campus that started in 2005 and is still evident today in the data collected is the culture created by the president. The president documented the expectations of holding employees accountable in the
documents before he was even hired. He holds employees accountable in meetings, and those vice presidents who participated in this study all stated they knew exactly what was expected of them on a daily basis. Based on the data collected, the culture of the College that has been created by the president during the past decade was and is the driving force of the implementation of the Renaissance I strategic plan. The next chapter will discuss, in detail, the key assertions identified from the data collected.
Chapter Five

Discussion

This chapter begins with an overview of the research problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The chapter then presents a discussion of the findings, the study’s limitations, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a chapter summary and conclusion.

The industry of higher education is filled with institutions that are relatively unknown nationally; however, since approximately 80% of students attend public institutions, less focus has been placed on small, private colleges and universities (Chabotar, 2010). Most of these institutions have been dependent on tuition revenue, and when the economy has weakened, along with family incomes, the families of students often have not maintained the ability to pay for private higher education. This, coupled with increased competition from the online education sector, has forced small, private colleges and universities to reconsider their ways of doing business.

Some institutions have considered shutting down completely, such as Sweet Briar College, a women's college in Virginia, considered in 2015 (Carlson, 2015). The college seemingly faced "insurmountable" financial challenges amidst a "declining number of students choosing to attend small, rural, private liberal-arts colleges and even fewer young women willing to consider a single-sex education" (Carlson, 2015, p. 1). Other colleges have opted to change course, begin adding different academic or extracurricular programs, or close other programs that were not popular or are too expensive to operate. As a result, small, private colleges have been forced to plan for the future in order to attempt to avoid catastrophic outcomes similar to those that Sweet Briar College
narrowly avoided in 2015.

Colleges and universities have engaged in strategic planning for years in an attempt to set a path to follow in the coming years. According to Mintzberg (1994), business strategic planning has been around since the 1950s but mostly has been used for budgeting purposes. Strategic planning in higher education began in the 1970s and 1980s (Chance & Williams, 2009). Definitions of “strategic planning” have varied greatly, but simply put, strategic planning is a process used to plan ahead. While a substantial amount of professional literature has been produced on the varying definitions of strategic planning, much less research has been conducted on how, and whether, institutions implement the strategic plans they have created.

The purpose of this study was to analyze how one small, private institution implemented a strategic plan. This research study examined one specific example that addresses the research gap in the literature related to higher education strategic planning implementation. For this study, I conducted 18 interviews, observed 5 meetings, and analyzed 11 historical documents to better understand how the 2005-2010 Renaissance I strategic plan was implemented.

The research questions addressed in the study included the following:

RQ1: How is a strategic plan implemented at a small, private institution?

RQ2: What can be learned from how a strategic plan is implemented?

The research questions were designed to help explore and identify useful suggestions that other institutions might use to successfully implement their strategic plans. The strategic plan focused on growing enrollment through a process of adding athletic programs, adding academic programs, and upgrading on-campus facilities. The
College realized a 100% growth in student enrollment during the first eight years of the current president’s tenure.

Many administrators of small, private colleges and universities have found their institutions at a critical point. Family incomes and investments were affected by the 2007/2008 recession, alternative and less expensive options for higher education have gained popularity, and enrollment and tuition revenue seemingly have been the main topic of discussion on every campus. Institutions have been forced to consider whether families can continue to afford the cost of education and whether families will continue to pay a higher price for what has been perceived by small, private institutions as a higher-quality education. Administrators of small, private institutions have begun to question themselves about the future of their institution. Should they consider new strategic directions? Should they increase or decrease tuition cost? Should they increase the amount of financial aid offered in order to attract students to their campuses? Should they implement programs to entice students? Should they discontinue programs that cost more money than they generate? Should they freeze salaries? Should they implement hiring freezes? All these questions have debatable answers that depend on the philosophy, mission, and vision of each specific small, private institution. This study focused on how the College wrestled with and eventually implemented a strategic plan that reflected its answers to these questions above.

The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan – Renaissance I

Goals. The Renaissance I strategic plan consisted of six main goals:

Goal 1 – Implement an enrollment plan that increased the number of students to 1,400 by 2011.
Result – The enrollment of the College in the Fall 2011 semester was 1,465 students.

Goal 2 – Make significant investments in the AC campus to attract prospective students and to support the learning and activity needs of prospective and current students.

Result – As of October 2015, all of the buildings on campus, with the exception of one, had either been built or renovated since the start of Renaissance I. The fundraising for the renovation of the final building began in the Fall of 2015. Additionally, sidewalks have been replaced, numerous outdoor seating areas have been built, and pergolas have been constructed in addition to other landscaping upgrades.

Goal 3 – Students will increasingly find that their individual needs are well met by the College. These needs range from counseling and advice they receive to the curriculum they study to the food they eat to the many services they receive.

Result – The College has renovated more than half of the living spaces students who live on campus are able to choose from. The study-abroad program has grown significantly since 2005 increasing the number of available options to students.

Goal 4 – The College will be a community full of school spirit and pride, instilling love, loyalty and a sense of belonging.

Result – The president of the College noted during his interview that part of building the multipurpose sports stadium was to bring the football team back on campus from the local high school field where they had been playing prior to Renaissance I. This was designed not only as a recruiting feature but also to instill school pride. If the College was to grow and become the institution the president envisioned it to be, one of the
methods for realizing that vision was having the football team play on campus during Saturdays in the Fall. This also meant the cheer team, band, and other campus organizations could partake in weekend activities.

**Goal 5** – *The College’s academic program will more clearly address the career aspirations of students while thoroughly immersing them in a distinctive liberal arts curriculum appropriate to a national liberal arts tier 2 institution.*

**Result** – The Office of Career Planning was developed and enhanced to provide students with additional job search skills and internship opportunities during the time enrolled at the College. Additionally, more academic majors were added to the college curriculum to address areas of student interest and economic areas of need.

**Goal 6** – *The technological infrastructure of the College will significantly enhance the living, learning and working environment.*

**Result** – The president noted some of the funding that was not spent on renovating or constructing physical spaces was spent on “vast IT enhancements” to the campus.

**Cost.** The Renaissance I strategic plan had an initial monetary goal of $30 million. This amount was designed to help construct the multipurpose athletic complex which would provide a field for sporting events, such as football, soccer, and lacrosse. Additionally, these dollars were used to construct a hockey arena, which provided an ice surface for club hockey teams and NCAA hockey teams in addition to a variety of synchronized skating teams. The president of the College had planned to raise half of this amount and borrow the other half from a financial institution. The amounts listed below were for the construction of the facilities, the remainder of the funds was spent on
coaches for the teams and purchasing equipment. Additionally, the president’s house on
campus was renovated into an admissions house and a renovation of Rush Hall occurred,
which is where

- Baseball Field = $2,227,000
- Ice Rink = $6,733,000
- Pellowe Hall Renovation = $2,147,000
- Multipurpose Performance Stadium = $7,322,000
- Softball Field = $208,000
- Tennis Courts = $439,000
- Track & Field = $286,000

  Grand Total of Physical Buildings = $19,362,000

(D. Drews, personal communication, October, 27, 2015)

Fundraising. The fundraising goal from the Renaissance I strategic plan fell short
by the end of the fiscal year in 2011, although additional funds were raised after 2011. In
total, approximately $11.6 million was pledged to be donated to the College by the end of
the Renaissance I strategic plan. These funds, along with those borrowed, were used for
constructing and renovating physical buildings, improving the information technology
infrastructure, hiring and training additional or new faculty and staff members.

- Approximate Pledges received FY 05-FY 11 for Renaissance I: $11,670,000
- Approximate Cash received FY 05-FY 11 for Renaissance I: $10,460,000

(J. Mahony, personal communication, October 28th, 2015)

Overall Result of Renaissance I. The overall results of implementing the
strategic plan were seen as positive by the the College administration and members of the
board of trustees. The goal of growing enrollment was realized and enhanced the broader goal of solidifying the financial stability of the institution. The physical improvements to the campus and changes made to the institution resulted in an increase in new-student enrollments, which have exceeded 500 new students every year since 2009 and reached a high point of 655 new students in the fall of 2012. The success of Renaissance I resulted in the creation and implementation of Renaissance II, a strategic plan that focused on academic improvements to the campus, in contrast to the athletic and enrollment objectives of Renaissance I.

Summary of the Findings

For this study, I interviewed 11 different individuals who were in some way either involved with the Renaissance I strategic plan and/or currently played a role in the implementation of Renaissance II at the College. I attended five separate meetings and observed them as a silent participant. I also reviewed and analyzed 11 strategic planning documents from meeting minutes as well as the actual initial strategic planning document. A separate analysis of each data type (interviews, meeting notes, and internal documentation) was conducted along with a cross analysis to identify common themes that were present in each data type.

Findings from interviews conducted. Participants who were interviewed for the study identified the College’s focus on human resources as a key to the successful implementation of the strategic plan. Participants reported that the hiring process at the College is one that always ends with a meeting with the president, who has the final say in the hiring decision. Prospective employees are also made aware of the climate of accountability at the College and that, during the implementation of Renaissance I, failure
to meet expectations could mean loss of employment. Participants also noted that one component of their accountability related to the president’s commitment to the strategic plan and his leadership by example, which inspired and motivated those around him to accomplish similar goals.

Participants also reported that members of the board of trustees were cautiously optimistic about hiring the president and embarking on the path of Renaissance I because the strategic plan was a departure from the College’s prior operational methods. Participants also reported that frequent communication between the president and his senior staff members, between the vice presidents and members of the board of trustees, and between the president and the chairman of the board of trustees helped ensure the success of the strategic plan. The president commented that much of his time during the first few years of Renaissance I was spent communicating the plan to constituents both on and off campus to ensure everyone understood the College’s goals.

Findings from meeting observations. The participants in the meetings I attended echoed much of the same information revealed during the interviews I conducted for this study. The president was involved in all the meetings I observed, and his attention to detail was evident each time he asked questions of someone about a particular topic. He was not reluctant to ask questions that held vice presidents accountable in front of their peers. He not only worked to clearly communicate his expectations about projects, but he also worked to ensure he communicated his appreciation. Through the meetings I attended, I also identified a process whereby the College regularly analyzes its competition either through word-of-mouth conversations with colleagues at other institutions or by researching news articles describing strategies that other schools have
implemented both regionally and nationally. The meetings I attended provided a first-hand view of the culture at the College and the president’s leadership characteristics.

**Findings from document analysis.** The documents I reviewed for this study included strategic planning documents, meeting minutes, and the actual initial strategic planning document. These documents further confirmed the focus placed on students, faculty members, and staff members. The documents noted all of the initial changes that needed to be made. Students were to expect changes that would enhance their experience and faculty/staff members should expect improved workspaces and increased accountability. It was also evident from historical meeting minutes that the College had regularly examined and analyzed it competitors in order to gain ideas. The meeting minutes from the board of trustees meetings confirmed that they, along with the senior staff members, often discussed “big ideas” during strategic planning committee meetings.

**Synthesized findings from all three data types.** The themes that appeared across all data types included the president’s involvement in daily activities and his leadership characteristics. His ability to communicate expectations and his process of holding employees accountable were evident in the data collected. Additionally, enforcing accountability was a practice implemented by the president. Members of the board of trustees also openly questioned vice presidents in front of other vice presidents, and vice presidents communicated their expectations to their direct reports regarding the mechanisms by which they would be held accountable. Finally, the College’s unique culture of responsibility and accountability was identified as a recurring theme throughout the data collection process. During the interviews I conducted, participants all echoed a similar refrain about the culture of the College and its uniqueness among other
institutions. Observations and analyses of the meetings I observed revealed a president who leads by example, and the documents analyzed confirmed that the College historically has held itself accountable and implemented the majority of strategic items it planned to implement.

**Discussion of the Findings**

This section discusses three points that were critical to the successful implementation of Renaissance I: (a) the leadership of the president and his involvement in almost every aspect of the campus; (b) the culture of the College and the ways in which setting expectations and rewarding those who meet expectations contributed to successful implementation of the strategic plan; and (c) the process of holding employees accountable, a practice not regularly seen in higher education.

The process of implementing a strategic plan, for the purposes of this study, began with the hiring of a president, the creation and formulation of a strategic plan, and the building of a specific workplace culture. The implementation of the Renaissance I strategic plan was designed to set expectations, increase enrollment, and create a financially stable institution for the future. Thus, the focus of this study was on the College’s implementation of the strategic plan and the valuable lessons that can be learned from this successful implementation.

**Presidential leadership.** This section on presidential leadership begins by discussing expectations of college presidents; the role the president played in human resources operations; his attention to detail; and his communication of the strategic plan early in the process, including setting expectations and holding employees accountable for those expectations.
According to Choban, Choban, and Choban (2008), current college presidents have much different expectations than their predecessors in prior decades. Formerly, college presidents were more responsible for ensuring that the mission of their institution was carried out, but today, presidents spend more time on strategic initiatives and budgeting (Cook, 2012). As many participants of this study indicated, the main reason the president was hired was to return the institution to a stable financial position. The enrollment had been dwindling for years, and the institution needed a president who could provide much-needed leadership. According to the findings of this study, the president did just that by maintaining active and consistent involvement with human resources, regularly communicating the strategic plan, and eliciting commitment from college employees by his leadership example.

A 2012 Council of Independent Colleges and Universities (CIC, 2012) study of independent college and university presidents analyzed job responsibilities of college presidents. The study found that today’s independent college presidents spent the most time on “fundraising, budget and financial management, and enrollment management. Newer presidents… also cite strategic planning as an activity consuming considerable time” (p. iii). One item this CIC study did not indicate as being one of the president’s responsibilities was involvement in human resources or making the final decision on hiring personnel. The current study on the College found that the president was involved with nearly every hiring decision on campus.

The president of the College paid very close attention to the process of evaluating and hiring employees, especially at the beginning of Renaissance I. The participants in this study noted that the president interviewed almost every final candidate on campus to
ensure that each candidate is the type of employee that he (the president) wants to be part of the College campus community. This suggests that the president values the role each individual employee plays in the success of the institution. It is logical to think that other college presidents may understand or even articulate the value of individual employees but may not necessarily prioritize the practice of actually meeting with prospective employees and/or do not have time in their busy schedules. Limited research, if any, exists on college presidents and their role in human resources operations and hiring decisions. However, according to a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, Charan, Barton, and Carey (2015) noted that “CEOs worldwide see human capital as a top challenge [but] they rank HR as only the eighth or ninth most important function in a company” (p. 63). Additionally, another article noted that CEOs do not “understand” what human resource professionals do and ‘don’t care’” (“Secrets of a CEO,” 2015). While these two sources did not indicate that CEOs who ignore human resources are successful, they do provide context for the role most CEOs seemingly play in human resources.

In this study, one reason for the successful implementation of Renaissance I was that the president took the time to ensure each employee was a good fit for the institution. This process also provides prospective employees an opportunity to witness the degree to which the president is committed to success, for example, that he would spend time meeting with entry-level employees. In other words, the president understood that in order to meet the goals established, every employee hired needed to be carefully evaluated in order to ensure that he or she was a good fit within the institution.

The president’s regular and consistent involvement in hiring practices was a main
theme in the findings of this study, and it exemplified his practice of leading by example. The president took the time to meet with many prospective employees, and all employees on campus took notice. The meeting observations during this study also revealed that the president noticed small details about the campus and held employees accountable in addressing these details. Likewise, the document analysis showed that part of the strategic plan was to improve the “curb appeal” of the campus. For example, during one meeting, the president asked why the grass was not cut prior to a recent on-campus event. This attention to detail illustrates leadership by example in that the president demonstrated that he cares about what others might consider to be minor details. In other words, the president demonstrated his commitment to the strategic plan. In a study on leading organizational change, Taylor (2015) noted that effective change includes a leader’s “ability to positively influence followers” (p. 43). Not only was the president able to hold employees accountable, but he also influenced the vice presidents by following through on objectives laid out in the strategic plan so that they too paid attention to the details within their own area of the college. Additionally, Havice and Williams (2005) noted that leaders build commitment and focus employees on completing objectives. The current study confirms that finding in that the president was able to influence those around him by modeling for others his attention to detail and, in turn, his commitment to implementing the Renaissance I strategic plan.

In addition to displaying his attention to detail and commitment to Renaissance I, the president also spent a significant amount of time early in the implementation of the strategic plan communicating the plan on campus to administrators, faculty members, and staff members. Numerous studies have noted the need for communication in successful
leadership (Carey, 2013; Cech, 2010; Corder, 2015; Pagel, 2011; Poole, 2012; Sheehan, 2006; Taylor, 2015). The president and the executive vice president understood the importance of communication and initially gathered all the employees of the College to explain the vision of the strategic plan and let employees know that they needed either to commit to the plan or resign and seek employment elsewhere. The president also spent time communicating the plan off campus to local organizations and individuals that were critical in ensuring the success of the plan, such as bankers and donors. The process of communicating the strategic plan to external and internal constituencies was also seen as important in similar recent studies (Poole, 2012; Taylor, 2015).

These findings suggest that it is critical for presidents and their senior staff members to be actively involved in communicating strategic plans to ensure everyone is aware of the degree to which they will be held accountable. Because researchers have suggested that some strategic plans are created but never implemented, it is essential for presidents to actively be the ones communicating the plan (Dooris, Kelley, and Trainer 2004; Mintzberg 1987a). In other words, the president needs to be the central figure in communicating not only the expectations but also the mechanisms of accountability that will be used to ensure that employees meet those expectations.

In addition to verbal communication, the president and executive vice president both suggested that if they had to implement Renaissance I over again, they would have created a physical document that explained the strategic plan. In other words, some of those who heard about the strategic plan would have benefited from visual aids that illustrated and reinforced the actions that the president was planning to take. It is logical to think that people conceptualize ideas differently, and therefore using a variety of
communication media is important when communicating with a large number and a wide variety of people. Poole, in a 2012 study on community colleges and leadership practices, noted that “one of the participants… developed a formal document that outlines the process and expected outcomes” (p. 126). While I did not find specific mentions in the literature that a physical document was key to the success of implementing a strategic plan, the literature did indicate that a strategic plan must be well documented (Pagel, 2011; Poole, 2012).

**Culture.** This section on culture begins by discussing the specific campus culture of small, private institutions. The section continues by exploring the idea of a change agent and hiring a president to create a sense of urgency and implement change on a small, private college campus. Next, this section discusses various aspects of creating a culture of accountability and communicating those expectations. This section concludes by discussing recognition and rewards potentially given to employees.

The culture of small, private colleges and universities is oftentimes what differentiates them from each other and from their public college/university counterparts. Students (and parents) often select small, private institutions because during their campus visit they felt something special or enjoyed their interactions with faculty members, staff members, or students on campus. Students sometimes cite the personalized atmosphere as one reason for selecting a small, private institution (Ekman, 2015). Additionally, faculty members and staff members at small, private colleges sometimes have been described as “families” because employees work in the same building, or in a small collection of buildings, and frequently work with one another (McKenna, 2015). This working arrangement is in contrast to large, public, state institutions that feature numerous
buildings and departments and, in some cases, multiple campuses. According to O’Dell (2014), “Organizational culture is a powerful force, especially in faith-based organizations” (p. 304). During the interviews I conducted, participants, mentioned that employees were looking for jobs externally before the president began his tenure. The culture of the College, prior to Renaissance I, was one of fear because the enrollment had been declining and employees were scared of future demise.

The members of the board of trustees I interviewed for this current study noted multiple times that before the president was selected, they had realized that the College needed a “change agent.” This individual would be required to reverse a trend of declining enrollment and put the institution back on stable financial ground. Battilana and Casciaro (2013) found that change agents are successful when they are part of the informal network, are able to connect disconnected groups, and are able to influence those indifferent to change. The president was able to influence those who remained employed on campus after his hiring and, as things began to change on campus, he was able to further instill his culture on campus because faculty members and staff members could see the successes.

One other study noted that those executives hired externally tend to implement strategic change while those promoted internally tend to continue past initiatives (Fondas & Wiersema, 1997). The College hired the president as an external candidate specifically assigned to change current practices. Additionally, a recent article in Forbes noted that “without strategy, change is merely substitution, not evolution” (Llopis, 2014, p. 1). The president was hired as a change agent and came to the College with a plan to change the campus culture and recent enrollment trends.
Change is difficult at institutions of higher education, mainly because of the individual cultures (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Lerner, 1999; VanDanBerghe, 2010; Zell, 2003). At the College studied, however, the change process was not described as difficult by participants. It is logical to think that it was not described as difficult because (a) some of those who were resistant to change left the college on their own for other employment opportunities and (b) others converted to following the strategic plan quickly as the enrollment numbers grew and new buildings were being built on campus. The president noted that when he arrived on campus, faculty members and staff members were eager for change. Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder (1993) noted that an organization’s “readiness for change” is essential to the effectiveness of the change being implemented (p. 681). According to the participants interviewed for this study, employees had been looking for some new direction, and the president provided the vision for employees to follow.

Many times, difficulty arises in persuading employees to believe in a strategic plan because institutions that struggle have made small changes that have led to their decline over time, and therefore it seems like nothing has changed in many years (VanDanBerghe, 2010). The current study documents a strategic plan that was implemented quickly, and, as a consequence, individuals both on and off campus were able to witness the progress and changes as a result of implementing the plan. Other studies also have identified the need for creating a sense of urgency and taking immediate action (Cardona, 2007; Carey, 2013). The president arrived at the College with a basic outline of what the strategic plan would be, filled in the missing components with the help of the campus community, and implemented the strategic plan as fast as he could. In
higher education, when a new administrator is hired and attempts to institute positive changes within a campus culture, this change process is often met with resistance (Taylor, 2015). The College’s enrollment and campus had been regressing for years, and because of this, the campus community strongly supported the plan and understood the need for speedy implementation.

In one meeting observation conducted for this current study, the president referred to a project on campus and said that the particular department responsible for this project “needs to do better.” This statement, and other similar statements, was made at a weekly senior staff meeting that was attended by all of the vice presidents, the athletic director, the dean of students, the president’s administrative assistants, and the director of alumni relations. On a different date but at the same weekly senior staff meeting, the president discussed a project assigned to a vice president and said he was confident that the vice president “will get the job done.” These comments provided constant reinforcement of the culture the president implemented and his method of communication in establishing the culture on campus. Numerous other studies have identified the importance of communication in presidential effectiveness (Carey, 2013; Corder, 2015; Perkins, 2007). This particular study aligns with these previously conducted studies in that presidents must communicate well to be effective.

The practice of direct communication on a frequent basis has resulted in a culture of accountability. Garner (2013) found that “colleges often lack the ability or desire to examine internal failures” (p. 8). This is contrary to practices at the College being studied, where the president sets expectations, reiterates them in meetings, and points out when they are not being met. This consistency ensures a constant driving force towards
completion of objectives. Some researchers noted that the practice of setting expectations and installing accountability measures was a critical component in successfully implementing a strategic plan (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009; Salter, 2014).

Employees at the institution studied know that the president gets involved with projects on campus and is relentless in ensuring that tasks are accomplished and completed based on his expectations. In other words, the culture established by a president and the consistency with which he or she implements it has a significant influence on the successful implementation of a strategic plan. Another study noted that managers must communicate strategy and become personally involved in the process in order to improve strategy execution (Sheehan, 2006). The College’s practices align with other studies in that the mechanisms put in place helped successfully implement the strategic plan.

While the president identified instances when his expectations were not being met, there were other instances in which he demonstrated his appreciation toward employees when they successfully implemented strategic plan objectives and completed projects. Based on the meetings I observed, it appeared that the president has a standing agenda item to write “thank you” notes to individuals who have helped the College, regardless of whether these individuals are internal employees of the college or external individuals involved with projects on campus. According to White (2014), in order for individuals to feel truly appreciated, one must regularly communicate their appreciation, not just periodically. This practice of regularly displaying appreciation has had a positive effect on the morale of employees. The College was successful, in part, because the employees and others felt appreciated by the president. The result of this appreciation was the belief that if employees work hard and complete projects, they will be recognized.
One vice president recounted an incident that occurred before the president started working at the College. This vice president received a congratulatory note from the (future) president regarding a recent project. The vice president noted how incredibly thoughtful this gesture was at the time. The vice president mentioned that others had received similar messages in the past. This act, especially considering that it occurred prior to the current president’s first day on the job, went a long way in establishing new expectations for employees. Marshall and Adamic (2010) said that “the first basic principle of an effective corporate narrative is achieving a particular purpose; to applaud and foster a certain type of behavior” (p. 18). This confirms that one reason the implementation of the strategic plan worked was that the president began changing the culture as soon as he accepted the position of president at the College.

The president began to instill a culture of accountability and appreciation at the College soon after he was hired and before he arrived on campus for his first day. His leadership was displayed not only through his words (holding employees consistently accountable in meetings) but also through his actions (thank you notes and congratulatory notes). According to Taylor (2015), presidents who are able to communicate regarding important issues, such as accountability and appreciation, will find success in leadership roles. White (2014) also noted that leaders must be authentic in their appreciation and that a core condition of appreciation is that it is “personal and individualized” (p. 18). The president spent the time to individually identify accomplishments of his future employees and recognized them for their work. This practice helped build a culture of appreciation and helped build individual relationships that was remembered by a staff
Another component comprising the culture of the College is the notion of rewards. Employees at the College adhere to different definitions of what constitutes a reward, and they were not certain whether the institution had a rewards system in place. According to Hunt et al. (1997), a key requirement in successfully implementing a strategic plan is to have systems in place to reward individuals. Participants interviewed for this study reported conflicting views on the reward systems currently in place at the College. However, participants interviewed for this study who formerly worked at the College during Renaissance I identified numerous rewards provided to employees. These rewards included multi-year employment contracts, departmental group trips to sporting events, and salary increases. While the results of this study indicated that opinions about rewards were not the reason for the success or failure of the strategic plan, Vakola and Nikolaou (2005) found that “pay and benefits is another occupational stressor associated with resistance to change” (p. 170). Based on individual college cultures and a past record of providing (or not providing) rewards, institutions may need to reward employees as an incentive to change, or continually perform, in successfully implementing a strategic plan.

In order to motivate all employees to perform different tasks, leadership must consider all forms of recognition. If institutions are going to change the culture of their campuses and hold employees accountable, the ways in which employees are recognized must be effective. Leadership must understand how employees define rewards individually and consider the process for meeting those expectations. Some employees expect public words of appreciation and an occasional “thank you” from a senior staff
member, while other employees are solely driven by salary increases and promotions. Administrators at the College provide a variety of forms of recognition and, early in the implementation of Renaissance I, provided rewards to employees for completing objectives laid out in the strategic plan.

**Accountability.** Holding individuals accountable is critical to the ability of organizations to successfully implement strategic plans (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009; Salter, 2014). Organizations can create well-thought-out strategic plans that have been developed during the course of years and involve everyone in the company, but if the plan is not implemented correctly or accountability is not maintained, the planning process is meaningless. According to Dooris, Kelley, and Trainer (2004), research has shown that in some cases, the implementation of a strategic plan fails 90% of the time. Poor implementation often has occurred because employees are not provided with clear expectations or not held accountable for those expectations. Holding employees accountable for expectations that have been clearly laid out for them is essential in successfully implementing a strategic plan and specific action items. Franken, Edwards, and Lambert (2009) found that establishing accountability is a key to successful strategic change. Salter (2014) found that “the extent to which the leader has the support and loyalties of followers is… the extent to which the leader has authority to assess follower performance and give reward or punishment” (p. 116). Both of these studies reference the need for the leader of the strategic plan to have the ability to establish and enforce accountability.

Ferguson, Hall, and Hopwood (2015) identified numerous items needed to implement and sustain change but did not mention accountability or communicating
expectations. They noted that organizations must maintain their leadership and leadership teams and work to nurture harmonious relationships. However, the results of this current study indicated that accountability is in fact a key factor in implementing strategic change. For example, at the College, it was not only important to document the need for accountability in the strategic plan but also to openly discuss it. A 2012 study on effective performance management revealed that the first stage of managing employee performance is communicating employee expectations (Kumari & Malhotra, 2012). Some participants (vice presidents at the College) commented that communicating accountability was a significant part of Renaissance I and its successful implementation. The president “came in and was very honest and open that this was going to be a culture of accountability, and you were expected to do your job, and if you didn’t do your job, you weren’t going to have job,” said one vice president. In other words, employees at the College were expected to produce results, and if vice presidents committed to accomplishing certain goals, they knew they would be asked about those goals at the next senior staff meeting. At the College, when employees volunteer to take on a project or are asked to perform a task, they know that they will be held accountable by their supervisor until the task or project has been completed.

According to Demillo (2011), because the cost of doing business seems to be ever increasing, colleges and universities must adjust and adapt their practices. Some institutions may charge higher tuition, others may increase accountability to maximize work, and other institutions might do both (Demillo, 2011). It is logical that focusing on accountability would lead to increased efficiency of employees’ work efforts. For example, at the College, the president required athletic coaches to meet specific annual
recruiting goals. This measurable outcome provided athletic coaches with clear expectations and showed them how to keep their job. This practice of providing clear expectations was largely responsible for the College accomplishing the strategic planning goal of increasing enrollment.

In this present study, the president mentioned his preference for hiring from within the organization and that if he expected people to work hard and be held accountable, then they should expect to be rewarded for their hard work. Interestingly, two of the current vice presidents started their employment at the College not as vice presidents but rather as a professor and a director, respectively. This suggests that the president stays true to his word, and in response, employees remember this consistency. Employees understand that when the president sets expectations and implements accountability measures, meeting those expectations leads to future promotional opportunities over the hiring of an external candidate. The practice of keeping promises builds trust in the president and also results in other positive outcomes. According to Gomez and Rosen (2001), “Trust [is] . . . a variable that is crucial for organizational effectiveness. At the College, employees are more committed to the institution because they have trust in the president and the senior leadership. In other words, employees know they will be given promotional opportunities if they work hard and do their part in implementing the strategic plan.

As it relates to the preference of hiring employees externally or internally, three vice presidents and the president in this current study reported that hiring from within helped implement the strategic plan. One vice president specifically noted that hiring someone internally makes it unnecessary to “translate” the strategic plan and the methods
for implementing it. Employees who have worked at the College have a better understanding of the strategic plan and the expectations that will be placed upon them as they enter a new position on campus. In other words, promoting internal candidates into a new role can serve numerous purposes. First, the employees ideally have a shorter transition period and can pick right up where the former employee left off. Secondly, the employees know the expectations and understand they will be held accountable to meet those expectations. Finally, the employees may feel a sense of accomplishment in that they most likely met the expectations in their former position and that was the reason for their promotion.

If employees desire to continue getting promoted and rewarded, they will continue to meet the expectations they are being held accountable to meet. For example, in a 2006 study of Spanish industrial plants, the researchers noted several reasons why the plant would hire internally over externally (Bayo-Moriones & Ortin-Ángel, 2006). The authors explained one reason is that internal “promotions are understood as mechanisms to encourage workers’ efforts” (Bayo-Moriones & Ortin-Ángel, 2006, p. 454). The president confirmed that he used a similar theory at the College by encouraging individuals to meet objectives and work hard. In response, if an opportunity came along, they would be given preference over an external candidate. The Spanish study also noted that most plants use a combination of hiring externally and internally, like the College, but also provided a reason why a plant may want to hire internally.

Accountability in the industry of higher education is a fairly new concept (Sullivan & Richardson, 2011). The president of the College mentioned that he changed the expectations on campus. Not surprisingly, this was a departure from the strategy
employed by the previous administration, and the results of the present study indicated that holding employees accountable has a dramatic influence on the successful implementation of the strategic plan. As competition for students increases, and as small, private institutions, such as the College studied, continue to depend on tuition revenue for financial stability, holding employees accountable will become a necessity in higher education. The culture of accountability was implemented by the leadership of the president during Renaissance I.

Conclusions

This study has documented numerous strategies that the president and his senior staff at the College employed when implementing Renaissance I from 2005 to 2010. The president paid attention to details and consistently communicated his expectations. This pattern of leadership transformed the culture of the College. Employees knew they would be held accountable for specific projects around campus. For the most part, these employees felt rewarded for their work and knew that if they continued to perform, they could be promoted ahead of external candidates who applied for the same position. The initial strategic planning documents indicated that the pattern of holding employees accountable was consistently reinforced by the president. This accountability also was reflected in the meetings I observed and confirmed by interviewed participants. The implementation of the Renaissance I strategic plan began with hiring a leader who maintained a clear vision and was able to transform the culture of the campus, in part by being involved in the hiring process, by communicating clear expectations, and by holding employees accountable for their actions.
Limitations

This section discusses how every research study encounters limitations, and this study is no different. In particular, three primary limitations were encountered. First, I was employed at the College. I directly reported to some of the individuals I interviewed for the study and indirectly report to the rest of the senior administrators. The fact that I was employed at the College introduces a potential limitation in terms of the responses provided to me during the interviews. Participants may have been more open with an individual they do not work with every day when discussing strategic practices for implementing strategic plans. This limitation may have influenced the study in terms of the information that was shared during the interviews or discussed during the meetings. While on one hand participants may have divulged sensitive information to me because of knowing me and feeling comfortable, there is a potential limitation in that participants did not tell me the specific details of a strategy for implementing strategic plans because of our professional interactions.

Additionally, my personal bias undoubtedly influenced me periodically as I interviewed the participants for this study and had prior knowledge of their leadership styles before the study began. This prior knowledge could have promoted certain assumptions and interpretations of interview responses that could have influenced my data analysis.

A second limitation is that the Renaissance I strategic plan began in 2005 and ended in 2010; however, this study was conducted between 2013 and 2015, at least three years after the completion of the initial strategic plan. While this time frame allowed participants to use hindsight to describe and evaluate the implementation of the strategic
plan, the College had begun implementing a second strategic plan. This meant that participants were challenged to challenge their memory about what happened or why they thought a particular strategy did or did not work. This created a limitation in that they may not have remembered accurately the processes and strategies that were effective or ineffective. In addition, some of the administrators interviewed in this study were not employed at the College during Renaissance I. All of the members of the board of trustees, the president, and three vice presidents served as senior administrators at the time Renaissance I was implemented. Three other vice presidents either held a lower-level position during the implementation of Renaissance I or did not work at the college.

Finally, the results of this study are not generalizable to other similar institutions. Each small, private college or university has a unique mixture of history and culture. Furthermore, each campus has its own set of characteristics, such as organizational structure, financial position at the time of the implementation, local and regional reputation, institutional mission, and geographic location, to name a few. These characteristics make the implementation of a strategic plan different for each campus; however, the strategies outlined in the next section could be used to help implement a strategic plan. Furthermore, as previously noted, a high percentage of strategic plans created are never implemented, and therefore this study does identify specific actions which resulted in a successful implementation that could be used at other institutions (Dooris, Kelley, & Trainer, 2004).

**Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of this study, three specific recommendations can be provided for other institutions to implement. These recommendations include (a)
focusing on human resources, (b) implementing a culture of accountability, and (c) providing the necessary leadership for the institution and its employees.

First, the level of attention a small, private institution places on hiring and firing employees should be high when implementing a strategic plan. Small, private colleges and universities are comprised of departments that usually accomplish many tasks and frequently facilitate interaction with students. This interaction is critical to enrollment and retention, and for institutions that are tuition revenue driven, these student-employee interactions are critical. Senior administrators, including the president, should be involved in the hiring process of all employees because they will be influential in determining the success of the strategic plan. In addition to their involvement in the processes of hiring and firing employees, senior administrators must also set expectations and lead by example. Setting expectations is crucial in ensuring that employees accomplish tasks that they have been assigned, which in turn benefits the institution.

Secondly, senior administrators must understand the culture the president wants to implement as part of the strategic plan and closely align their actions to ensure that the culture is consistent across campus. Having a culture of accountability on campus allows senior administrators to communicate clear expectations even before an employee’s first day of employment. These expectations, and the practice of holding employees accountable for those expectations, will in turn allow supervisors to focus more on their own tasks as opposed to monitoring and micro-managing their direct reports. Having a culture that is understood and communicated by a staff of senior administrators helps dictate the way a strategic plan is implemented as well as its success. Communicating expectations is essential in having employees understand what is expected of them during
their employment.

Third, leaders of small, private colleges should be actively involved in all of the details around campus during the implementation of a strategic plan. At the College, the president’s commitment to paying attention to details allowed him to understand what does and does not need attention and monitoring. It also allowed the president to better understand what is important not only to students but also faculty members and staff members. For the president of a small, private college or university, being involved in the details of day-to-day operations allows him or her to access more information with which to make decisions about resource allocation.

These three recommendations, when practiced together at the College, created an atmosphere conducive to implementing the 2005-2010 Renaissance I strategic plan. The leadership created a culture of accountability in which high-quality employees remained employed and ineffective employees were separated from the college. The College experienced a dramatic change when the president was hired and Renaissance I began, and his leadership, along with the other recommendations in this section, allowed the strategic plan to be implemented successfully.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

After reviewing the findings of this study and considering the limitations, several recommendations for future research can be proposed. First, there is a need for additional institutions similar to this particular College to be studied, institutions that have successfully implemented strategic plans in the eyes of those outside of the campus. Studying institutions that have made national headlines because of a successful strategic plan or strategic initiatives will help those interested in the success of small, private
institutions better understand the characteristics needed to successfully implement a strategic plan. Although each campus is unique, plans of action and the implementation of those plans could be adopted and modified to work at different institutions.

Secondly, further research should be conducted on the involvement of presidents at small, private institutions. In order to understand the influence that one individual can have on a campus, future research could be conducted that examines the degree to which an institution is considered successful in relation to the level of involvement of the president. The president was the primary impetus for the implementation of the strategic plan, and, in turn, he was responsible for the success of Renaissance I. With small, private colleges and universities featuring smaller campuses and unique cultures, studying the leaders of these colleges would provide insight into the role of presidents and their influence on institutional success.

Third, additional research could be conducted on institutions that have adopted models that are similar to the College. This College used athletic programs and athletic facilities to increase enrollment during Renaissance I and, during Renaissance II, employed a second strategic plan to enhance academic facilities and programs. Studying other institutions that have traveled down a similar path may provide beneficial information about successful implementation of similar strategic plans.

Fourth, future research might include studying institutions with enrollments of different sizes as well as public institutions that have implemented strategic plans successfully. Furthermore, future researchers should examine institutions similar to this College that have multiple campus structures and/or different student bodies, for example all female institutions or historically black colleges and universities.
Fifth, exploring the role that vice presidents play in implementing strategic plans would be helpful. Even if the president is an influential figure and effectively communicates how the implementation of a strategic plan should be carried out, it would prove beneficial to know how vice presidents carry out that plan. Research also should be conducted that focuses on middle managers and how they take a strategic plan created at a high level and break it down into day-to-day functions within different departments. Additionally, the organizational structure of small, private institutions could be researched to better understand the implementation process. For example, do colleges with fewer vice presidents allow for more consistency in implementing a strategic plan, or does having fewer vice presidents result in projects taking longer to get implemented and thus a reduction in momentum? All of these areas of potential research could provide beneficial information.

Finally, future researchers could also explore the perceptions of lower-level administrators and their views on success and presidential leadership. As the strategic plan is being created and implemented, it would be beneficial to know the role they play and how their perceptions impact or do not impact the implementation. This research would help senior administrators understand the employees they entrust to carry out the day-to-day operations of implementing a strategic plan.

Summary

This chapter outlined the findings from the research and provided a discussion of those findings along with recommendations for practice and future research. The meetings I observed, the interviews I conducted, and the documents I analyzed all provided beneficial information about how the College was able to implement
Renaissance I. The participants referenced human resources, the president’s leadership ability, and a culture of accountability as key contributing factors to the successful implementation of the strategic plan. The meetings I observed further revealed the president’s leadership abilities, which allowed him to hold people accountable when they did not meet expectations and to thank those who met expectations. The document analysis identified the changes to the campus that were planned and referenced how the College engaged in the practices of idea generation and competitive analysis.

The findings suggest that the College’s Renaissance I strategic plan was successfully implemented due to several reasons. First, the implementation of the strategic plan focused on human resources, in other words, the hiring and firing of employees and the setting of expectations for faculty members and staff members. Secondly, the strategic plan was successfully implemented because of the culture developed at the College. The culture of accountability was instrumental in employees understanding the ramifications of meeting expectations as well as failing to meet expectations. Employees knew they would be recognized for good work and potentially penalized for not meeting expectations. Third, the strategic plan was successfully implemented because the leadership of the College paid attention to details and helped employees maintain accountability. Finally, the strategic plan was successfully implemented because the College constantly analyzed its competitors and adapted its practices when required.

The recommendations for practice outline several actions that other small, private institutions can take at their institutions to potentially assist in implementing strategic plans. At the same time, not all findings are generalizable and transferable to other
similar institutions. The majority of small, private institutions may feature different enrollment levels, different campus cultures, and different leadership styles. The recommendations for practice include senior administrators becoming more involved with human resources and ensuring that the most effective employees are being hired to meet expectations. Additionally, there must be leadership in place that rewards superior employee performance and holds employees accountable for failing to meet expectations. Also, the institution must have a culture that aligns with the president’s vision in order for there to be consistency among the senior administration.

The recommendations for future research include examining institutions of different sizes that are in the midst of implementing strategic plans; examining institutions of a similar size that have experienced success implementing strategic plans; and examining the role that presidents have played in the implementation of strategic plans at small, private colleges or universities.

**Conclusion**

The College’s strategic plan, Renaissance I, was the main impetus for its turnaround. Prior to its implementation, the enrollment at the College had been decreasing, and the campus was decaying both physically and emotionally. As one vice president put it, “We were all looking for jobs” at other institutions. However the president, along with his dedication to the Renaissance I strategic plan, was able to implement strategies that positively altered the future direction of the College in the long term. During an eight-year period, enrollment doubled, and nearly every building on campus was rebuilt or renovated. Many of the members of the board of trustees, when asked what could have been done differently, expressed complete satisfaction and no
regrets about the implementation of the strategic plan. The implementation of the Renaissance I strategic plan was successful because of the president’s ability to set expectations and hold employees accountable for meeting those expectations. His leadership characteristic of paying attention to details allowed him to continually implement strategic initiatives. The implementation of Renaissance I was successful because of the president’s leadership and his ability to set a course of action that every member of the College community followed.
References


Carey, A. B. (2013). *On the edge: A study of small private colleges that have made a*


Cook, B. J. (2012). The American college president study: Key findings and takeaways. Presidency [Supplemental issue], 2-5.


Council of Independent Colleges and Universities (CIC). (2012). A study of presidents of


can-antioch-college-return-from-the-dead-again.html


Grant, M. S. (2010). *The shifting landscape of continuing higher education: Case studies of strategic planning and resource allocation practices in research intensive

doi: 10.1002/ir.37019906705


Retrieved from http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-
graduate-schools/top-education-schools/higher-education-administration-
rankings?int=38fa2c

48-54.

Hoover, E. (2013, August 23). In Buffalo, talk of college costs stirs hope and doubt.


Theses. (Accession No.1112250988).

Institute of Higher Education. (2015). *Graduate programs*. Athens, GA: University of
Georgia. Retrieved from http://ihe.uga.edu/graduate-programs/course-descriptions

No. 303385049).

http://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2012/01/19/a-free-college-education-for-all/


Kahn, J. V. (2011). Improving outcomes from your planning process during turbulent


Washington University.


Rudden, M. S. (2008). Ten reasons why colleges and universities undertake campus master planning: And how to align your campus planning effort to best address


magically fix the economy? *Fortune*, 162(7), 96-108.


235


U.S. Department of Education. (2013). College Affordability and Transparency Center. *Which colleges have the highest and lowest tuition and net prices?* [Data set].


Watkins, D. A. (2002). *The strategic planning process and student recruitment and
retention at tuition-dependent, small, private colleges: A multiple case study


doi:10.1080/02602930600760892


Young, J. R. (2013). Online classes see cheating go high tech. *Education Digest, 78*(5), 4-8.

Appendix A

Example Email for Meeting/Interview Setup

President:

I am writing this email to request a meeting with you to discuss my dissertation on the implementation of strategic plans and the role this institution will play in my collection of data.

Please let me know what days and times work best for you.

Thanks.

Matt Rheinecker
Appendix B

President and Vice President Interview Questions

General

1. How long have you been employed at this institution?

2. What is your current title?

3. Do you have employees who directly report to you? If so, how many?

4. What other official roles have you been employed at here at this institution?

5. Have you served on any committees while employed at this institution?

6. What areas of the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan would you say directly impacted/affected you?

7. What role would you say you’ve played in the implementation of the strategic plan?

8. Can you discuss what you believe it took to successfully implement a strategic plan?

Employee Evaluation

1. Are employees around campus evaluated as it relates to their ability to implement a strategic plan? If so, in what ways?

2. If you evaluated employees, how did you go about this? Or how did your evaluation differ from other leaders on campus?

3. Did an employee’s ability to implement aspects of a strategic plan affect any hiring decisions you made during the implementation of the strategic plan? If so, how?

Relationship Building
1. How would you describe the inter-departmental relationships on campus as it relates to working together to implement parts of the strategic plan that were cross-departmental?

1. What steps, if any, did you take to build relationships across departments and around campus to help implement your areas of the strategic plan?

**Gaining Commitment**

1. Could you describe the commitment level to the strategic plan of the Board of Trustees and other President/Vice Presidents?
   a. If low, why do you think it was low?
   b. If high, how do you think that commitment was gained?
   c. If average, what do you think could have been done to gain more buy-in?

1. Did you attempt to gain commitment from your direct reports?
   a. If so, how?
   b. If not, why?

**Leadership**

1. Could you describe the leadership of the strategic plan?
   a. Who was responsible for creating the strategic plan?
   b. Who was most influential in implementing the strategic plan?
   c. What aspects of this leadership helped or hindered the strategic plan?

1. How did leadership react to parts of the strategic plan that weren’t working or needed adjusting?

1. How involved you were in the day to day aspects of implementing the strategic plan?
Reward Systems

1. Did leadership reward employees for effectively implementing parts of the strategic plan?
   a. If yes, how?
   b. If no, why do you think it wasn’t necessary to reward employees?

Wrap-Up

1. Looking back, what would you have changed about the implementation of the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan and why?
1. Is there anything additional you’d like to discuss that will help me better understand the implementation of the strategic plan at the College?
Appendix C

Member of the Board of Trustees Interview Questions

General

1. How long have you been a member of the Board of Trustees at this College?
2. What is your current professional title?
3. Have you ever been directly employed at this College?
4. Which BOT committees do you/have you served on?
5. What role would you say you’ve played in the implementation of the strategic plan?
6. What role would you say the BOT played in the implementation of the strategic plan?

Employee Evaluation

1. Did the BOT evaluate current leadership as it relates to their ability to implement a strategic plan? If so, in what ways?
2. Was ability to implement a strategic plan part of hiring decisions by the BOT? If yes, how did this evaluation happen?

Relationship Building

1. Do you think the BOT developed relationships with senior leadership during the implementation of the strategic plan? If so, why?
2. Do you feel as though it’s important for senior leadership to develop relationships with other departments/directors/Vice Presidents across campus? If so, why?

Gaining Commitment
1. Do you feel as though it’s important for senior leadership to believe in all aspects of the strategic plan that apply to their area? Why?

2. Did the BOT do anything to gain buy-in from senior leadership regarding aspects of the strategic plan?

**Leadership**

1. Did the BOT of Trustees evaluate the leadership as it related the implementation of the strategic plan?
   a. If yes, how did the BOT do the evaluation?
   b. If no, why didn’t the BOT feel it was necessary?

**Reward Systems**

1. Did the BOT setup reward systems for the senior leadership team?
   a. If yes, what were they and what was the rationale behind them?
   b. If no, why did the BOT feel it wasn’t necessary?

**Wrap-Up**

1. Looking back, what would you have changed about the implementation of the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan and why?

2. Is there anything additional you’d like to discuss that will help me better understand the implementation of the strategic plan at the College from a member of the Board of Trustees viewpoint?
Appendix D

Interview #2 Questions with the President

1. Could you tell me a little bit about where you got your leadership style from? Was it something you’ve always had, previous individuals you’ve worked with? Things like that. Where did you get it from?

2. Could you narrow it down to maybe which of those traits translates into successfully implementing a strategic plan or which of those traits you think you’ve used the most I guess while you’re here?

3. Can you talk a little bit about the knowledge you have in starting building projects and if that’s something that’s required or just something that I guess you have that was beneficial? Do you think a President needs to know that type of stuff?

4. Would you talk about the idea of an Executive Vice President and if you think you needed one person leading the charge among the Vice Presidents or if that just happened to be the way the structure was?

5. Could you talk about maybe specifically how like accountability works between you and the members of the Board of Trustees?

6. Has there been a change I guess in the way they’ve held you accountable over time? From initially not really knowing you and not really sure if the plan would work to as things worked and time went along? So early on was it enrollment? And that was the main indicator?

7. Could you talk about how you know if the College has a preference on hiring externally, internally and if you think that preference has an influence on the way to implement strategic plans?
8. Have you ever I guess heard directly or gotten the feeling that maybe Directors or VPs don’t actually feel like they have the final say because you meet with all the candidates? Has it ever created a problem I guess?

9. Do you think that by firing employees that you set the precedent—same thing like if you work hard you’ll get promoted, if you don’t work hard you’ll be gone? Do you think that has helped set a precedent for the work ethic around the College?

10. Have other institutions you’ve worked at done the one-year contracts or has that always been a thing? And if so do you think it has any impact on how hard people work?

11. Would you change about the rewards system during Renaissance I? Do you think if you did that differently it would have any effect on implementing strategic plans if you were able to significantly reward someone for going dramatically above and beyond? Do you think that would have any impact?

12. Do you think a similar type plan would have worked at an institution that was maybe a little more stable at the time? Or do you think that the fact that enrollment was going in the wrong direction and people were wondering if this place would stay open—do you think that had a dramatic impact?

13. Is there anything else that you could think of that you would change about how the plan was communicated internally or externally? To faculty and staff or community?

14. Was there a similar type of strategic plan at the previous school you worked at? It was written by you? Did it work?
15. Looking back again, what do you think, during Renaissance I, the College did differently than maybe the other institutions you worked at that helped them have the success that they did?

16. When do you think people started to trust you and trust the plan? Was there any turning point where people even jumped more on board because they knew this was going to work?

17. Is there anything else you’d like to add that will help me better understand how to implement strategic plans? How it was done here?
Appendix E

Interview #2 Questions with Former Executive Vice President

1. Could you talk about how you were held accountable? By either the President or the members of the Board of Trustees in terms of how it was communicated to you?

2. For the most part it sounds like you were held accountable by the enrollment goal and then in the Board of Trustees meetings? Is that right for the most part?

3. And then how did you hold your direct reports accountable?

4. Did you have individuals that would fight with you on that and just say it was a bad year or something like that?

5. Could you talk to me a little bit about if, when you were here, the College had a preference to hire internally or externally and if you think that helped or hindered implementing the strategic plan?

6. Did the College just identify who was the best candidate for the job?

7. Did the President or could you talk about the President’s role in hiring individuals around campus if he played a role? Did the President meet with individuals you wanted to hire? Even down to the Admissions representative level. Or did he allow you to make decisions?

8. One of the things you mentioned last time was when you first got here and there were Admissions Reps and you replaced them and you said you were looking for five but instead you hired six knowing that they were going to weed themselves out. Did the President frequently give you that type of flexibility to make I guess
what I would call an executive decision at the time? Did he give the same type of
flexibility to the other Vice Presidents when he first got here?

9. Do you think the President gave more flexibility to Vice Presidents he hired as
   opposed to those that were already employed at the College before he started?

10. Could you talk about how or if during your time at here and/or your time working
    with the President has changed your leadership style and maybe in what ways?

11. Were there things about the College that you think the College did differently
    than other institutions which allowed them to be successful in implementing their
    strategic plan?
Appendix F

Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President

1. Could you maybe talk a little bit about how you or I guess just your position is held accountable?

2. Have you ever forecasted a deficit knowing that there are big expenses upcoming and what is the annual timeline of when the budget’s decided?

3. How do you hold your direct reports accountable?

4. Can you discuss how and I guess if fundraising plays into the revenue of an institution or the funding of projects?

5. Does fundraising play into budgeting or is fundraising an extra that allows this institution to do other projects that maybe they wouldn’t have?

6. Do you think Renaissance I could have been implemented without that money? Borrowing that $15 million?

7. Could you maybe talk about the financial aspect of not having that luxury of available land? What impact that would have if you also had to acquire land to do these kinds of things?

8. Does that currently affect a lot of decisions right now in terms of building versus renovating or building on top of current structures or right by current structures?

9. Could you talk about I guess the College’s and maybe your philosophy on hiring internally versus externally for promotions and new positions?

10. Do you think that philosophy or this College’s philosophy of doing it that way helps or hinders the ability to continue implementing the strategic plan by having
somebody that already knows what’s going on into that new position or you think it doesn’t make a big difference?

11. Could you talk about maybe if and how your leadership style has changed since coming to this College? Or has it been influenced by the way this College does things?

12. Has the President's way of doing things differed from other individuals you’ve worked with and could you maybe talk about things that are different or worse?

13. Have you ever run into instances where your pick has differed from the President’s pick and how that’s played out? Have you ever said this is the person I want and he said no?

14. Have you ever experienced instances when someone who is meeting their goals and meeting expectations but they were let go for a different reason? For example fit, communication, relationships with other offices, things like that or is it pretty much just the accountability?

15. Is there anything additional that you think the College does differently than other places you’ve worked or other schools that you’ve heard of in terms of implementing Renaissance I?

16. Do you think, just in your opinion, that’s even the case with similar sized institutions? Do you think this College does anything differently from their competitors?
Appendix G

Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President

1. Could talk just a little more specifically about how you’re held accountable in terms of I guess what you’re held accountable for and how you’re held accountable?

2. Could you talk about maybe your experience in the same role at other institutions and the President’s at those institutions? Did they have a recruiting model that they implemented? Maybe the differences of the President compared to other Presidents?

3. Last time I believe you used a term like nimble institution. Could you maybe talk about what that means compared to your prior experiences as it relates to enrollment?

4. Do you and if you do, why do you think that senior staff makes the majority of the decisions and without a ton of buy in from other areas? Do you think the campus buys into the decisions? And if you do, why since they aren’t really involved?

5. Could you talk about maybe your area at the College and if the turnover rate has differed from other institutions?

6. Could you talk about I guess maybe that process as it relates to—have you ever had instances where you wanted to hire somebody and he’s vetoed the decision or it is pretty much always on the same page?

7. Could you talk about maybe the College’s, your perception of the College’s method of hiring people internally or externally and what they prefer or is it
department specific; things like that? And then if you think that has any effect on being able to implement a strategic plan?

8. Do you have more individuals that are internally promoted?

9. Does that allow you to better implement the strategic plan? Or does hiring people externally give their viewpoints better?

10. Do you think since you’ve come to the College and been in this culture, that your personal leadership style has changed? And if so how do you think it’s changed? Or why do you think it hasn’t changed?

11. What would have been something at a previous school that you would have been involved with the faculty with? Is that what you mean?

12. Are there any other things that you can point to say that besides accountability you know this is something that’s a glaring difference between the College and maybe other schools you’ve been a part of?

13. What do you think about the president specifically was different from other Presidents as it relates to implementing that strategic plan?
Appendix H

Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President

1. Could you talk maybe specifically or general I guess, however it applies, about how you are held accountable personally?

2. Do you think—do you think people understand that because it’s like a constant rhetoric or because they’ve seen people get let go or another reason?

3. How do you hold your direct report accountable?

4. The President doesn’t give goals and you don’t give goals to the board, but it’s rather more of an upward this is what I’m going to do and then hold you accountable for that?

5. One of the things you mentioned last time that was you said that the faculty really responded well to the President because he delivered on his promises. Has there been anything that has happened where the President like wasn’t able to deliver on a promise that he had made for whatever reason? Not available funding or time or prioritizing things differently and maybe how he communicated it? And how did people react to it?

6. Can you talk about your impression or your understanding how the College chooses to or chooses not to promote from within versus hiring externally, how that works?

7. Do you think hiring from within has helped implement strategic plans because people are more familiar with the institution?

8. Can you talk like maybe how often the opinions have differed between you and the President?
9. Could you maybe discuss the President’s involvement with the faculty? Does he meet with them ever? Does he communicate with them?

10. Any or of all the things you mentioned are those different from past presidents you’ve worked for?

11. During Renaissance I I guess in your experience in your area, was there high turnover, low turnover? Do you think that had anything to do with the strategic planning and its ability to be successful?

12. Do you think your leadership style has changed since coming to this College?

13. What has this institution done differently in your opinion? Can think of anything else that maybe you could pin down as something this College did differently during Renaissance I that made it successful?

14. Do you think that schools can implement strategic plans as successfully as Renaissance I if they are big and complex?
Appendix I

Interview #2 Questions with the Vice President

1. Could talk specifically about how you are held accountable? Do you talk about numbers in those meetings like specific goals or anything like that? Is that a regular occurrence?

2. Was the Renaissance I goal $15 million? Were there ever any other metric goals during Renaissance I as it related to actual dollar figures?

3. Did your Vice President give you metrics? Or how did your Vice President hold you accountable?

4. How do you hold your direct reports accountable? Is there any accountability that’s not numerical?

5. Have there ever been instances where during your entire time here, whether as the Vice President or not, where people have been let go for a different reason besides not meeting numerical goals? Can you give me an example?

6. Has anyone ever been let go when they were meeting their goals but for something that they really could control—that they could control themselves like a personality issue, a culture fit, lack of loyalty or something like that?

7. Do you think that helped or hindered it because Renaissance I was a different campaign? Do you think that was a good thing because there wasn’t a silent phase and got rolling right away or do you think it would have worked better and faster as a more traditional campaign? Do you think anything could have been done differently I guess?
8. Can you talk a little bit about how you identified these new donors? Were they large donors, small donors, graduates, not graduates, things like that?

9. What would you say during Renaissance I or would you say this College did anything differently than other schools? And if so, what was it?

10. Do you think that implementing such a large plan like Renaissance I makes it difficult to fundraise after that point?

11. Does it make it difficult to continually keep asking for money after people have embarked on such a big journey? It was easier to fundraise and get previous donors to donate again? Or it was easier because you’d identified new people or both?

12. Could you talk about I guess during Renaissance I and maybe currently how the College and you specifically views hiring internally versus externally?

13. Do you think one way or the other helps or hinders an institution’s ability to implement a strategic plan?

14. Do you think during your time at the College obviously it’s based on the position but more often than not this institution has tried to hire internally to fill positions than externally?

15. Would you talk about if that’s been the case in your area where the President has met with people to potentially hire them? Have you ever run into instances where your preference about to who to hire contradicted with the President’s and how that played out in terms of who was selected?

16. Can you talk about if during your time as Vice President your—how your leadership style has been influenced by the President’s leadership style? Or do
you think you had your own ways of doing things prior to becoming Vice
President?

17. Do you think it helped Renaissance I that the institution was not as sophisticated
as it currently is and that there weren’t policies in place to slow things down?

18. What do you think the College does differently as compared to maybe the other
schools or companies that you’ve worked at or people you talk to and I guess I
would say excluding accountability?

19. During Renaissance I could you talk about how active you felt in the process of
implementing the strategic plan?

20. Would you, and if you would, how do you think the rewards systems could be
changed at the College to better or differently reward employees for good work?
What do you think would work better?
Appendix J

Interview #2 Questions with the Former Vice President

1. Could you talk about how you were held accountable by the president?

2. How do you hold your direct reports accountable?

3. Can you talk about how the College promoted from within or decided to fill a position with an external candidate?

4. Do you think hiring from within helped implement strategic plans because employees were more familiar with the institution?

5. Can you talk about how often your opinion differed from the President? If ever?

6. Could you maybe discuss the President’s involvement with the faculty back when you were at the College? Did he meet with them frequently?

7. Was there high turnover/low turnover when you were at the College during Renaissance I? Do you think that had anything to do with the success of the strategic plan?

8. Can you discuss if you think your leadership style changed during your time at the College?

9. What has this institution done differently in your opinion?
Appendix K

Informed Consent Form

Purpose of the Study:

This study intends to provide a better understanding of the process through which ------ College implements strategic plans. This study is looking at the specifics of the 2005 - 2010 strategic plan implementation as well as the general implementation process currently used by ------ College.

The primary research questions that will guide this study are: How is a strategic plan implemented at a small, private institution? What can be learned from how a strategic plan is implemented?

The data collected in this study will be used to draw conclusions to help institutions better understand the process of implementing strategic plans.

Subject Understanding:

• I agree to participate in this study that I understand will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Philosophy degree at the University of Toledo.

• I understand that my participation is voluntary.

• I understand that all data collected will be limited to this use or other research-related usage as authorized by the University of Toledo.

• I understand that I will not be identified by name in the final product.

• I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.

• I acknowledge that the contact information of the researcher and his advisor
have been made available to me along with a duplicate copy of this consent form.

- I understand that the data I will provide are not be used to evaluate my performance.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse repercussions.

Subject’s Full Name: __________________________________________________________

Subject’s Signature: _______________ Date Signed: ____________________________