A case study of learning community curriculum models implemented in business programs in three public community colleges in Ohio

Vicky McEliece Wood
The University of Toledo

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A Dissertation

entitled

A Case Study of Learning Community Curriculum Models Implemented in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio

by

Vicky McEliece Wood

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

_______________________________________________
Dr. David L. Meabon, Committee Chair

_______________________________________________
Dr. Debra Gentry, Committee Member

_______________________________________________
Dr. Mary Ellen Edwards, Committee Member

_______________________________________________
Dr. Ron Abrams, Committee Member

_______________________________________________
Dr. David Hyslop, Committee Member

_______________________________________________
Dr. Patricia Komuniecki, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

December 2012
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An Abstract of

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The University of Toledo
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Ohio needs to increase the number of college-educated citizens to improve the state’s economy and to remain competitive in the global economy. The Ohio Board of Regents challenged colleges to develop better methods of retaining students to increase graduation rates. Learning community curriculum models have been used to restructure the curriculum, student learning, and the classroom environments to improve student persistence and academic achievement. However, there is limited research on how learning communities are used in business programs in community colleges. This multi-case study examines how three learning community curriculum models have changed the learning environment and the findings provide a comprehensive, contextually rich description of each learning community based on an insider’s perspective. A document analysis, three classroom observation, and interviews with 34 participants were included in the multi-case study. The findings show how learning communities facilitate student involvement and social and academic integration, and describe best practices of learning communities in community colleges.
For my father, Kenneth Robert “Kenny” McEliece, who lost his battle with cancer half way through my doctoral program. You asked me to continue and earn this degree…this is for you, Dad! I love you and miss you!
Acknowledgements

As a child, my parents encouraged me to set goals and never give up until I achieved my goals. My father encouraged me to work hard, respect others, and to earn a college degree so that I could get a job and support myself. My other childhood father figure, John Watkins, influenced me to pursue higher education. This is the foundation for which my passion for higher education was built. I am blessed to have a career that I enjoy and one that allows me to share my passion with others. It is rewarding to influence and support others while they change their lives through higher education.

Working full time, raising three children involved in a lot of activities, and working toward a doctoral degree has been challenging. I would not have accomplished this goal without the love and support of my family and friends—thanks! A special thanks to my friend, Bob, who helped and supported me while we completed this program together. A special thanks to Dr. Meabon who guided me and shared his knowledge and expertise in qualitative research. Thanks also to my committee members for their valuable input and my peers, faculty, and students who participated in this study.

To the most special people in my life, my husband and my three children, thank you for all of the love and support you have given me throughout the past five years. You never complained about the hours I spent studying, researching, and writing in my office; your visits were the best part of those long, challenging days. Morgan, Colin, and Ryan—I am proud of the kind, caring young adults you have become and I hope this family experience motivates you to work hard in college and earn graduate degrees that will lead to fulfilling careers. Rodney, thank you for the sacrifices you have made and for your love, support, and encouragement. I could not have achieved this goal without you!
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List of Abbreviations

AACSB .......... American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business
AADP .......... Adult Accelerated Degree Program
ABP .......... Accelerated Business Program
ACBSP .......... Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs

CCSSE .......... Community College Survey of Student Engagement
CIRP .......... Cooperative Institutional Research Program
CSP .......... Coordinated Studies Program

FIG .......... Freshman Interest Group

IACBE .......... International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education
I-E-O .......... Input-Environment-Output
IRB .......... Institutional Research Board

MBA .......... Master of Business Administration

ONAW .......... One Night A Week
ORC .......... Ohio Revised Code
OBR .......... Ohio Board of Regents
OIG .......... Ohio Instructional Grant

SBE IRB .......... Social, Behavioral, and Educational Institutional Review Board
SSI .......... State Share of Instruction

USO .......... University System of Ohio
Chapter One

Introduction

Community colleges are the fastest growing higher education segment in the United States (Obama, 2010). They are affordable, conveniently located, open-door institutions that serve the educational needs of a diverse student population that includes first-generation college students, employed adult students who often attend college part time, students with low academic achievement levels, and students who need financial assistance. Although community colleges serve this diverse population, curricula, course schedules, instructional delivery models, and support services are often designed for traditional, full-time college students (SENSE, 2009). Learning communities are a curriculum model that blends theory and practice to create a collaborative environment that encourages students’ active involvement in learning. Community colleges have used learning communities to alter educational settings to meet the needs of their diverse population and to address the issue of attrition. Approximately 50% of the new students who enroll in community colleges leave within their first or second term (SENSE, 2009).

Research indicates that learning communities increase student persistence and academic achievement in higher education (McGregor, Smith, Mathews, & Gabelnick, 2002; “Washington Center,” n.d.; Tinto, 1998). The learning community curriculum model is designed to create an active, collaborative learning environment in which students connect with their peers and faculty. Research showed that students who participate in learning communities benefit from both social and academic collaborative experiences (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Learning communities give students the opportunity to meet people, make friends, and build a network of peers. Learning
communities provide students the opportunity to establish peer support groups that provide academic and social support both within and outside the classroom. This level of collaboration seldom exists in traditional college courses where students do not take a common set of courses together. Tinto and Russo (1994) provide evidence that students who participate in learning communities are actively involved in learning and that students learn more when students learn together. This type of collaboration is important in community colleges where the majority of students are commuting students who rarely spend time on campus outside the classroom.

There are many different learning community models that incorporate a variety of characteristics; there is no common definition or standard set of characteristics. Tinto (1998) defines learning communities as a “…kind of co-registration or block scheduling that enable students to take courses together…for two or more courses, forming a sort of study team” (p. 3). McGregor, Smith, Mathews, and Gabelnick (2002) provide a comprehensive definition of a learning community:

A variety of approaches that link or cluster classes during a given term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, that enroll a common cohort of students. This represents an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, and to foster more explicit connections among students, among students and their teachers, and among disciplines (para. 2)

Three general types of learning community curriculum models used in community colleges include: linked course, thematic cluster, and coordinated program. The linked course learning community links two or more courses during an academic term; a group of students take courses together. Linked course learning communities are often used to restructure first year college experiences. They are designed to create connections and
shared learning between faculty and students throughout the first year of college. Colleges using this learning community design link courses from different disciplines and students from different majors to create an interdisciplinary, collaborative learning experience for students (Tinto, 1998). The Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) is an example of a linked-course learning community where 60-75 students take psychology, sociology and English courses together for approximately 15 hours per week; the courses are team-taught by three faculty members (Tinto, 1998).

The thematic cluster learning community model links courses by theme or discipline; they are sometimes taught by a team of instructors. The Freshman Interest Group (FIG) at the University of Washington is an example of a thematic cluster. Groups of students in the FIG take a cluster of courses together and meet on a regular basis outside of class to socialize and discuss both academic and non-academic issues (Tinto, 1998).

The coordinated program learning community model links courses in a program, thematically, or by content; a group of students take the courses together (McGregor, Smith, Mathews, & Gabelnick, 2002; “Washington Center,” n.d.; SENSE, 2009). This model often keeps students together for the entire curriculum. Group projects and activities that foster collaboration and student involvement are often incorporated into the curriculum. An example of a coordinated program learning community model is the academy, called the Enterprise Center, at New York’s LaGuardia Community College (SENSE, 2009; Tinto, 1998). In this academy, the college links general education, technical, and career development courses; co-curricular activities; and workshops. Academy student retention is 6% higher than non-academy peers; and students’ academic
achievement in technical courses is 6% higher than non-academy peers (SENSE, 2009). This learning community research provided empirical evidence of how learning communities were used in two different educational settings; however, more empirical evidence is needed.

*Achieving the Dream* is a national nonprofit initiative designed to close student achievement gaps and accelerate success by improving results at institutions, influencing policy, generating knowledge, and engaging the public (Achieving the Dream, 2011). A critical gap this initiative addressed is fewer college graduates and the increased need for workers with higher-level skills. The 160+ community colleges in 30 states involved in this initiative have designed and implemented innovative learning strategies to improve student success. Learning communities are an innovative curriculum model some colleges involved in the *Achieving the Dream* initiative implemented to improve student success. Bailey and Alfonso’s (2005) critical analysis of practices outlined in *Achieving the Dream* identified the following gaps in community college research:

1. The majority of persistence and completion research involves four-year colleges that serve traditional students.
2. The available data provides limited detail on institutional practices.
3. The data that highlight institutional practices are based on student surveys and single institution studies.
4. Community college learning community research is limited; only 32 of 119 learning communities in a national study addressed community colleges.
The findings of this multi-case study answered research questions and addressed these gaps by providing empirical evidence on how learning community curriculum models are implemented in three community college business programs. First, the study provided persistence and retention evidence on students participating in learning communities in community colleges. Second, the findings described contextual details of how involvement, social integration, and academic integration are fused into the learning environment. The evidence provided reflects the perspectives of the researcher and students, faculty, and administrators involved in the learning communities.

**Background**

America’s higher education system is challenged with low college degree completion rates. The national degree completion rate in 2008 was 37.89% for students seeking an associate degree and 29.52% for student seeking a bachelor degree (Fingerhut, 2008). Colleges must increase the number of college graduates to keep pace with the national demand for jobs that require a college education (Miller & Ewell, 2005). The federal government, state governments, and national foundations have launched initiatives to increase college graduation rates (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011).

Community colleges are one of America’s unique contributions to higher education. Approximately 40 percent of all students enrolled in higher education institutions in the United States are enrolled in community colleges (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Community colleges have complex missions that serve the educational needs of the community, provide workforce development, offer college transfer programs, and offer developmental education (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown;
Community colleges are responsive to community needs and the curriculum is designed to train students for occupations that meet the workforce needs of the community. When community needs change, community colleges quickly adapt curricula and services to produce educated graduates to meet employment needs. Community colleges also offer general education and liberal arts courses that transfer to four-year colleges to provide students a convenient, affordable path to a bachelor degree.

Access is a core principle of community college missions. Community colleges offer students affordable access to higher education regardless of a student’s sex, ethnicity, ability, knowledge, or skills. Their open access policies have enabled community colleges to serve the largest percentage of America’s adult students, students from low-income families, first generation college students, and students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (National Center for Public Policy, 2011). Improving the success of students from these diverse backgrounds is a critical factor in increasing the number America’s college-educated citizens. Currently, students 25 years of age and older make up approximately 50% of the student enrollment in America’s higher education institutions and the majority of these students are enrolled in community colleges (Noel Levitz, 2009). The 2009 National Adult Student Priorities Report emphasized the need for higher education institutions to better understand the needs of adult learners and to develop academic programs that respond to their needs (Noel Levitz, 2009). The report showed that adult learners have different experiences, responsibilities, and needs than traditional students. Community colleges need to alter their instructional delivery formats to meet the needs of adult learners.
Because of the number of students community colleges serve and the diverse student population they serve, community colleges will play a significant role in increasing the number of college-educated citizens in America. President Obama challenged community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates by 2020 to fuel the economy with an educated workforce (Obama, 2010). The President encouraged community colleges to design new programs to improve student persistence and to graduate students in less time. President Obama introduced the American Jobs Act of 2011; this act outlines strategies to rebuild and modernize America through job creation and building an educated workforce. Again, President Obama emphasized the important role community colleges play in achieving the nation’s strategic goals. The proposed bill recommends federal financial assistance to modernize community colleges, to improve instruction, and to increase capacity to train students for today’s workforce (The American Jobs Act, 2011). The learning community curriculum model is a viable option to modernize curriculum, improve instruction, and generate the number of graduates needed to meet the nation’s strategic goals.

Higher education business programs will also play an important role in producing the college-educated workforce needed to sustain a competitive economy. The 2008 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey stated that business programs are the major of choice for incoming freshman; the largest percentage of college freshman, 14.1 percent, indicated that they are interested in pursuing a business career (Pryer & Reedy, 2008). Business programs produce accountants, business managers, financial analysts, economists, marketing specialists, and other administrative professionals. Four business-related careers, accounting, business administration,
business owner, and business salesperson have been included in the annual CIRP freshman survey since 1976 (Pryer & Reedy, 2008). In addition to serving college students enrolled in business programs, the business curriculum includes management, technology, and leadership courses, which are often integrated in other college programs. The business curriculum will continue to be an important part of higher education curricula.

**Significance to Ohio.** Business is the economic driver of Ohio; successful Ohio-based businesses provide quality employment opportunities that keep people in Ohio. Businesses provide Ohio residents with employment and working residents generate tax revenue to support the state’s economy. College-educated citizens earn higher average salaries than non-educated citizens and their higher salaries increase tax dollars for the state. Nationally, bachelor-degree citizens have increased to 31%; however, 26% of Ohio citizens hold a bachelor degree (Pyle, 2011). It is estimated that a 1 percent increase in bachelor degree graduates will generate an estimated $2.5 billion per year for the state’s economy (Petro, 2012).

Ohio spends a significant portion of the state’s resources to educate Ohio citizens. From 2004 to 2009, Ohio increased appropriations of state tax funds to support higher education operating expenses. State funds increased from $2,071,035,000 in FY2004 to $2,499,847,000 in FY2009, an approximate 21% increase over approximately five years (Grapevine 50-State Summary Table, 2009). During the 2011 fiscal year, Ohio spent approximately 23% of the state’s general funding on education (Ohio Office of Budget and Management, 2011). However, with budget challenges, Ohio has reduced state appropriations for higher education. Nationally, state financial support for higher
education declined 7.6% from 2011 to 2012 and Ohio experienced an 11.8% decline in state appropriations for higher education (Kelderman, 2012).

Ohio’s economy is negatively affected by the lack of college-educated citizens living and working in Ohio (Complete College America, 2011). In addition to tax revenue losses, Ohio faces a projected skills gap in the number of college-educated workers that will be required by 2020, as shown in Figure 1. Ohio is not graduating enough skilled workers to meet projected labor force demands.

Figure 1. Projected skills gap for college educated workers, 2020. This data was assembled by Complete College America, 2011. The data shows the proportion of students who earn a degree on time, and in 150% and 200% of the time.
Ohio’s current associate degree completion rate is also a critical issue, as shown in Figure 2. Ohio’s four-year completion rate of 16.5% is the sixth lowest rate of the 29 states that reported data on this metric.

**Figure 2.** Graduation rates for students seeking associate degree. This report was created by Complete College America, 2011. The data show Ohio’s associate degree completion rate is near the bottom of reporting states.
Ohio ranks below the United States average in the percentage of students who complete a college degree. Ohio’s associate degree completion rate was 34.87% compared to the national rate of 37.89% and Ohio’s bachelor degree completion rate was 26.29% compared to the national rate of 29.52% in 2008 (Fingerhut, 2008). Colleges lose money, federal and state funds spent on students who do not earn a college degree are of limited value, and the state loses tax revenues when students do not earn a college degree.

In an attempt to increase the number of college educated citizens in Ohio, Governor Strickland launched the University System of Ohio (USO) in the state’s Strategic Plan for Higher Education. The USO goals outlined four categories for higher education improvement—access, quality, affordability and efficiency, and economic leadership. The primary goal of this strategic plan was to increase the number of college-educated citizens in Ohio. Governor Strickland set a goal for higher education institutions to increase enrollment by 230,000 students and to increase college graduation rates 20 percent by 2017 (Fingerhut, 2008). Recently, Governor John Kasich launched a 3-Year Degree initiative to increase the number bachelor degree Ohio citizens to meet workforce demands and improve the state’s economy. Ohio’s public higher education institutions must transition 10% of their programs to three-year degree plans in 2012 and 60% of their programs must be offered in three-year degree plans by 2014 (3-Year Degrees, 2011).

Ohio also adopted a new funding model for higher education that awards institutions for achievement of strategic goals. The state moved from an input, enrollment-based funding formula to an output, performance-based funding formula. Ohio’s new funding model, currently being implemented over a three year period,
directly links 30% of an institution’s SSI funding to achievement of the state’s strategic goals. The goals focus on student persistence and graduation. While higher education institutions strived to meet strategic goals and adjust to the state’s new performance-based funding model, the state reduced higher education funding by 19.3% from FY2008 to FY2011 (Grapevine State Fiscal Support for Higher Education, 2011). Additionally, Ohio’s higher education institutions were faced with additional financial challenges this year when the state reduced the State Share of Instruction (SSI) by 13.1% for FY 2012 (Turocy, 2011).

Ohio’s higher education institutions must meet strategic goals of increasing graduation rates and reducing the time to degree completion by transitioning 60% of their programs to 3-year degree plans. Higher education institutions must meet these goals with significantly reduced funding. This challenge has caused higher education institutions to review current practices and redesign curriculum models and instruction to improve student persistence and increase graduation rates to meet the state’s strategic goals. It is imperative for Ohio’s economy that higher education institutions retain and graduate more students.

Ohio’s community colleges and the business programs within these institutions will play an important role in producing college-educated graduates necessary to expand the state’s businesses and workforce. Business programs within community colleges serve the second largest number of students in Ohio’s community colleges (Fingerhut, 2010). Business programs provide graduates who can create, lead, and support successful businesses necessary to improve the state’s economy. In an effort to attract, educate, and
graduate more students, some business programs in Ohio community colleges have redesigned curricula into learning communities.

**Statement of the Problem**

The current curriculum models used in higher education business programs are not enabling colleges to retain and graduate enough students to support future knowledge-based workforce needs. Colleges must design curriculum models that enhance student learning, improve student retention, and increase the number of college graduates.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to present findings on how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. This study provided a comprehensive, contextually rich description of each learning community based on an insider’s perspective. This study filled gaps in community college learning community research that were revealed in the literature review. In particular, it addressed the four gaps Bailey and Alfonso (2005) identified in their critical analysis of practices outlined in *Achieving the Dream*: 1) limited community college research, 2) limited details on institutional practices, 3) limited evidence from multiple institution studies, and 4) limited learning community research.
Conceptual Framework

Over 30 years of persistence research shows that student involvement is an important factor in student success and that academic integration is the most important form of involvement (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 2000; Tinto & Russo, 1994). Astin (1999) defines student involvement as “…the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). His research showed that involved students spend increased amounts of time on academics, campus and student activities, and interacting with peers and faculty. Student involvement theory, the foundation of learning communities, is the theoretical framework for this case study (Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001b; Tinto, 2000; Tinto & Russo, 1994; Volkwein, 2003). Learning communities create an opportunity for students to become involved in their college experience. Academic learning communities are curriculum models that alter the classroom environment; they create an environment in which students are involved in learning.

Learning communities promote shared knowledge and shared knowing (Tinto, 1998). Tinto (1998) suggested that students gain shared knowing because learning communities enable students to “. . . construct knowledge together—to share the experience of learning as a community of learners . . .” (p. 4). Learning community courses may be linked and sequenced to build cognitive ability. This is not easily accomplished in the traditional college course structure where students take courses in a non-structured sequence. Learning community courses that are linked and sequenced allow faculty to develop a higher level curriculum because all students have similar knowledge and skills.
Berger and Milem (1999) further examined Astin’s (1984) Theory of Involvement and students’ perceptions of integration. Their findings suggested that the role of involvement is more critical to student persistence than earlier studies suggested. The findings identified behavioral components of involvement that are critical to student persistence—faculty involvement, peer involvement, and noninvolvement. Pascarella & Terenzini (2001a) expanded involvement research by analyzing the dynamics of behavior and student perception. Their findings suggested that informal interactions with faculty influence students’ perceptions of their academic experience and have a significant impact on persistence. Their findings also suggested that the level of faculty-student informal interactions impacted student’s perceptions; moderate to high informal interactions equated to more positive ratings.

The researcher of this study created a conceptual framework using Astin’s (1999) Theory of Involvement, Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure, and Terenzini and Pascarella’s (1994) Theory of Social and Academic Integration. The first concept is that learning communities foster a learning environment where faculty interacts with students and students are engaged in active learning (Astin, 1999). The second concept is Tinto’s (1998) theory that students gained shared knowledge because learning communities “…promote higher levels of cognitive complexity that cannot easily be obtained through participation in unrelated courses” (p. 3). The concept is that learning communities integrate students into their social and academic environments (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994).

This researcher’s conceptual framework shows how a learning community curriculum model powers student involvement, engagement, and social and academic
integration. Figure 3 shows how the involvement, engagement, academic integration, and social integration gears collectively work together to power student learning in a learning community.

![Power of the learning community: Wood’s conceptual framework. This theoretical framework is developed from Astin’s (1999) Involvement Theory; Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure; and Terenzini and Pascarella’s (1994) Theory of Social and Academic Integration.](image)

The gears power each other and each gear individually and collectively powers the learning community. The learning community actively involves students in learning, encourages engagement through collaborative activities, and facilitates student integration both inside and outside of the classroom. The involvement gear is powered through active learning and learner-centered instruction. The engagement gear is powered by community building and collaboration that help students establish support systems.
The academic integration gear is powered by students learning together, group activities, and pedagogical strategies that facilitate community. The social integration gear is powered by student-student interactions, student-faculty interactions, and interactions that occur outside of the classroom. The learning community curriculum model enhances the educational environment at community colleges where involvement is limited because students seldom spend time on campus outside of the classroom.

**Research Questions**

This multi-case study answered four research questions.

1. How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate student involvement in community college business programs in Ohio?
2. How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate student social and academic integration in community college business programs in Ohio?
3. How did each learning community curriculum model used in community college business programs in Ohio align with learning community research?
4. What can be learned from three different learning community curricular models in order to improve practice and positively impact student involvement and social and academic integration?
Methodology

The qualitative form of inquiry was used to explore the meaning faculty and students have constructed from their involvement in learning communities. The multi-case study provided an in-depth description of each learning community and a collective analysis of the three models.

Various qualitative research strategies that could have been used to answer the research questions were evaluated. A survey design was considered because it could provide information to answer the research questions; however, it would not provide a record of actual behavior. A survey design would have limited the descriptive depth of the study. A historical or an archival analysis design was considered to document how the learning communities evolved over time; however, it would not have provided the perspectives of students and faculty currently involved in learning community models. The researcher did not want to identify or control the variables that were embedded in the natural environment (Yin, 1989). The researcher selected the case study empirical inquiry method to provide a current, detailed description of three learning community curriculum models implemented in community college business programs.

This case study described the real-life context of each learning community curriculum model (Yin, 1989). Multiple sources of evidence were used to study each learning community model in the natural setting. Historical elements of each model were incorporated into the study and participants’ thoughts and feelings were an integral part of the study.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the state, community colleges, and learning community models. Sampling criteria included community colleges in Ohio,
associate degree business programs, and a learning community that has linked courses and a cohort of students was used to select the colleges and the learning communities for this study. Ohio was selected because of the critical need to increase college-educated citizens to meet the state’s future workforce needs. Community colleges were selected because Ohio’s 23 public community colleges currently graduate only 8 out of 49 students within four years (Complete College America, 2011). Business programs were selected because they are open access programs that enroll a large number of students. Figure 4 shows how learning community curriculum models used in community college business programs impact the state’s workforce and economy.

Figure 4. The learning community curriculum model used in community college business programs will provide college-educated graduates to support the state’s workforce needs.
Of the 23 business programs in Ohio’s public community colleges, only five have learning community curriculum models. Of the five learning community models, one was eliminated because the curriculum combined business and medical assisting and the other was eliminated because the researcher is employed at the institution. The three institutions in this study are diverse in size, location, and students. The small sample selection was purposeful to allow the investigator to spend time connecting with the students and faculty in each learning community. The researcher interviewed students, faculty, and administrators; observed students and faculty in the learning community classroom; and reviewed documents to triangulate the findings and understand the nature of the learning community.

The researcher continued to review relevant literature throughout the study (Hatch, 2002). The researcher used triangulation strategies to address construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 1989). The researcher used multiple sources of evidence and had administrator and faculty participants review the findings in the report to improve construct validity. This case study was replicated three times, once for each learning community model, to improve external validity and increase the generalizability of the results. The researcher used this replication logic to interpret the findings across the cases and to synthesize the results (Yin, 2012). To improve reliability, the researcher followed case study protocol, used a database to store the documentation, and used NVivo qualitative software to analyze the data.
Significance of the Study

This research is important because community colleges must increase the number of graduates to fill the anticipated need for a college-educated workforce. Astin (1993) encouraged educators to alter environmental variables to move from traditional pedagogical approaches of lecturing to active, engaging approaches that encourage student involvement in learning. Berger and Milem (1999) expanded involvement research by identifying three behavioral components—faculty involvement, peer involvement, and non-involvement—as critical to student persistence. Their findings identified the need for further research on different types of involvement. Tinto (1998) encouraged higher educational administrators to merge theory, research, and practice to reform higher education. He encouraged researchers to explore new curriculum innovations and instructional practices that are being used in higher education to improve student persistence. The SENSE Imagine Success (2008) report also challenged colleges to “redesign their educational approaches to reflect the reality of student characteristics” (p. 4). Numerous studies have documented the need to alter the learning environment and learning community curriculum models are an innovative approach that changes the learning environment and improves student retention.

There was limited evidence on how learning community curriculum models are used in business programs. The learning community curriculum models in the literature included one example of a business learning community; and the contextual detail of the learning community is limited (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Tinto, 1998, 2000, 2006; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993; SENSE, 2009). The frequent references of the same learning community models provided evidence that additional learning community research is
needed. College administration needs to understand how academic learning communities are designed so that educational settings can be altered to build community (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

This multi-case study filled this research gap and provided contextual details on how learning community curriculum models are used in business programs. This study provided descriptive information on how learning community curriculum models alter the learning environment. Contextual examples of the three learning communities as perceived by faculty and students involved in the experience and as witnessed through the researcher’s observations were included in the findings. The findings provided the contextual details necessary for educators to design learning communities.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher has knowledge of community colleges, business curricula, and learning community models. The researcher understood the threat of bias when a human instrument is used for data collection and analysis and the researcher used case study protocol and emphasized participants’ perspectives to control for bias.

**Limitations and Assumptions**

**Limitations.** The qualitative data for this study were collected from three public community colleges in Ohio. The data represent three learning community curriculum models used in business programs and was not intended to represent all learning community curriculum models. The documents analyzed were limited to academic and promotional documents related to each learning community.

The case study was limited to selected participants over the age of 18 as approved by The University of Toledo’s Social, Behavioral, and Educational Institutional
Review Board (SBE IRB). The data represented the perspectives of 37 students, faculty, and administrators who were involved in the three learning communities. The participants were purposefully selected and their perspectives may not represent all students involved in the learning community. The sample size is not sufficient to allow the findings to be generalized to business or other programs offered in public community colleges.

**Assumptions.** Four assumptions were used throughout this study. The first is the assumption of honesty; it was assumed that the participants interviewed for this study shared their honest perceptions of their learning community experiences. The second assumption was that participants interviewed were representative of the persons participating in each learning community model. The third assumption is that the theories of involvement, student departure, and social and academic integration are accurate. The fourth assumption was that the statements of political, business, and educational leaders who say it is in the best interest of the United States to increase the number of college graduates are true.

**Definitions of Terms**

This study includes terms that may be familiar to the reader; however, they may have different meanings in different contexts. Table 1 shows definitions of terms used in this study.
### Table 1

**Definition of Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>Recognition from an external review agency for meeting quality standards in the areas of administration, finances, institutional and student resources, faculty and curriculum (Cohen &amp; Brawer, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>A public, accredited two-year institution; and community colleges, junior colleges, technical colleges, and two-year colleges are used interchangeably in this paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree completion</td>
<td>The rate in which higher education institutions produce graduates. For example, if 100 students began coursework in the fall of 2008, and 20 students had earned an associate degree in the spring of 2010, the degree completion rate would be 20%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental education</td>
<td>A curriculum to prepare students to take college level courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning community</td>
<td>A curriculum model in which all courses in the program are linked and a cohort of students enroll in the courses together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal arts</td>
<td>A general curriculum that provides a foundation of general knowledge that students’ build upon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement tests</td>
<td>Achievement tests used to measure students’ knowledge and skills used to place students into courses that align with their abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time faculty</td>
<td>Faculty that are employed on a part-time basis to teach; these faculty are normally working in their field of specialty and cost less than employing a full-time faculty (Cohen &amp; Brawer, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public colleges</td>
<td>Higher education institutions that rely on a significant portion of funding from the state or local taxpayers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private colleges</td>
<td>Higher education institutions that operate independent of state funding; they rely on funding by private.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>Curriculum that is designed to prepare students for employment in a specialized field; additional terms used to describe this training include technical, occupational, terminal, and career (Cohen &amp; Brawer, 2003).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This case study used empirical evidence to provide details in how three unique learning community curriculum models are used in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. This study filled gaps in learning community research and provides contextual information necessary to generate policy and practice changes in how business programs are offered at community colleges.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

History of Higher Education

Higher education in the United States has a rich history dating back to the colonial era. During this era, attending college was a privilege for select male students from higher social class families (Thelin, 2004). Colleges were led by ministers and the mission emphasis was to teach students appropriate behavior and to connect students for future business and marriage opportunities (Vine, 1997). Students were educated by tutors who were often young, privileged men who had earned a college degree; the tutors also served as pastor and maintained the facilities (Finkelstein, 1997). The curriculum emphasis was to develop the character of influential men. Degree completion was not the focus and most students left after one or two years; only a small percentage of students graduated from college (Thelin, 2004). Enrollment in colonial colleges was in the low teens and there was no formal primary and secondary education system to prepare students for college (Thelin, 2004). Academic robes, based on their social class, were the attire students wore in college (Thelin, 2004). Harvard College, founded in 1636, was the first higher education institution in the United States (Schwartz, 2003). The nine colleges from the colonial era—Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton, Rutgers, William and Mary, and Yale—remain prestigious universities today.

During the mid-1700s, Benjamin Franklin suggested the college curriculum be broadened to include practical skills in gardening and planting to improve agriculture; however, college faculty did not have the skills to teach practical subjects and the traditional curriculum remained in most colleges (Church & Sedlak, 1997). During the
late 1700s, some colleges altered their charters to receive state funds and the number of colleges in the United States doubled to 52 colleges by 1820 (Thelin, 2004). The curriculum expanded beyond liberal arts to preparation for specific professions and professorships were established (Finkelstein, 1997). While curricula at some colleges transitioned into courses about various professions, other colleges maintained a liberal arts curriculum. The Yale faculty wrote a report to defend the traditional liberal arts curriculum built on the foundation of Latin and Greek literature as an appropriate curriculum to prepare students for any profession (Silliman, 1997; The Yale Report, 1828). This report was influential in maintaining the liberal arts curriculum that remains in colleges today. The creation of social communities that connected students within academic disciplines was another theme from The Yale Report that remains in higher education today (The Yale Report, 1828). Frederick Rudolph’s (1962) *The Collegiate Way* expanded the social community theme in the creation of residential colleges and learning environments that created cross-sectional student and faculty connections.

There were significant changes in college access, curriculum, and the learning environment during the 1800s. College remained a privilege of the wealthy until 1862 when The Morrill Act connected higher education and the federal government by funding the creation of land grant higher education institutions to increase college access and expand curricula (Thelin, 2004). This act gave federally controlled land to states to build colleges to offer science, engineering, and agriculture fields of study (Johnson, 1997; Thelin, 2004; Williams, 1997). Commerce courses such as bookkeeping and business correspondence were offered during this time; however, commerce was not a field of study (Thelin, 2004). A benefactor attempted to create a school of commerce at the
University of Louisiana in 1857, but was unsuccessful (Thelin, 2004). In 1881 the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania was the first college in the United States to offer a business-focused liberal arts program (Thelin, 2004). Oberlin College, established in Ohio in 1838, removed enrollment barriers based on sex, race, and religion and was instrumental in changing the access missions of colleges (Church & Sedlak, 1997). The changes that occurred during this time are prevalent today. Access remains a priority in higher education. Business programs are one of the largest programs in higher education and business courses are an important component in liberal arts programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Colleges continue to update curricula and develop new curriculum models to improve student learning and persistence. Higher education changed significantly during the 1900s as colleges transformed from small, liberal arts colleges to universities that offered diversified technical and vocational programs (Gruber, 1997). Academic professionalism became prominent in universities and the instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor designations of rank were initiated; faculty were expected to conduct research and publish in addition to teaching duties (Thelin, 2004). In addition to the traditional pedagogy of lecture and recitation, students in graduate programs conducted research and were closely involved with faculty research and scholarship (Geiger, 1997). The college curriculum expanded to include business, agriculture, theology, law, science, and medicine to meet the needs of new professions (Gruber, 1997). Colleges incorporated electives into the curriculum; offered advanced and doctoral degree programs; and developed a four-year curriculum with freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior class designations.
Medical schools during this time had minimal admission requirements and most were not affiliated with colleges (Thelin, 2004). The Flexner Report, published by the Carnegie Foundation in 1910, recommended entrance requirements, curriculum standards, and graduation requirements for medical training programs (Flexner, 1910). This report caused some medical schools to close and others to merge with higher education institutions (Lagemann, 1997). The report was also the impetus for the creation of strict entrance requirements that limited admission to these programs. The limited admission requirements made it difficult for females and students of color to pursue medical training.

By 1940, the Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.) was the most popular field of study; however, females were often not accepted into B.B.A (Thelin, 2004). Female college graduates who wanted to pursue a career in business had limited opportunities and often attended professional schools such as the Katharine Gibbs School in New York and the Gregg College in Chicago that offered secretarial training (Thelin, 2004). College facility expansion, marketing, accreditation, and public policy initiatives were implemented in an effort to increase college enrollment. Colleges expanded buildings to include student housing, libraries, and athletic facilities (Thelin, 2004). Colleges created learning and living communities where students lived and learned with their peers and publications included images that depicted an exciting campus experience (Thelin, 2004).

Educators and legislators worked together to implement public policies to increase college enrollment. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) provided veterans returning from World War II funds to enroll in college (Servicemen’s
Readjustment Act, 1944). The GI Bill and the National Defense Student Loan program provided federal funds to students, regardless of race, to increase college access. Accreditation was used to establish common practices among land-grant institutions, recognize institutions that met specified quality standards, and to certify higher education institutions so students could receive federal funds (Hawkins, 1997; Thelin, 2004). Within three years of the GI Bill implementation, enrollment at most universities doubled. Business administration and engineering programs were popular because of employment opportunities (Thelin, 2004).

President Harry Truman created a commission to study the United States higher education system to determine if there was a way to expand the principles of the GI Bill to other constituents to increase college enrollment to address the shortages of elementary and secondary teachers (Kerr, 1997). This was the first time a president formally connected the federal government and higher education (Thelin, 2004). The Truman Commission report stated that approximately 49 percent of students in post-secondary education had the ability to complete 14 years of education and that every state should create public community colleges to increase higher education enrollment (Lerner, 1995). The Truman Commission’s report highlighted inequities, suggested policy recommendations to eliminate barriers, and set goals for higher education institutions to increase enrollment (Truman, 1947). It is credited for the expansion of the public community college system that increased access and opportunities for all people to earn a college degree (Kerr, 1997). The Truman Commission was instrumental in the creation of two-year colleges, free college access, and convenient access to college within driving
distance. The themes highlighted in The Truman Commission are the foundation of community college missions today.

The world recession in the early 1960s brought challenges for higher education; people questioned the amount of money being spent to educate a limited number of students (Perkin, 1997). There were strikes and unrest targeted at higher education and these circumstances lead to changes in policy, governance, and funding (Perkin, 1997; Moore, 1997). Legislative policies instrumental in expanding access to all students were the Brown vs. Board of Education case, The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Higher Education Act of 1965, and The 1968 Reauthorization of The Higher Education Act of 1965 (Roebuck & Murty, 1997). The Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court’s landmark case eliminated racial segregation in public education (Roebuck & Murty, 1997). The Higher Education Act of 1965 and The 1968 Reauthorization Act provided federal funds to higher education institutions and to students through a variety of financial aid (Roebuck & Murty, 1997). The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, renamed Pell Grant, was a primary source of aid that made it easy for students to attend a college of their choice (Thelin, 2004).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the number of two-year colleges and university branches continued to expand and the number of high school students declined, which caused colleges to compete for students (Thelin, 2004). In 1986, there were 12.4 million students enrolled in America’s higher education institutions, including students enrolled at 900 public community colleges (Trow, 1997). Community colleges offered degrees that prepared students for employment and transfer degrees that allowed students to earn credits for transfer to a university (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As two-year college
enrollments increased, there was concern that federal money was being spent on students who were not receiving the residential and extracurricular living and learning experience that universities offered (Thelin, 2004). A study conducted at the University of California concluded that students from two-year colleges did as well as their university counterparts in terms of grades and degree completion (Thelin, 2004).

The Federal Student loan program, started in 1965, continues to change in an effort to provide equal opportunities to higher education to all American citizens. Evidence shows that family income is a factor in determining where students attend college. Students from middle- and upper-income families attend four-year institutions at a higher rate than students from low-income and minority families; students from these segments often attend two-year colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The economic and ethnic diversity of student enrollment in higher education remains an issue that should be addressed through federal and state policy; however, during these challenging economic times the issue will probably not be addressed. Two-year colleges will probably continue to have a higher percentage of low income and minority students than four-year colleges due to their open access missions.

During the economic downturn of the 1990s, affordability of college became an issue due to changes in funding. State appropriations to higher education declined, tuition increased, and federal and state aid to students decreased (“College Costs,” 2004). Colleges began to use institutional resources to offer student aid to ensure that low-income students could afford college (“College Costs,” 2004). Private colleges offered merit-based financial aid packages to attract students with high credentials (Thelin, 2004). During this time accountability became transparent and prominent. Institutions
were required to show that public funds were spent efficiently and effectively for the benefit of all citizens who wanted a college education (Ewell & Jones, 2006).

Accountability measures focused on enrollment, demographics of enrollment, credit hours earned, and assessment of student learning (Ewell & Jones, 2006). Accountability became more prominent in the 2000s with the development and promotion of national institutional rankings (Ewell & Jones, 2006). Learning outcomes assessment data that compared institutions across five states were communicated through the Measuring Up Web site (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000). Transparency expanded with data from national surveys, licensure test results, and standardized assessments made public via the Internet (Ewell & Jones, 2006; National Center, 2000). Accountability changed from an institutional, compliance-focused system to a national, integrated, and transparent system; the focus moved from institution to the state (National Center, 2000).

During the past five years, America’s higher education institutions have faced multiple challenges. Increased government regulations and subsidy reductions have caused colleges to reduce budgets, impose hiring freezes, eliminate programs, and reduce course offerings (“College Costs,” 2004). Higher education institutions have strived to implement new technologies and distance learning, provide financial aid and support for students, and comply with federal and state regulations.

The United States has the most robust higher education system in the world. More than 3300 public and private institutions serve a diverse student population of traditional, adult, part-time, female, and students of different race (Trow, 1997). United States higher education institutions lead the world in college enrollment; enrollment of 18- to 24-year-
olds in higher education has increased from 33 percent in 1983 to 42 percent in 2006 (Braxton, Doyle, Jones, McLendon, Montgomery, & Proper, n.d.). Although enrollment has increased in America’s higher education institutions, higher education institutions have not achieved the same success in degree completion. Only 53 percent of students who seek a bachelor’s degree complete the degree (Doyle, 2010).

Students who earn a college degree earn approximately $600,000 more than a non-college graduate throughout their lifetime (Braxton et al., n.d.). The additional earnings provide an improved lifestyle for college graduates. The additional earnings of college-educated citizens provide increased tax revenues and an educated workforce to advance the nation’s economy. In addition to economic benefits of a college-educated society, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested that college graduates have higher community and civic involvement, use more advanced technologies, have children that attend college at a higher rate, and are less likely to be involved in criminal activity than their non-college graduate peers. It is critical for the United States economy that federal, state, and institutional policies and practices improve degree completion.

**Community Colleges**

Community colleges have played an important role in higher education throughout the 20th century. In the early 1900s, higher education leaders, including the founder of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, provided the vision for the creation of junior colleges with a plan to separate the first two years of colleges and use those years as college preparation years (Brick, 1994; Kane & Rouse, 2006). The primary focus of junior colleges was to teach a general education curriculum to prepare students for transfer to the last two years of a baccalaureate degree. The philosophy suggested that
students who received general education training in college would have the ability to learn skills on the job. Junior colleges gained national recognition in 1920 when the American Association of Junior Colleges was founded to support the junior college movement; this organization was instrumental in integrating junior colleges into America’s higher education system (Bogue, 1950; Brint & Karabel, 2006).

Legislative policies were instrumental in the expansion of junior colleges. The GI Bill, that provided financial support for military personnel to enroll in college to train for jobs, was credited for the increased enrollment in junior colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Junior college enrollment doubled during the mid-1940s after World War II. The curriculum expanded beyond a general education transfer curriculum to include vocational education to prepare students for employment in technical jobs within the community. The addition of the vocational curriculum brought forth a name change and junior colleges were often called community colleges. The term community college was used to refer to public two-year institutions that offered both vocational and academic transfer education and junior colleges referred to university branches (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Lerner, 1995).

During the 1960s, after the Vietnam War, community colleges experienced another increase in enrollment. In addition to the GI Bill, The Truman Commission on Higher Education and The Carnegie Commission legislative initiatives were credited for the expansion of community colleges; these commissions promoted community colleges as open access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 2006). These commissions supported local community control of community colleges (Bogue, 1950). While community colleges were being promoted as open access for all to higher
education, Clark (1994) argued that community college practices did not support open access to baccalaureate degrees. He used the term “cooling-out” to describe the practices used at community colleges to redirect students with limited academic ability toward vocational higher education. Clark (2006) argued that community colleges blocked opportunity for these students by forcing them into lower status higher education programs.

During the challenging economic times in the 1960s and 1970s, there was significant growth of community college enrollments. People needed skills and retraining to secure jobs and community colleges expanded occupational programs to train students for skilled positions. New community colleges were built in urban, suburban, and rural areas to provide convenient access to higher education (Doughtry, 2006). Community colleges offered a quality education at low-cost and students gained the skills necessary for employment in less time than if they would have attended a four-year college.

Since the 1980s, community colleges have expanded their missions, curriculum, and size. Community colleges’ complex missions serve community needs and provide a comprehensive curriculum that serves a variety of purposes in higher education. Community colleges offer vocational-technical programs and courses that prepare students for employment, academic transfer programs, remediation, and continuing education for workforce development (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2003; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Obama, 2010). Assessment of institutional services, curriculum, and student learning are integral components of institutional effectiveness plans at community
colleges. External constituents, such as professional practitioners, are included in assessment practices to annually review the curriculum to ensure it is current and meets employment needs.

The primary job responsibility of faculty at community colleges is instruction (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Faculty hold academic credentials and have practical work experience in their field. The faculty composition includes full-time faculty and also practitioners who teach on part-time basis. Assessment of student learning is an integral part of faculty responsibilities to ensure the curriculum is relevant to current workplace needs. A variety of instructional modalities, including distance learning and nontraditional course delivery methods are used in community colleges.

Community colleges serve a diverse student population that includes a variety of ages, economic backgrounds, and ethnicities. Kane and Rouse (2006) state the enrollment distribution in community colleges is 70 percent white, 11 percent black, and 11 percent Hispanic; over 35 percent of community college students are adult learners. Cohen and Brawer (2003) suggested that community college students have lower academic abilities and come from a lower socioeconomic class compared to students who enroll in four-year colleges. The percentage of minority students may be a factor in community college students’ lower academic abilities. Although community colleges serve the minority population, gaps in college enrollment and persistence based on socioeconomic backgrounds, race, and ethnicity continues to be a challenge. Students from low-income families rarely attend college; 25 percent of high school graduates are in this category (Baum & Ma, 2007). There continues to be a relatively low percentage of black and Hispanic students attending college. Students from these populations who enroll in
college face challenges in navigating higher education and succeed at a lower rate than students from middle- and upper-class families. Rendon and Mathew’s (1994) findings showed that only one-fifth of minority students who transfer from a community college to a four-year program actually complete a baccalaureate degree. Their research highlighted a variety of barriers that limit success of minority students: lack of motivation, unfamiliarity with college expectations, work responsibilities, and financial pressures (Rendon & Mathews, 1994). Colleges must implement ways to help students deal with these barriers to reduce enrollment and completion gaps in higher education.

Transfer has been an integral part of community college history since the first junior college was created. Transfer options provide place-bound community students the opportunity to complete the first two years of baccalaureate degree within their community. Community colleges establish articulation agreements with four-year colleges to guarantee course transfer. State legislative policies support transfer initiatives. Current legislative policies in some states have permitted community colleges to confer baccalaureate degrees (Floyd, 2006). Governing and legislative agencies are currently investigating this idea; the outcome could impact community college missions.

Community colleges are funded and controlled by a variety of state and local agencies. Some public community colleges are funded and controlled by the state and others are funded and controlled by a local governing body (Lovell & Trouth, 2006). Some states have a state system of vocational-technical colleges and other states have a variety of two-year institutions that include vocational-technical, junior colleges, and community colleges coordinated through a state agency and governed by individual boards (Bender, 1994).
Accountability standards for community colleges focus on persistence, program completion, transfer, and attainment of gainful employment. Standards that were created for four-year colleges do not always work as standards for community colleges. For example, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 1965 changed the target for a degree completion rate for first-time, full-time students from 200 percent to 150 percent (“Measuring 2-year Success,” 2010). This provision requires students to complete a two-year degree within three years, which is difficult for many students who are enrolled in community colleges. Community colleges provide students remediation and serve a high percentage of part-time students; this makes it difficult to achieve the three year federal success metric. Another accountability standard that causes challenges for community colleges is the shift from enrollment-based funding to a performance-based funding (Hudgins & Mahaffey, 2006). Community colleges are challenged to find ways to meet accountability measures without shifting focus from their missions. Community colleges’ administration and faculty continue to use assessment data to drive in curriculum and instruction changes to increase student success. Student engagement is measured through the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and colleges use the results to identify areas for improvement and to design curricula and services to increase student persistence and degree completion to meet accountability measures.

A strategic goal for higher education institutions in the United States is to graduate an additional 5 million students by 2020 (Obama, 2010). Through this initiative, President Obama recognized community colleges as the “…largest, fastest-growing, and most affordable segment of America’s higher education system” and he emphasized the importance of community colleges in achieving the graduation goal. Obama (2010)
emphasized that community colleges serve students of all ages and offer flexible and innovative programs that produce well-educated, highly skilled people to fill the workforce demands of the 21st century.

**Higher Education in Ohio**

Ohio has a rich history of higher education. Ohio’s first institution of higher education, Ohio University in Athens, opened in 1805 (Thelin, 2004). Religious groups opened numerous religious-focused higher education institutions throughout Ohio throughout the early 1800s. Higher education was expanded with the creation of public institutions following The Morrill Land-Grant Act. In the early twentieth century, Ohio was known throughout the United States for the number and diversity of its higher educational institutions (Ohio History Central, 2011). The state began providing funds to support Ohio’s public higher education institutions in 1878 to give all high school graduates the opportunity to earn a college degree. The state provided land in 1909 to open Miami University, the United States’ seventh public college, to educate the citizens who could not otherwise afford higher education.

The Truman Commission Report was the impetus to initiate various legislative bills to establish a public higher education system to offer the 13th and 14th grades; the bills were introduced and rejected over 12 years because of opposition from leaders of four-year institutions (Lerner, 1995). In 1958 Ohio’s first two-year public college, Barberton Technical School, opened. The Ohio governor and legislature were not generally supportive of community colleges; public speculation is that the political connections of university presidents influenced this attitude. Ohio’s technical schools continued to expand programs and increase enrollment throughout the state; programs
included engineering, health, agriculture, and business technical programs. Lerner (1995) suggested that Ohio may have been the first state to offer a business technology degree program at the public two-year college level.

After approximately 14 years of unsuccessful attempts to establish community colleges, the Ohio legislature approved the creation of community colleges; this action is reflected in Ohio Revised Code (ORC) Section 3354 (Lerner, 1995). In 1961 Cuyahoga Community College and Lorain Community College were the first two community colleges established in Ohio. Governor James A. Rhodes, who took office in 1962, led Ohio’s community colleges expansion; he emphasized the economic importance of improving the state’s higher education system to produce a college-educated workforce. He set a goal for all Ohio citizens to have access to college within 30 miles of their homes. In 1963 the Ohio legislature authorized technical institutes to be part of Ohio’s higher education system and the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) was established to provide oversight of Ohio’s higher education system; this action is reflected in Ohio Revised Code Section 3357. The Ohio Board of Regents continued to expand the number of two-year colleges with the creation of Lakeland and Sinclair community colleges and several technical institutes including Clark, Jefferson, Stark, Columbus, and Owens. In addition to the expansion of community colleges and technical institutions during the 1960s, additional four-year colleges and branch campuses opened throughout Ohio. Ohio’s Master Plan for Public Higher Education specified that community colleges and branch campuses could only award associate of arts degrees and technical institutes could only offer technical degrees in engineering, business, agricultural, and health to support community employment demands.
Following Ohio’s two-year college expansion in the 1960s, a shift towards accountability occurred during the 1970s. Senate Bill 396 changed the name of Technical Institute to Technical College in Ohio (Lerner, 1995). Ohio’s second Master Plan for Higher Education set enrollment goals, established an enrollment-based funding formula, implemented state authorized program approval requirements and a five-year program review process, and provided funds to two-year colleges for equipment. The plan promoted community colleges as an affordable way to earn a college degree and provided the Ohio Instructional Grant (OIG) to help students fund their college education. The transfer of technical credits from a two-year to four-year colleges was an issue that was not resolved. The four-year colleges accepted some general education credits, but would not accept credits earned in technical courses. During the mid-1970s, some technical colleges changed their name to community colleges to expand transfer options. A unique private and public college partnership was developed when Rio Grande Community College opened and offered the first two years of a four-year degree and Rio Grande College offered the last two years.

Ohio’s 1988 Master Plan challenged Ohio’s 24 two-year community and technical colleges to focus development of programs and training to prepare students to meet the workforce demands of the future (Lerner, 1995). In 1991, Governor Voinovich created a task force to investigate Ohio’s public higher education system and identify ways to make the system more effective and efficient. The Managing for the Future Task Force report identified ways the state’s higher education institutions could operate more efficiently. The report suggested that communities do not need to have both a technical college and a branch campus because the duplicate administrative functions and
academic programs cost the state money. The report suggested that the state create a comprehensive community college system that included technical colleges, community colleges, and branch campuses. The OBR’s response was published in the *Securing the Future of Higher Education in Ohio* report that emphasized the different services offered among the state’s technical colleges, community colleges, and branch campuses. The report identified nine service expectations that public colleges had to meet and suggested that funding be appropriated based on an institution’s ability to meet these expectations.

In 2004 Ohio’s governor established a Commission on Higher Education to address the economic needs of Ohio. The commission’s first recommendation was to create more high-skilled jobs and provide more Ohio citizens with knowledge and skills to support those jobs (Governor’s Commission, 2004). The commission implemented strategies to improve math and science skills of students, to align grades P-16, reduce financial barriers to make higher education affordable, and create transfer pathways to provide students access and affordable options for a college degree. The commission’s second recommendation was to create jobs through research and innovation that would employ highly educated, skilled workers in high wage jobs that would generate tax revenue for the state. Additionally, higher education research institutions would generate millions of dollars in research and development funds. The plan connected Ohio’s higher education system with the state’s economic development, facilitated collaboration among Ohio’s educational institutions, and created accountability measures the Board of Regents would use to monitor progress and document performance. The state enacted a universal course equivalency classification system, ORC 3333.16, required higher education institutions to remove barriers to transfer of college courses among state public higher
education institutions (Ohio Revised Code, 2010). The Ohio Board of Regents led state initiatives to create transfer assurance guides to provide two-year to four-year college pathways (Governor’s Commission, 2004).

The Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) governs Ohio’s public higher education institutions. Ohio colleges have produced a college-educated workforce to support the state’s economy for over 100 years. Ohio has 75 public and private four-year institutions including 13 public universities, 58 private colleges, 2 medical colleges, and 2 proprietary universities (Governor’s Commission, 2004). Ohio has 49 two-year higher education institutions including 24 public community and technical colleges, 23 four-year college regional campuses, and 2 private institutions. Table 2 shows the enrollment in Ohio’s public higher education institutions for the past two academic years.

Table 2

*Enrollment in Ohio’s Public Higher Education Institutions, 2009-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preliminary Headcount Fall 2009</th>
<th>Preliminary Headcount Fall 2010</th>
<th>Percent Change 2009-2010</th>
<th>Difference in Headcount 2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statewide Total</td>
<td>522,913</td>
<td>543,468</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>20,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Main Campuses</td>
<td>270,985</td>
<td>280,352</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>9,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Regional Campuses</td>
<td>49,697</td>
<td>53,315</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>3,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Colleges</td>
<td>202,231</td>
<td>209,801</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>7,570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This is the preliminary fall-fall enrollment data at Ohio’s Public Higher Educational Institutions. Data is from the Ohio Board of Regents, 2011. (http://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/default/files/uploads/data/statistical-profiles/enrollment/Preliminary_Headcount_Fall_2010_update.pdf)
Additionally, Ohio has adult workforce training centers and proprietary institutions that offer degrees approved by the Ohio State Board of Career Colleges and Schools. Ohio’s higher education institutions share library services such as books, research databases, and journals through the state supported OhioLINK technology resource (Governor’s Commission, 2004).

Ohio’s economy has changed significantly over the years from agricultural to manufacturing to the current knowledge-based economy focused on technological innovations (Governor’s Commission, 2004). Businesses that support the new knowledge-based economy require skilled, college-educated workers; this is a challenge for the state because only 34.9 percent of Ohio citizens have college degrees (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). Although Ohio provides access to higher education, Ohio’s higher education system is faced with challenges of low college graduation rates and funding issues. Ohio’s high school graduation rate for bachelor degree students is 26% compared to the national rate of 31% (Petro, 2012). Additionally, Ohio reduced funding of public education. In 2006 Ohio ranked 39th in per pupil funding among higher education institutions in the United States (Fingerhut, 2008).

The state recognized the need to increase the number of college-educated citizens to improve the state’s economy and to remain competitive in the global economy. College educated citizens earn more money, pay higher taxes, and make greater financial and personal contributions to their communities and the state. A college educated workforce is a critical factor in the state’s ability to attract and retain successful businesses that create jobs to support the economy. A strong state economy and a strong
system of higher education attract researchers and new technologies that create new
talent, businesses, and jobs (Fingerhut, 2008).

In 2007 the Ohio Board of Regents was placed under control of the governor and
the governor was given the power to appoint the chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents
(Fingerhut, 2008). Governor Strickland appointed Eric D. Fingerhut as Ohio’s first OBR
chancellor. Governor Strickland also launched the state’s 10-year strategic plan and the
University System of Ohio (USO) that emphasized four categories for higher education
improvement—access, quality, affordability and efficiency, and economic leadership.
The primary goal of this strategic plan is to increase the number of college-educated
citizens in Ohio to improve the state’s economy. Governor Strickland set a goal for
higher education institutions to increase enrollment by 230,000 students and to increase
college graduation rates 20 percent by 2017 (Fingerhut, 2008). The strategic plan set 20
benchmarks that would be used to appropriate a portion of the state's funding to public
college or universities. The new funding model moved from an input-based formula that
used enrollment to determine funding, to a partial output-based formula that used student
retention and graduation rates to determine funding. Additionally, the strategic plan
integrated multiple cost-saving strategies including elimination of redundant programs
and administrative procedures, budget reductions, and transparency of college costs and
student success rates.

Higher Education Business Programs

Business programs have been an important part of higher education in the United
States since the late 1800s (Thelin, 2004). Joseph Wharton, a successful philanthropist in
the metal industry, established the United States’ first higher education business school in
1881 at the University of Pennsylvania—Wharton School (“Wharton History,” 2011). The curriculum at the Wharton School focused on economics and finance. The University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business was the United States’ second higher education business program established in 1898 to offer a practical business curriculum focused on commerce and administration (“Chicago Booth History,” 2011). In 1898 the University of California, Berkeley’s College of Commerce, later named the Haas School of Business, was the first public higher education institution to offer a business program in the United States (“Haas School of Business,” 2011). The curriculum at the Haas School of Business integrated business and liberal arts. Higher education business programs were expanded into graduate programs in 1900 when Dartmouth College’s Tuck School of Business offered a master’s degree in business administration; the degree was titled master of commercial science (“History,” 2011). The first Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree was established at the Harvard Business School in 1908 (“Our History,” 2011). The case study method of instruction was used to teach the MBA curriculum at Harvard. The MBA is an American contribution to higher education and was first offered outside of the country in 1948 when the University of Western in Ontario, Canada established an MBA program using curriculum design and instructional principles that aligned with Harvard’s MBA curriculum (“Ivey’s History,” 2011). Harvard and other United States colleges provided funding, professors, and guidance to establish higher education business colleges in other countries throughout the mid to late 1900s.

Colleges offer associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral business programs. Business programs include areas of specialization in business administration, accounting,
economics, statistics, finance, marketing, management, information systems, and strategic management prepare business professionals (Bagamery, Lasik, & Nixon, 2005). Business programs continue to have the second highest enrollments in colleges; second to Arts and Science programs. Figure 5 shows the past five years of enrollment history at public colleges in the United States. Enrollment in business programs grew by 8.3% over this time period.

Figure 5. Number of bachelor degrees awarded by program area at public colleges in the U.S., 2004-2009. This chart was created from data available at the National Center for Education Statistics Web Site, 2011.
The business curriculum extends into other higher education programs that use elective business courses focused on interpersonal relations, leadership, teamwork, management, strategic planning, business law, information technology, and communications. Business courses are also used to train professionals in strategy, communication, leadership, finance, and management skills that are needed in all levels of an organization (“Today’s changing rules,” n.d.). The business curriculum evolves and changes as workplace needs change to prepare students to meet workplace demands (Tuleja & Greenhalgh, 2008). Entrepreneurship and small business are emerging areas of study in business programs; these programs will play an important role in educating small business owners and entrepreneurs on global commerce strategies (Maidment, 2007). An emerging trend that reflects how college business programs react to the changing needs of business is the curriculum addition of global commerce strategies and the creation of business-school partnerships that provide students the opportunity to study abroad. Partnerships among American and Chinese universities are credited for enhancing students’ business knowledge and skills and also for shifting the Chinese educational culture from a teaching-centered lecture, one-way communication approach to a learning-centered, open communication approach to learning (Auken, Wells, & Borgia, 2009).

Higher education administrators and faculty use assessment and accreditation to keep business curricula current. Some business programs require students to take the Educational Testing Service’s major field exam for business to evaluate general knowledge of the business subject area to verify end-of-major learning in business programs (Bagamery, et al., 2005). Some business programs seek specialized business education accreditation as a means to verify curriculum relevancy and to market
programs. The three primary business programs accrediting agencies are the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) (Tullis & Cane, 2007).

Business education programs provide relevant, current training that meets the needs of the changing business environment and “these programs are on the frontline in the effort to education and retool the American workforce for the 21 century” (Maidment, 2007, p. 64). Community colleges will play an integral part in producing business associate degree graduates, students that transfer to bachelor programs, and retraining the current workforce through continuing education programs. Continuing education programs will play a vital role in providing the existing workforce with new skills and strategies necessary to increase productivity necessary to be successful in today’s global economy. Community colleges use business professors and subject matter experts who work in the field to provide current training in all facets of business. Community college faculty use student-centered pedagogical approaches and current technology to prepare students for the 21 century workforce. Community college business programs produce college-educated business leaders vital to business success and the nation’s economy.

**Theoretical Constructs**

Student persistence in higher education has been a research area of interest for three decades. The current issue of low student degree-completion rates that is in the forefront of federal and state legislation and higher education administration has accelerated a demand to use the research to revamp curriculum models. Over 30 years of
research on student persistence shows that student involvement and integration are important to student persistence and degree attainment (Astin, 1984; Tinto 1993).

**Involvement Theory**

The theory of involvement suggests that student involvement has a positive impact on student development and persistence; this theory has guided curriculum design and instruction for over 30 years (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1998). Involvement theory focuses on students’ physical and psychological energy that is applied toward learning (Astin, 1999). The findings showed that involved students spend more time on academic study, are involved in campus activities, and interact with their peers and faculty on a regular basis. Students’ behavior is the critical element because there is a direct correlation between the amount of learning and personal development a student achieves in an educational program and the quality and quantity of the student’s involvement in that program. Additionally, Pascarella and Terenzini (2001b) suggested that students’ affective development and ability to think critically are significantly impacted by student involvement.

Involvement theory indicates that peer groups and faculty-student relationships are important environmental variables that impact student development and persistence (Astin, 1999). Astin’s (1999) findings suggested that peer groups have the greatest impact followed by faculty-student relationships. His findings also suggested that students’ values and behaviors change to align with values and behaviors of the group they interact with the majority of the time. Berger and Milem (1999) argued that students do not change to adopt the behaviors of the academic and social communities in which they are involved in college. Their findings suggested that the students who are most likely to
persist are those whose values and norms align with the values and norms of the college. Their findings also suggested that students select their social and academic communities based on characteristics of the communities that align with their existing norms and values. Mannon (2007) determined that students who are less socially integrated may compensate by being more academically integrated and those who are less academically integrated may be more socially integrated. These findings support the need for colleges to better serve underrepresented groups of students and to provide a variety of opportunities for students to become socially and academically involved.

Astin’s (1999) Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model provides a conceptual framework for analysis of how institutional organization, policies, and practices impact students’ college experience. The input component of this model includes students’ demographics and precollege characteristics and an institution’s policies and procedures to attract and enroll students. The environment component of this model focuses on educational programs and curriculum delivery models that enhance the academic and nonacademic experiences of students. The output component of this model focuses on academic achievement, degree completion and scores on certification exams. Higher education institutions have altered the college learning environment to facilitate student collaboration. The creation of residence halls is an example; research indicated that living in a campus residence has a positive impact on student development and persistence among all types of students regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background (Astin, 1993). Some community colleges have residence halls and can foster student collaboration through living arrangements; however, other community colleges serve only commuter students. Commuter students have limited opportunity for involvement.
with their peers because their time on campus is often limited to class and labs; this may be a factor in Astin’s (1993) research finding that attending a community college had a negative effect on involvement.

Involvement theory challenges the assumption that a curriculum comprised of a variety of courses is the best approach for student learning. Astin (1999) argued that for a curriculum to affect student learning, the delivery of the curriculum must entice student effort in order for learning and development to occur. Faculty should focus on pedagogy to generate peer interaction and involvement more than curriculum and content. This philosophy shifts the focus from teaching to student behavior. The emphasis is on what students are doing in the classroom and the amount of time and energy they are devoting to learning. Curricula should be designed to create involvement and interaction among students.

Community colleges are open access institutions that have limited control over input variables; therefore, it is important that these institutions find ways to alter environmental variables to establish communities of students. Students who attend community colleges seldom spend time on campus outside of the classroom; therefore, establishment of communities and collaborative opportunities should occur in the classroom.

**Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure**

Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory of student departure views attrition as a longitudinal process where student interactions in academic and social communities within the college environment influence students’ commitment to goal completion. The theory emphasizes that students enter college with a specific set of background
characteristics and traits that influence their social and academic involvement and their commitment to an institution (Tinto, 1993). Students’ social and academic integration within the college environment leads to a higher commitment to an institution and degree completion (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

The model of student departure focuses on how institutions influence students’ social involvement and intellectual development through redesign of the college environment and the model that documents specific attributes that may be used to change the environment (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) suggested that the model of student departure goes beyond the use of aggregate data from national databases to identify characteristics that influence student departure. The model also differentiates between institutional departure and system departure; institutional departure includes students who transfer to other institutions and system departure includes students who leave higher education. The model used two categories of withdrawal, academic dismissal and voluntary withdrawal, to analyze student departure. The findings suggested that over 75 percent of withdrawal was the students’ decision and was not due to the students’ academic ability. Tinto (1993) used four terms to describe the reasons students leave college—adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. The findings suggested that students leave because their intentions do not align with the college environment and they are often not integrated into the social and academic communities of the college.

Research supports the contention that students’ college expectations influence student departure and that academic and social integration were affected by how well students’ expectations for college are met (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995). There is also an opinion that students’ departure from community colleges may be an indicator of
student success, a positive educational outcome (Bers & Smith, 1991; Russo & Tinto, 1992). This research suggested that students’ departure from two-year colleges may be to transfer to a four-year college to achieve a higher degree or to begin employment in their field; students depart because they may have achieved their goals.

The theory of student departure emphasizes an organizational view of student departure theory. The theory focuses on “…how events within the institution come to shape the process of departure from the institution” (Tinto, 1993, p. 34). The theory suggests that colleges can modify environmental variables—classroom structure, human resources, facilities, student services—to improve the college environment. Colleges that create cohesive, collaborative environments both within and outside the curriculum increase students’ social and academic involvement (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). The classroom is the optimal place to facilitate student involvement and aid students’ academic and social integration (Tinto, 2006). However, Mannan (2007) suggested that there are significant differences in factors that influence academic and social integration based on programs of study and years in the program. Program administrators should investigate learning curriculum models that alter the educational environment to increase students’ social and academic integration and determine how to implement these models.

**Theory of Social and Academic Integration**

Bers and Smith (1991) used components of the Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1980) study to determine if the factors that impact students' academic and social integration at four-year colleges affect students at community colleges. Their findings suggested that academic and social integration affect student persistence at community colleges and that social integration had a greater impact than academic integration. Their findings also
suggested that students' level of commitment to the institution was affected by their intent, goals, background characteristics, and employment status; these factors had a greater impact on persistence than academic and social integration. They also found that community college students’ employment and family responsibilities take priority over college. Community college students’ level of commitment differs from traditional, four-year college students and this may account for the stop-out behavior of community college students. These findings supported the need for different measures of persistence for the community college population, including measures that show that student departure may be a positive outcome. These findings showed that community college students have different responsibilities and needs than four-year college students and college programs should be designed to meet community college students’ different set of needs.

Berger and Braxton (1998) provided further evidence that organizational attributes impact social integration and student persistence. Their research identified three specific attributes that had a positive effect on peer and faculty relationships: institutional communication, fairness in policy and rule enforcement, and participation in decision-making. Institutional communication affected peer relations, fairness in enforcing policies and rules affected both peer and faculty relations, and participation in decision-making affected faculty relations. Although this study was conducted at a highly selective, private research university, it expanded organizational theory by providing evidence on specific ways colleges can increase social integration. Community colleges could apply these three attributes to institutional practices to enhance students’ social integration.
Students’ interaction with faculty is another environmental factor that impacts students’ institutional commitment and persistence (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Students who are connected to faculty are often connected to other aspects of the college environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001a). This connection increases students’ involvement in college and motivates students to give more energy to learning. Faculty-student relationships empower students’ intellectual growth and encourage students’ active involvement in learning (Tinto, 1993). The more students are involved in learning with each other and faculty, the more students learn (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 2006). Students at community colleges perceive social contact with faculty as being instrumental in degree completion (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1985). Students’ background and their social and academic integration into the college environment impacts student-faculty informal contact (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980). Mannan (2001) suggested that higher education institutions train faculty to understand students’ backgrounds and to develop counseling skills in an effort to improve faculty-student interactions.

Pedagogical strategies designed to create collaborative and active learning environments in the classroom increase students’ involvement and social integration (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). Students involved in active learning took greater responsibility for their own learning and learn from their peers (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). The social constructivist orientation to student learning emphasized the importance of collaborative learning strategies such as peer learning groups, problem-based learning, and project-based learning (Stage, et al., 1998). However, Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan’s (2000) findings
did not support the construct that active learning involving group work improves students’ social integration.

The humanist orientation to student learning emphasized the needs of students to become self-actualized, particularly adult learners (Merriam & Caffarella, 2001). Adult learners have prior knowledge and experience that can enrich the learning environment (Knowles, 1984; Merriam & Caffarella, 2001). The connection of new learning with learning they already know is a critical component of learning in adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella, 2001). This connection is cyclical in nature because in addition to applying their experience to new learning, adults will apply the new learning to future work experiences. Knowles’ (1984) andragogy model of learning also emphasized the unique characteristics of adult learners that included self-direction, accumulation of experience, readiness to learn, need for immediate application of new learning to solve problems, and internal motivation. He suggested that learning environments should be more student-directed and less teacher-directed because adult learners are internally motivated. His andragogy model emphasized that adult learners are independent and self-directed and learning strategies should allow students to draw from their experiences to solve problems.

Communities facilitate interaction and integrate students into the college environment (Tinto, 1993, 1998, 2000, 2006). Communities that students are involved in within the college environment function similarly to communities that people are involved in at work, church, and other places throughout their lives. The communities that people are involved in frequently change as people move in and out of communities throughout their lives. Education communities are similar; communities students are
involved in during elementary school years are different than the communities students are involved in during their high school and college years. Although communities frequently change, communities facilitate social interactions and help people connect with others. Colleges that create social and academic communities provide students opportunities to become connected with peers and the college environment. The communities may be formal or informal and take place inside and outside of the classroom. College communities provide stability and a place for students to connect and establish support systems. This connection helps students transition into college and persist throughout college. The social relationships that students create in one type of community influence the social relationships in other communities (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

Strange & Banning (2001) provided further evidence about the importance of creating a campus environment that contributes to student success. They identified four environmental components—physical, human aggregate, organizational, and social—that are important to campus ecology. The physical components of the college environment included architecture, building and classroom layouts, and community space. The aggregate component focused on the characteristics and behaviors of the people within the environment. The organizational component focused on the organizational structure and how the entities within the organization work together to influence behavior and achieve goals. The social component emphasized the social climate and culture of an institution.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (2004) expanded Strange and Banning’s work and developed an ecological approach that colleges can use
to assess and improve the campus environment. This approach included questions that can be used to evaluate environmental factors and their influence on campus ecology. The ecological approach will help college administration understand the relationship among students and the campus environment, improve the aspects of the physical setting that have a positive influence on student behaviors, and create a healthy campus community that supports student academic achievement and personal growth (NASPA, 2004).

Higher education institutions are encouraged to assess their college environment and the levels of student involvement and integration and use the results to make policy changes to increase involvement and integration (Mannan, 2001; Tinto, 1987). Tinto’s (1993) research moved beyond stating the importance of student involvement; it identified how the educational environment can be altered to increase student involvement in settings where involvement is limited—community colleges. Tinto (1998) encouraged higher educational institutions to merge theory, research, and practice to reform higher education. Tinto (2006) suggested faculty create classroom communities for learning and use pedagogies that entice students to create knowledge together in a collaborative environment. Furthermore, he recommended that researchers explore and communicate new innovations and practices that are being used in higher education.

Learning Communities

Learning communities alter educational settings to facilitate a collaborative learning environment and create connections and shared learning among faculty and students (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). These communities provide curricular coherence by strategically structuring technical and elective courses together and they reduce the
division of disciplines and people (Hill, 1985; Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). Learning communities alter curriculum content and pedagogy and foster changes in relationships among faculty, students, and the administration (Geri, Kuehn, & MacGregor, 1999).

There are many different learning community models used to restructure higher education curricula and classroom environments; variation is the norm and there are no common set of characteristics (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). Tinto (1998) defined learning communities as a “…kind of co-registration or block scheduling that enable students to take courses together…for two or more courses, forming a sort of study team” (p. 3). McGregor, Smith, Mathews, and Gabelnick (2002) suggested the following learning community components: clustering of courses during a term, using a cohort of students, restructuring students’ time, building community, and fostering student and faculty integration.

Three academic, classroom-based learning community models are used to link courses through block scheduling to keep students together: 1) linked-course, 2) course cluster, and 3) coordinated studies (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). The linked-course learning community curriculum model links two or more courses during an academic term; a group of students take courses together. Courses from different disciplines and students from different majors are linked to create an interdisciplinary, collaborative learning experience for students (Tinto, 1998). The cluster learning community curriculum model links a cluster courses by theme or discipline. A cohort group of students take the course cluster together; the cluster is sometimes taught by a team of instructors. The cluster model targets specific groups of students such as underprepared, freshman, displaced workers, second-language, and transfer students (MacGregor, 1994).
An example is the freshman interest group model that links courses to create learning clusters of students who have the same major. This model is used to restructure first-year college experiences to create connections and shared learning among faculty and students. The coordinated studies learning community is an interdisciplinary model that links courses in a program and a cohort of students complete the program together as a cohort; this is often taught by a team of faculty (MacGregor, 1994; MacGregor, Smith, Mathews, & Gabelnick, 2002; “Washington Center,” n.d.; SENSE, 2009). This model often keeps students together for the entire curriculum and often integrates themed-based projects throughout the curriculum.

Academic learning communities are curriculum models that alter the classroom setting; they create an environment where students are involved in learning together. Student involvement theory is the foundation of learning communities because learning curriculum models shift the attention from the teacher and subject matter toward student behavior (Astin, 1999). Learning communities give students a group of peers they can identify and interact with on a sustained basis.

Learning communities increase student retention and the benefits extend beyond the classroom (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008; Tinto, 1998, 2000). They connect faculty across disciplines, improve communication among faculty, and provide professional development opportunities for faculty through the sharing of interdisciplinary ideas and content (Geri et al., 1999; MacGregor, 1994). Learning community models strengthen assessment and program development because program evaluation is incorporated into the curriculum design (Geri et al., 1999). Learning communities enhance student learning and community building.
The freshman year is a critical year for students’ involvement and social and academic integration (Berger & Milem, 1999; Tinto, 1998). Student involvement in the freshman year extends to the remaining college years (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001a). Student-peer and student-faculty involvement is important to integration in persistence in the first year of college (Berger & Milem, 1999). Learning community models designed to enhance first-year experiences are used in both two- and four-year colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001a). Two learning communities designed around first-year experiences include the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) at the University of Washington and the Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) at Seattle Central Community College; both models have improved student retention (Hallenbeck, 2009; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993). The Freshman Interest Group (FIG) at the University of Washington is an example of a thematic cluster learning community. A group of students in the FIG take a cluster of courses together and meet on a regular basis outside of class to socialize and discuss both academic and non-academic issues. The Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) is an example of a linked-course learning community where 60-75 students take psychology, sociology and English courses together for approximately 15 hours per week; the courses are team-taught by three faculty members. Tinto’s (1993) study filled a gap in student involvement and integration research by providing empirical evidence of how learning communities can be used in two different educational settings. His findings indicated that learning communities helped students build support groups. Students’ perceptions of engagement were positive and students were more engaged in their learning experiences (Tinto, 1993). The findings suggested that students learned more and persisted at a higher rate because they learned from a variety of perspectives rather
than one perspective—the teacher’s (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993). Additionally, this type of learning environment provides students a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1997). The findings support the need for institutions to construct new learning environments that connect social and academic integration and foster student involvement. This case study expanded research by providing evidence on how learning communities are used in business programs in three community colleges. The researcher’s conceptual frame was used to categorize evidence to demonstrate how involvement, engagement, and social and academic integration are thread into each learning community curriculum model.

There are significant differences between traditional college students, who recently graduated from high school, and adult college students, who often juggle work and family obligations. Tinto (1993) stated that the traditional high school student “…goes to college instead of doing something else, the typical adult learner goes to college in addition to doing other things” (p. 76). Adult learners are on campus for limited periods of time, often only to attend class and labs, due to their external obligations. Community college students, particularly adult learners, must balance multiple roles such as jobs and family; and these roles complete with college. Conflicting demands, and the stress of the conflicting demands, make it difficult for community college students to find way to balance their multiple roles (Karp, 2012).

First-generation college students are another group of students who are disadvantaged in their ability to get involved in the college environment. First generation students are students whose parents have a high school education or less than a high school education. These students often take fewer credit hours, work more hours while in
college, live off campus, and are less involved in college activities (Pascarella et al., 2004). Adult and first-generation students’ limited time on campus restricts their connection and involvement with their peers, faculty, and the college environment. The college classroom is often the only on-campus place these students connect with peers and faculty due to obligations outside of the college (Tinto, 1993). Classroom-based learning communities that reorganize curriculum and create environments that foster social and academic collaborative experiences that connect faculty and students benefit adult and first-generation students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2001b; Pascarella, et al., 2004).

An example of a classroom-based learning community model that was designed to increase involvement of students studying business is The Enterprise Center at New York’s LaGuardia Community College (Hallenbeck, 2009; SENSE, 2009; Tinto, 1993, 1998). General education, technical, and career development courses are linked and combined with co-curricular activities and workshops to facilitate integration. The learning community gives students the opportunity to meet people, make friends, and build a network of peers to support them both inside and outside of the classroom. This level of collaboration seldom exists for students enrolled in traditional business courses where students seldom take common courses together. Students enrolled in The Enterprise Center have a 6% higher retention rate and 6% academic achievement than peers who do not participate (SENSE, 2009). Participation in The Enterprise Center also benefited students who enrolled in developmental education courses; these students experienced the same outcome as students entered in college-level courses (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, & Russo, 1993).
An example of a learning community designed to keep business majors connected to each other and connected to business careers is *The Business Profession* program at Xavier University (Clark, 2005). This learning community connects the business curriculum and the business profession through non-credit workshops and activities focused on career preparation. The program keeps business students connected to their peers and faculty throughout their four years in college and has enhanced students’ business career preparation.

Indiana’s community college system is one of the first state higher education systems to use a learning community curriculum model to offer an accelerated path that would allow students to earn an associate degree in one-third time it takes the average student to earn a two-year degree (Fuller, 2010). The goal of this initiative, financially supported by the Lumina Foundation and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, is to enroll more low-income students and to increase the state’s degree-completion rate to produce college-educated citizens to support the state’s economy (Fuller, 2010). This learning community curriculum model used for these programs includes a cohort of between 12-20 students, block scheduling of four courses during an 8-week term, faculty collaboration, and a part-time staff member to provide academic support.

The *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* national initiative focused on helping community colleges use data and evidence to identify barriers and develop intervention strategies to improve students’ academic performance, persistence, and completion (Achieving the Dream, 2011). Goals of this initiative are to increase college graduates to meet workforce demands for high-skilled positions; to close student achievement gaps; and to accelerate success by improving results at institutions,
influencing policy, generating knowledge, and engaging the public. Intervention strategies launched through this initiative include advising, tutoring, supplemental instruction, success courses, and learning communities (Rutschow et al., 2011). Although the *Achieving the Dream* initiative promotes these strategies as an effective way to increase student degree completion, there are gaps in empirical evidence to support the strategies. Bailey and Alfonso’s (2005) critical analysis of practices outlined in *Achieving the Dream* identified the following four gaps in community college research:

1. The majority of persistence and completion research involves four-year colleges that serve traditional students.
2. The available data provides limited detail on institutional practices.
3. The data that highlight institutional practices are based on student surveys and single institution studies.
4. Community college learning community research is limited; only 32 of 119 learning communities in a national study addressed community colleges.

Furthermore, the *Turning the Tide: Five Years of Achieving the Dream in Community Colleges* (2011) report published the first round of results from this initiative show modest results in improvement of student outcomes. This report indicated positive results were attained in establishing a culture of evidence and broad institutional involvement across the 26 institutions; however, the intervention strategies implemented through this initiative only reached approximately 10 percent of the institutions’ student population. The evidence showed only modest improvement in students completing developmental courses. These results were contrary to research that suggested learning
communities increase student retention (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008; Tinto, 1998, 2000). One reason for the discrepancy may be because the findings are limited to the linked-course learning community model used in developmental education.

There is limited research on how learning community curriculum models enhance students’ involvement and integration in community college programs. The majority of empirical research on involvement and integration focused on traditional students who attend four-year colleges (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Berger & Braxton, 1998). Although this research provided an understanding of students’ academic and social integration in a traditional college environment, the evidence may not be applicable to community college students. The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) recommended learning community research is needed to fill the research gap across different institutional contexts (The National Study of Living-Learning Programs, 2011). This organization promotes the need for further learning community research that contributes to academic theory and best practices for higher education institutions.

The limited empirical evidence on community college student success that does exist showed mixed results in determining the factors that influence student success. This supported the need for additional research on how learning community curriculum models are implemented in community colleges. This study filled the four gaps Bailey and Alfonso (2005) identified in their critical analysis of practices outlined in Achieving the Dream. This study expanded community college research, provided contextual details on institutional practices, provided information on three programs at different community colleges, and showed how learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs.
Summary

Junior colleges, now community colleges, played an important role in transforming higher education in America throughout the 20th century and community colleges remain an important part of America’s higher education system (Brint & Karabel, 2006). Community colleges have an extensive curriculum that includes technical education for employment, liberal arts education for transfer, developmental education for remediation, technical courses designed to meet business training needs. Community colleges are flexible and adapt easily to changing economic situations to meet community needs. Community colleges have improved connection and articulations with four-year colleges and expanded educational offerings through secondary education to increase higher education access to all regardless of age, ethnicity, and economic status.

A United States strategic initiative calls upon higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, to redesign programs so that students can graduate in less time (Obama, 2010). This initiative advocated a reformation of community colleges so that citizens of all ages can learn new skills and knowledge necessary to obtain jobs. The reformation must focus on student learning and student retention. Learning as defined by a behavior change and experience, “…is a function of the interaction of the person, the environment, and the behavior” (Merriam & Caffarella, 2001, p. 81). Learning community curriculum models enhance the social aspect of learning through the use of pedagogical and andragogical strategies that facilitate student integration and involvement of with learning. Learning community environments have a positive impact on student behavior and retention.
Ohio has also set goals for higher education institutions to increase the number of college-educated citizens to sustain economic viability in Ohio. In order to meet the national and state goals, higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, must redesign curriculum models to increase student persistence. Redesigned curriculum models should increase student involvement and integration and the learning community curriculum models is a viable option. Business programs, one of Ohio’s largest enrolled programs in community colleges, will play a significant role in producing college graduates needed to expand Ohio’s business and employment opportunities. Currently, five of Ohio’s 23 public community colleges have used the learning community curriculum model to redesign business programs to improve student persistence and increase graduates. There is limited research on how these learning community curriculum models are used in business programs.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

A qualitative multi-case study was conducted to show how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. This study answered four research questions and filled gaps in learning community research revealed in the literature review. In particular, it addressed the four gaps Bailey and Alfonso (2005) identified in their critical analysis of practices outlined in Achieving the Dream: 1) limited community college research, 2) limited details on institutional practices, 3) limited evidence from multiple institution studies, and 4) limited learning community research.

The researcher used a qualitative research methodology to gain an understanding of the phenomenon—the learning community curriculum model—by studying it in a natural setting (Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Stage & Manning, 2003; Stake, 2006; Yin, 1989). This multi-case study included details of student and faculty relationships, elements of instructional design, and etic and emic perspective of the academic setting (Stake, 2006). The emic perspective is based on the meaning faculty and students have constructed from their personal experiences in the learning community and the etic perspective is based on the researcher’s observations of human behavior as it is experienced within each learning community. The end product, a report, communicated a contextually comprehensive, rich description of three learning community models used in business programs in community colleges.
The researcher evaluated various qualitative research methods including survey, archival analysis, historical, grounded theory, and case study forms of inquiry for this study. A survey design was considered because it is an efficient way to gain information from a large number of participants to answer the research questions (Fowler, 2009). However, this method would have limited the descriptive depth of the study because it would not have provided a record of participants’ behavior or an in-depth understanding of participants’ perceptions. An archival analysis form of inquiry was considered because documents could have provided detailed, contextual information about each learning community (Love, 2003). However, this strategy would have used past documentation and the researcher would not have been able to capture the personal perspectives of people currently involved in the experience. A historical form of inquiry was considered because it would have demonstrated how each learning community evolved over time (Schwartz, 2003). However, the researcher wanted the emphasis to be on the present from the perspective of students and faculty currently involved in the learning communities. A grounded theory case study was also considered; however, the goal was not to create theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). There is over 30 years of research on student persistence theories and rather than focusing on theory creation, the researcher used existing theories to develop a conceptual framework for this case study.

The researcher used a case study method to study the learning community phenomenon in its natural environment. Yin (1989) recommended a case study form of inquiry when the researcher does not want to separate the variables of a phenomenon from their context. Merriam (1998) and Yin (2012) recommended a case study form of inquiry to provide an intensive description of a bounded system such as an educational
Each learning community in this multi-case study was a bounded system and served as the unit of analysis. The researcher used a multi-case design and multiple sources of evidence to study the real-life context of each phenomenon, three unique learning community curriculum models (Stake, 2006; Yin, 1989). The evidence included both archived and current data to provide a historical and a current contextually explicit view of each learning community. This study provided a depth of contextual details about each learning community environment as experienced through student, faculty, and administrators’ perspectives.

There is not a universal definition or specific research procedures on how to conduct case study research. Yin (1989) defined a case study in terms of a research process that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. Originally, Merriam (1988) suggested that case study methods focused on the end product, an intensive description of a bounded system and analysis of a phenomenon. However, in a later book, Merriam (1998) modified the definition to suggest that “…the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in the delimiting the object of the case, the study” (p. 27). Elements from these definitions were used to structure this case study. Three bounded learning community models were studied within their natural setting to provide an in-depth description of each model so that college administrators and faculty can use their knowledge and experiences to draw conclusions on how learning community curriculum models may be used in business programs (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1998).

This case study included the three defining characteristics that Stake (1995) stated are essential in qualitative studies—holistic, empirical, and interpretive. This study
provided a holistic, contextually explicit description of each case. The empirical research was gathered through field work in the natural learning environment. This study was interpretive because the researcher personally discovered knowledge through observations and interactions with participants who were involved in the experience. Additionally, this study included the three elements that Merriam (1998) identified as important in delimiting the object of the case—particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It was particularistic because a specific curriculum model was examined. It is descriptive because the end product was a comprehensive, rich description of each model. It was heuristic because the research included experience-based techniques that are used in the three learning community curriculum models.

The researcher’s conceptual framework, *Power of the Learning Community*, incorporates Astin’s (1999) Theory of Involvement, Tinto’s (1993) Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure, and Terenzini and Pascarella’s (1994) research on social and academic integration. The contextual categories from these theories—involvement, engagement, academic integration, and social integration—were used to explore the three learning community curriculum models. This study provided an interpretive and evaluative understanding of each model (Merriam, 1998). The interpretive component is a detailed description of each model using the theoretical frame highlighted in the literature review. The evaluative component is a cross-case comparison of the how the learning community curriculum model was used in business programs. The comparative overview communicated the similarities and differences among the models and suggested generalizations about all three models.
Research Questions

The researcher used a multi-case analysis strategy to answer the four research questions and to provide an interpretive and evaluative understanding of each learning community model (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989).

1. How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate student involvement in community college business programs in Ohio?

2. How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate student social and academic integration in community college business programs in Ohio?

3. How did each learning community curriculum model used in community college business programs in Ohio align with learning community research?

4. What can be learned from three different learning community curricular models in order to improve practice and positively impact student involvement and social and academic integration?

Study Approval and Ethical Considerations

The researcher completed The University of Toledo’s research training and assessment, received approval for this study from The University of Toledo Social, Behavioral, and Educational Institutional Review Board, and submitted a research application to approval of the application. The researcher followed The University of Toledo’s human-subjects research protocol when conducting interviews and observations at each institution.
The researcher followed institutional protocol and obtained approval from the institutional review board at each of the three higher education institutions. The researcher contacted the dean of the business division to discuss the study and identify the gatekeepers that need to be included in the research approval process (Creswell, 2008). The researcher provided a description of the study and obtained a consent form from each participant prior to conducting the interviews and the observations. The description of the study provided an overview of the case study, why their site was chosen, why the researcher was conducting the study, what the researcher planned to do with the findings, the timeline, the participants, and the researcher’s qualifications, (Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002).

Prior to collecting evidence at each institution, the researcher provided prospective participants the description of the study, an invitation to participate, and a consent form. Participants included administrators, faculty, and students who are involved in the business learning community. The consent forms were collected from participants prior to conducting the interviews and observations.

The researcher’s personal characteristics—familiarity with the phenomenon, conceptual interest, and quality investigative skills—enabled the researcher to conduct a quality case study (Miles & Habberman, 1994).

**Case Study Design**

The multi-case study incorporated the three primary components of qualitative research: data, analysis and interpretation, and written and verbal communication (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The research questions and the theoretical propositions outlined in the literature review framed the study. The study provided a complete conceptual picture
with contextual content that showed how student involvement and integration are incorporated into each learning community model.

The researcher used Yin’s (1989, 2012) six sources of evidence—documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts—to triangulate data. The sources the researcher analyzed included current and archived documents such as strategic plans, AQIP reports, curriculum meeting minutes, and curriculum guides; and documents of firsthand experiences such as observation and interview notes that were composed during the study (Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002, Love, 2003; Merriam, 1998). These documents were used to triangulate data discovered in interviews and during the observation. This triangulation strategy using cross verification using independent sources minimized bias and added credibility to the study (Yin, 2012).

The researcher completed field work at each institution to conduct interviews, perform observations, and collect documents to obtain quality data for this study. The interviews with administrators, faculty, and students’ allowed the researcher to learn participants’ perceptions of their learning community experiences. The researcher physically experienced each learning community through observation of faculty and student behaviors in the learning community environment. These experiences and the multiple sources of evidence provided the researcher an in-depth understanding of each model and a chain of evidence that was used to produce a quality case study (Yin, 1989).

The multiple-case design enabled the researcher to replicate the study at each of the three institutions and complete a cross-case analysis to search for patterns across the cases (Yin 2003, 2012). Theoretical perspectives were used to develop *The Power of Learning* conceptual framework, to develop the research questions, to design the case
study, and to analyze the data; this increases the generalizability of the findings (Yin, 2012). The researcher used Yin’s (1989) case study method to design this multi-case study, and developed a slightly modified version as shown in Figure 6. The end product was a comprehensive, contextually descriptive report of three learning community models.

Figure 6. Multi-case study method. A slightly modified diagram of Yin’s (1989) Case Study Method.
Site and Participant Selection

A purposeful sampling was used to select specific learning community curriculum models used in business programs in Ohio public community colleges. Criteria used to select the institutions: Community colleges in Ohio, associate degree business programs, and a learning community curriculum model. The definition used to describe the learning community model was linked courses and a cohort of students. The researcher sent an email to the business deans in Ohio’s 23 public community colleges asking if a learning community curriculum model was used in their business programs. Of the 23 business programs in Ohio’s public community colleges, only five used a learning community model. Of the five learning community models, one was eliminated because the curriculum combined business and medical assisting and the other was eliminated because the researcher is employed at that institution. The institutions that were selected for this study are diverse in size, location, and the number of students.

Purposeful sampling was used to select people who are connected to the learning community to interview. First, the researcher selected an administrator or faculty member who coordinated the learning community to interview. Second, the researcher selected one or two faculty members to interview. Third, the researcher used a snowball sampling approach to select four to five students who participate in the learning community to interview (Creswell, 2008). The snowball sampling occurred during the collection of evidence stage; the researcher sought faculty and student participant recommendations from the learning community administrator. A focus group interview approach was used to elicit information from student participants in a controlled environment. As the
research evolved, the researcher contacted the administrator and faculty to clarify and confirm information that was discovered.

Purposeful sampling was also used to select the learning community class that was observed. The observation allowed the researcher to spend time in the natural setting of each learning community observing students and faculty.

**Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

The researcher used three qualitative research methods—document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews—to collect data and learn about each business learning community model. First, the researcher collected a variety of academic documents to learn about the college and the learning community. Second, the researcher interviewed administrators, faculty, and students involved in the learning community. Third, the researcher conducted an observation of a learning community class. The circular three-step data collection process as shown in Figure 7 allowed the researcher to adjust the sequence of data collection according to the needs of the researcher and the participants.

![Figure 7. Three-step data collection process.](image-url)
This approach helped the researcher understand perceptions, behaviors, and the strengths of each learning community model. The researcher used the multiple sources to triangulate data to reduce bias and improve generalizability. This process was replicated for each of the three learning communities.

To launch the data collection, the researcher gathered and reviewed information about the college, business programs, and the learning community prior to visiting the campus. The researcher met virtually or in-person with the learning community administrator to learn about the college and the learning community curriculum model. The researcher sought participant referrals and coordinated the interviews and observations through the learning community administrator.

**Document Analysis**

The researcher collected a variety of documents to learn about each case. Hatch (2002) promoted the use of secondary documents as unobtrusive data that “provide insight into the social phenomenon under investigation without interfering with the enactment of the social phenomenon” (p. 116). The researcher collected documents during campus visits, through email correspondence with faculty and administrators, and from college Web sites. The documents included strategic plans, Academic Quality Improvement Process (AQIP) Plans, catalogs, brochures, curricula, syllabi, instructional materials, program orientation materials, program policy and procedure materials, and assessment reports to learn about the college and the learning community (Love, 2003). The researcher assessed the authenticity of each document by investigating where and why the document was originated, who composed the document, and the context for which it was composed (Merriam, 1998). This data within these documents provided
insight into the values of each institution and told a story without participant interpretation (Hatch, 2002). The documentation also included the researcher’s firsthand experiences such as observation and interview notes that were composed during the study (Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002, Love, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

The researcher reviewed the documents in anticipation of uncovering new data (Merriam, 1998). As the documents were reviewed, the researcher made notes of questions and further data collection needs. The researcher used the documents to find information, fill information gaps, and to verify information identified to in the interviews and observations. This data triangulation technique insured that data and themes were tested using more than one method (Denzin, 1970).

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted to obtain personal interpretations of administrators, faculty, and students who have experienced the learning community environment (Stake, 1995). After obtaining a signed consent form from each participant, the researcher conducted formal interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, yet flexible enough to adapt to unexpected directions in the conversation. The researcher used a list of open-ended questions to guide the interviews. The list included descriptive, probing, and structural questions. Descriptive and neutral questions were asked at the beginning of the interview so the researcher could establish rapport with the participant (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). The participants were asked to talk about their experiences in the learning community. Probing questions were asked to seek clarification on a topic or idea that was discovered during an interview so the researcher could gain an in-depth understanding (Hatch, 2002). Structural questions were asked to gain insight into the
contextual characteristics of the learning community (Hatch, 2002). The researcher avoided yes-or-no and multiple-part questions. The questions were framed using terminology that was familiar to the participants so the questions were easy to understand (Hatch, 2002). The researcher generally used the same interview sequence and questions; however, the conversation guided each interview and the questions and sequence were slightly altered as needed.

After obtaining a signed consent form from each participant, the researcher conducted the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview, provided an overview of the questions, and became acquainted with the interviewees (Altrichter, Feldman, Posch, & Somekh, 1993). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The interview guide and questions for the learning community administrator is shown in Appendix B, faculty in Appendix C, and students in Appendix D. The researcher used the same interview questions for the different levels of participants—administrators, faculty, and students—to seek a common understanding and to identify differences in interpretation (O’Donoghue, and Punch, 2003). Denzin (1970) called this triangulation technique a test of internal consistency. The researcher verified internal consistency by comparing the results of the sets of questions.

Individual interviews were conducted with administrator and faculty; and a focus group interview was conducted with students who were enrolled in the learning community. The focus group participants were already connected through their learning community experience and the participants were comfortable engaging in discussion with the research. The focus group interview allowed the researcher to capture ideas and
attitudes by observing the interaction among the participants during the interview (Kelly, 2003).

The interviews were conducted in a comfortable place with minimal distractions. The researcher reviewed the interview guide with the participants and addressed participant’s questions prior to beginning each interview (Creswell, 2008). The interview guide communicated the purpose of the study, the interviewer’s intentions, ground rules, and highlighted the questions. The review of the interview guide and the process allowed the researcher to establish a rapport with the participants prior to asking questions. The researcher asked permission from the participants to record the interview to preserve the data. The researcher engaged in an interactive conversation with the participants so that the interview was more than a question and answer session. The researcher used both verbal and non-verbal communications to show interest and appreciation. The researcher kept the conversation and questions focused on the case and kept track of the time (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 2006). The researcher engaged in reflection with participants to identify commonalities and differences in perspectives among the participants and to confirm accuracy of data (Hatch, 2002).

The researcher took detailed notes during the interview to document exact words, specific behaviors, and additional questions (Stake, 1995). Immediately following each interview, the researcher noted personal reflections; comments on relations with participants; thoughts about research questions, theory, and emerging categories and themes (Saldana, 2009). The interview notes of each interview were stored in the case study database for use in analysis and in writing the report.
The researcher audio recorded each interview and had the recordings transcribed by a transcriptionist to reduce researcher bias and improve construct validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1989). The transcripts were uploaded into NVivo qualitative software for storage and analysis to improve reliability (Yin, 1989). The researcher used an interview log shown in Appendix E to document the location, case, date, and details of each interview and to write analytic memos for each interview (Merriam, 1998).

**Observations**

The researcher conducted an observation of each learning community to capture firsthand knowledge of the learning environment. The researcher was a non-participant observer and used observation protocol to reduce subjectivity and ensure quality data (Cohen, & Manion, 1980). The observation gave the researcher the opportunity to see, hear, and sense the environment through observation of student and faculty behaviors and interactions in the natural environment (Yin, 2012). During the observation, the researcher focused on the setting, the pedagogy, and student and faculty involvement and interactions. The researcher watched for elements such as active learning, collaboration, student-to-student relations, student-faculty relations, and engagement. The researcher was a nonparticipant observer and took notes during the observation (Creswell, 2008).

The researcher has over 12 years of faculty and classroom observation experience and has the skills to focus on important details, take descriptive notes, and document behaviors as they occur during the observation. The researcher used an observation field note log shown in Appendix F to take notes during the observation (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). The researcher noted explicit details of the physical environment and the interactions during the observation to document descriptive details to validate
interpretations and reduce subjectivity. The field notes included the number of people present, sex distribution, observational notes of interest, quotations, a diagram of the physical setting, and the researcher’s reflection (Merriam, 1998).

After each observation, the researcher reviewed the field notes and added details of the observation and reflections to the raw data (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995). This reflection technique reduced the loss of details due to short-term memory and it reduced bias (Altrichter et al., 1993). These observations were used to triangulate data from interviews and documents. The researcher replicated the observation process as closely as possible for each case.

**Coding and Data Analysis**

The coding and analysis processes were completed throughout data collection. As documents were collected, the researcher coded the documents by college, type of document, and people to classify the data for storage and retrieval purposes. The researcher analyzed data as it was collected; this allowed the researcher to begin to answer the research questions, clarify information, and generate additional questions to ask in future interviews to test analogies and confirm understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This continual analysis helped the researcher manage the large quantity of evidence that was collected.

Stake (1995) suggested that case study researchers use both direct interpretation and coded interview and observation data for analysis. The researcher used direct interpretation through observation, reflection, synthesis, and analysis throughout the study. The researcher analyzed and interpreted the data using the analytical lens of the concepts and constructs highlighted in learning community research (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2009). The data, collected formally and informally, provided meaning to the
researcher as it was collected and gave the researcher an impression of the learning community (Stake, 1995). Saldana (2009) also suggested that coding is cyclical and requires multiple cycles of review because “recoding further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts grasping meaning” (p. 8). The researcher used a four-cycle coding and analysis process to review data multiple times.

As data were collected, the researcher applied attribute codes to classify interviews, observations, and documents so that they could be stored in a database for easy retrieval (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2009; Stake, 1995). Multiple levels of attribute codes were used to identify descriptive information and demographic characteristics of each data set. The first level of attribute codes identified the case. The second level of attribute codes identified the type of evidence. The third level of attribute codes identified specific characteristics for each piece of evidence such as the date, place it was collected, and who collected the information. The fourth level of attribute codes included the researcher’s thoughts and opinions. The attribute codes were used to title the data as it was uploaded into NVivo data analysis software.

The researcher designed the four-cycle coding and analysis process shown in Figure 8 to code and analyze the data for each case.
During the first-cycle coding process, the researcher used a holistic coding process to read and analyze the data as a whole to see the bigger picture (Saldana, 2009). The researcher read the 100+ pages of interview transcripts and observation documentation and coded common words and phrases into nodes. When data applied to more than one node, the researcher used the primary meaning of the statement to code the data into a node rather than coding each datum into multiple nodes. The researcher added annotations to note connections among the data to themes and important ideas or thoughts (Creswell, 2008). The researcher also read the transcripts and documents a second time to verify the first-cycle coding and to look for commonality among the codes. After the first-cycle coding process was completed, the researcher used NVivo’s query function to create a list of codes for each learning community. Meaning was acquired through direct interpretation of data and through aggregation of data (Stake, 1995).
During the second-cycle coding process, the researcher used NVivo to query the data into word frequency distributions, tag clouds, and tree maps to perform a second data analysis to identify codes. The researcher used NVivo’s word and frequency distribution feature to cross-check the data, extract important statements, and create categories. The researcher reviewed the data for various interpretations and looked for patterns and linkages among the data (Stake, 1995).

During the third-cycle coding process, the researcher compared the categories identified in the first-cycle coding with categories identified in the second-cycle coding to search for consistencies and patterns. The researcher logically pieced similar data together to identify categories (Yin, 2012). During the fourth-cycle coding process, the researcher conducted a final review of the data and the comparison categories brought forth the major themes of the case study. The researcher also used a comparative analysis method to conduct a cross-case analysis of the data among the three cases to identify themes among the cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The researcher also used a pattern-matching analysis method to compare the empirically based patterns identified in the study with the theoretical propositions identified in the literature (Yin, 2012). The matrix of evidence shown in Appendix G was used to align the themes from this multi-case study with theoretical propositions identified in the review of literature (Saldana, 2009; Stake, 1995). For example, the literature suggested that student involvement with peers and faculty is increased in learning communities; each model was analyzed according to this proposition to determine if there was evidence of peer and faculty engagement (Astin, 1999; Tinto; 2006; Yin, 1989). This alignment process was conducted to enhance the relevancy of the
data and corroborate previous research (Miles & Hauberman, 1994). The use of multiple triangulation techniques provided a balanced picture of each case and displayed contradictions that may have a negatively impacted the interpretations (Altrichter et al., 1993).

The researcher used the NVivo database to maintain electronic documents and audio files, coding nodes, and queries that were used for data analysis and to write the report. The findings, themes, extracted meanings, and supportive data the researcher looked at for each learning community model are presented separately in the report.

**Composing the Case Study Report**

A comparative analysis structure, using theoretical propositions, was used to present the findings of each case. The findings include a narrative discussion of the learning community, participants, business curriculum, pedagogy, and themes. As Stake (2006) suggested, the report was designed to “display the unique vitality of each case, noting its particular situation and how the context influences the experience of the program…” (p. 39). The report tells the story of each case with contextual details and illustrations as supported by authenticated findings (Stake, 2006). The details reduced speculation and bias.

Themes were used to present information in an organized manner to help readers relate the information to their experiences. The researcher’s personal perspectives were incorporated into the interpretation and writing of the report (Stake, 1995). However, the report included the personal perspectives of administrators, faculty, and involved in each learning community curriculum model. In addition to providing a contextual description of each case, the report included a brief cross-case comparison of the three cases. The
report included generalizations that are apparent across the three cases and also highlighted the differences (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2006).

Validation

The researcher understood that case study methodology is subjective and employed strategies to be open to different perceptions and maintained disciplined interpretation to reduce subjectivity. The researcher was sensitive to bias constructed through theoretical review of literature, professional experience, and personal experience and used triangulation strategies to control bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Triangulation strategies included the use of multiple cases to replicate the study, multiple sources of evidence within each case, and a pattern matching across the multiple cases. The researcher also used a comparative analysis process to compare the research themes with theoretical propositions to validate the findings.

The researcher reviewed and coded the data throughout the study and used sources such as interviews, observations, or documentation to triangulate the data (Stake, 1995). The researcher sent a draft of the findings to the administrator and faculty participants for each case and asked them to review the findings for errors of fact (Stake, 1995; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The participant review process reduced bias and increased the accuracy and construct validity of the study.

The researcher focused on particularization more than generalization (Stake, 1995). The researcher studied each case in-depth to understand the context of each learning community model. The particular features of each learning community model were reviewed through documents, observed in the natural learning environment, discussed with individuals who have experienced the learning community, interpreted,
and communicated in the case study report. The detailed information included in the report gives readers the opportunity to form generalizations based on their knowledge and experiences.

**Summary**

The researcher used a qualitative methodology to gain a personal, comprehensive understanding of how three learning communities were used in business programs in community colleges. Interviews with administrators, faculty, and students provided the researcher a variety of perspectives. Comments shared by participants were incorporated into the report to provide detailed perspectives. Observations allowed the researcher to further understand the behaviors that occurred in each learning community. The researcher used substantial evidence to present a holistic, in-depth description of the three learning community models.
Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

The findings of this multi-case study showed how three learning community curriculum models were implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. The three colleges included in the case study were selected from among Ohio’s 23 public community colleges using the following criteria: a community college in Ohio, offered an associate degree business program, and used a learning community curriculum model to offer the business degree. The definition used to describe the learning community model was linked courses in business programs and a cohort of students. Of the 23 business programs in Ohio’s public community colleges, only five used a learning community model. Of the five learning community models, one was eliminated because the curriculum combined business and medical assisting and the other was eliminated because the researcher is the dean of Business at that institution, and started a business learning community at her institution. This left three institutions that met the criteria for the study. The institutions included in the multi-case study were diverse in size, location, and the number of students. The findings of these case studies provided a comprehensive description of how three learning community models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. The findings were derived from the narrow lens of select administrators, faculty, and students directly involved in the experience and the researcher’s interpretation of the interviews, classroom observation, and review of documents.
The three public community colleges in this study are all accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Although the colleges are different in size and demographics, they are similar in mission, values, and business curriculum. The missions of these institutions are to provide a quality higher education that is affordable and accessible to all individuals. The educational programs offered at these institutions included associate degrees, transfer courses, developmental education courses, and technical training for workforce development.

Four research questions were used to learn how the learning community curriculum models were implemented in business programs:

Research Question One: How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate involvement in community college business programs in Ohio? In this section, the researcher described how three curriculum models facilitated student involvement, discussed the pedagogy used in each learning community, and analyzed administrator, faculty, and student perceptions of the learning environment.

Research Question Two: How did each learning community curriculum model shape the learning environment to facilitate social and academic integration in community college business programs in Ohio? In this section, the researcher described how each learning community facilitated social and academic integration among students and faculty. The researcher analyzed student and faculty perceptions of social and academic integration.

Research Question Three: What can be learned from three different learning community curricular models in order to improve practice and positively impact student
involvement and social and academic integration? The data showed curriculum design strategies and instructional methods these colleges have used to create learning environments that foster involvement, social integration, and academic integration. The researcher discussed the design details of the three learning community curriculum models. The researcher described pedagogical best practices that built community among students and facilitated active learning and collaboration, and analyzed administrator, faculty, and student perceptions on how these strategies impacted learning and success.

Research Question Four: How did each learning community curriculum model used in community college business programs in Ohio align with learning community research? The researcher compared the data from this multi-case study to the theory of involvement and the interactionalist theory of student departure that focused on social and academic integration. These theories are the foundation of learning communities. The analysis and comparison of the singular cases and a cross-case comparison will be covered in Chapter 5.

Identification of Themes

The researcher used three qualitative research methods—document analysis, classroom observations, and interviews—to collect data and learn about each of the three learning community curriculum models used in business programs. Three singular case studies were conducted. The data from each case were stored, coded, and analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The researcher collected a variety of documents to learn about each case. These documents included strategic plans, Academic Quality Improvement Process (AQIP) Plans, catalogs, brochures, curricula, syllabi, instructional materials, and program
orientation materials, and program policy and procedure materials to learn about the college and the learning community. The documents were collected during campus visits, through email correspondence with faculty and administrators, and from college Websites. As the documents were collected, the researcher read the information and made notes of questions and further data collection needs.

After the preliminary document analysis, the researcher conducted a classroom observation of each learning community to experience the learning environment and to observe human behavior within the environment. The researcher conducted interviews with administrators, faculty, and students to gain a personal perspective from individuals who have experienced each learning community. The theories of student involvement, social integration, and academic integration served as the foundation for the questions that were used in administrator, faculty, and student interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist and the transcripts were imported into NVivo for coding and analysis.

The three research methods were used to triangulate and validate data through cross verification of information. The researcher also validated the data through multiple sources in each case study. The researcher used Yin (2003)’s case study triangulation technique to ask the same question of three different resources and to determine if the answers from the three sources were similar. If the answers from multiple sources were similar, the researcher assumed that the finding was valid. In addition to using three singular cases and three sources of evidence for each case, the researcher also used theme-to-theory comparisons to reduce bias and increase the credibility of the analyses.
The coding and analysis processes were completed throughout data collection. As documents were collected, the researcher coded the documents by college, type of document, and people to classify the data for storage and retrieval purposes. The researcher used a four-cycle coding process to code the data for each case. A thorough description of the coding and analysis process is described one time and then the process is briefly mentioned in the findings of each case. The researcher conducted the four-cycle coding and analysis process shown in Figure 9 for each case.

![Figure 9. Coding and analysis process.](image)

During the first-cycle coding process as described in Figure 9, the researcher read interview transcripts and observation documentation and coded common words and phrases into nodes. The researcher analyzed 13 interview transcripts that included comments, descriptions, and interpretations of 39 participants involved in the three learning communities. Of the 39 participants, there were five administrators, five faculty members, and 29 students. When data applied to more than one node, the researcher used
the primary meaning of the statement to code the data into a node rather than coding each
datum into multiple nodes. The researcher added annotations to make connections among
the data. The researcher also read the transcripts and documents a second time to verify
the first-cycle coding and to look for commonality among the codes. The researcher then
used NVivo’s query function to create a list of codes for each learning community. An
example of a partial list of codes for Model A is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample List of Codes Identified in First-cycle Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodates work and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in less time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher then combined the codes into categories to combine the data to a
manageable amount of information and to identify themes. An example of how the 27
codes for Model A were combined into five categories is shown in Table 4.
Table 4

*Sample of Category Identification from First-cycle Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories from First-cycle Coding</th>
<th>Codes identified during First-cycle Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Learning, Student interaction, Specialize curriculum, Environment, Face to face connection, Motivated students, Work together, Further education Level of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
<td>Small class size, Accelerated pace, Degree in less time, Accelerated pace, Accommodates work and family, Faculty communication, Convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>Student dynamics, Non-traditional students, Support each other, Student connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>Socialization, Networking with peers, Social gatherings, Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Pedagogy, Little lecture, Approaches to teaching, Projects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the second-cycle coding process, the researcher used NVivo to query the data into word frequency distributions, tag clouds, and tree maps to perform a second data analysis to identify codes. The researcher used NVivo’s word and frequency distribution feature to cross-check the data, extract important statements, and create categories. An example of a second-cycle coding matrix that was created using Model A data is shown in Table 5.
Table 5

Sample of NVivo Frequency Distribution Analysis used to Identify Categories in Second-cycle Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Categories from Second-cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>student engagement, get togethers, socialization pedagogy, small groups, student dynamics, smaller classes, support each other, communicate/network peers, faculty communication, type of work</td>
<td>Involvement / Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>size small, take several sem/two in 5 week sessions, location, interaction in classes, accelerated</td>
<td>Pedagogy / LC Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>accelerated, limited amount of time to learn, shorter time to completion special advisor, earn degree sooner, works for schedule, type of homework</td>
<td>LC Model / Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>accelerated</td>
<td>LC Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accelerated</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>f2f, connection with students, no traditional age students, experienced teachers, job</td>
<td>LC Model / Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>want</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the third-cycle coding process, the researcher compared the categories identified in the first-cycle coding with categories identified in the second-cycle coding to search for consistencies and to develop the themes. During the fourth-cycle coding process, the researcher conducted a final review of the data and the comparison categories brought forth the major themes of the case study. An example of the themes identified in Model A is shown in Table 6.
Table 6

*Sample of Themes Resulting from Fourth-cycle Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model A Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This four-cycle coding, analysis, and theme identification process was repeated for each of the three case studies. In Model A, 27 codes were identified during the first-cycle coding process and five themes emerged. In Model B, 26 codes were identified during the first-cycle coding process and five themes emerged. In Model C, 24 codes were identified during the first-cycle coding process and five themes emerged.

The researcher conducted three singular case studies using this coding and analysis process to identify themes and answer the research questions. To add credibility to this study, the researcher used a comparative analysis process to compare the data from the multiple cases with the theoretical propositions identified in the literature in Chapter 2. The researcher used multiple colleges, three learning community models in business programs, and a cross examination of the findings with theories to triangulate information and enhance the validity of this study.

The researcher used the coding and analysis process described above to identify themes for each case. The findings, themes, extracted meanings, and supportive data the researcher looked at for each learning community model are presented separately.
Case Study of Learning Community Model A

Participant overview. The first college in the study was one of Ohio’s first community colleges and opened in 1963. This multi-campus college served over 55,000 students each year at its six campuses. Based on enrollment, it is Ohio’s fourth largest higher education institution and ranks seventh nationally in the number of associate degrees awarded by a community college. The college is involved in the Higher Learning Commission’s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), the League for Innovation in the Community College, and the Achieving the Dream national initiative.

The focus of the college’s mission is to provide a high quality, accessible, and affordable education to students (AQIP Systems Portfolio, 2012). The college offered approximately 144 degree and certificate programs and 1,900 credit courses to train students to meet the workforce needs of the community (Web site, 2012). These courses and programs are offered at the lowest tuition rate in Northeast Ohio (Academic Overview, 2012). The college has a five-year strategic plan that guided the institution in fulfillment of its mission and aligned the institution with state goals. One of Ohio’s key action plans is to close gaps in completion rates by reducing the time it takes to complete a college degree (Ohio Completion Task Force, 2012). The college’s strategic initiatives included broadening its reach in the community and reducing the time it takes students to complete a degree. An action step to broaden its reach was to expand scheduling options and flexibility to increase college participation (Strategic Plan, 2012). The associate dean stated that “the downtown area was identified as a way to broaden the college’s reach” (Ellison, personal communication, April 13, 2012).
The associate dean indicated that a study on the higher education needs of people who work in the downtown area was conducted and the findings showed that people employed in downtown businesses were interested higher education opportunities, particularly in business (Ellison, personal communication, April 13, 2012). To meet the institution’s enrollment expansion strategic goal and the needs of the downtown community, a Business administrator designed the Accelerated Business Program (ABP). The ABP was designed to broaden the college’s reach and to reduce students’ time to degree completion. The ABP was structured to offer students, particularly in the downtown area, a convenient way to take college courses and to earn an Associate of Applied Business Degree in Business Management (A.A.B.). The ABP was launched in the fall of 2010-2011. The associate dean indicated that the administrator who developed the ABP and the manager who was going to manage the ABP both left the institution the summer prior to the ABP launch. Students enrolled in the ABP complete a comprehensive business curriculum that teaches skills in problem solving and quantitative analysis and knowledge in accounting, marketing, purchasing, and economic and legal aspects of business (ABP Web Site, 2012). The program learning outcomes are shown in Table 7.

The associate dean stated “the ABP was designed to give students who worked full-time the opportunity to return to college and complete an associate degree.” The ABP helped meet the community’s need to increase the number of college educated citizens in Cleveland. Currently, only 8 percent of Cleveland residents hold a bachelor’s degree and 6 percent hold an associate degree. This percentage is significantly less than the Ohio’s
Table 7

Model A Business Management Program Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Use listening, non-verbal, written, and verbal communication skills utilizing appropriate technology with internal and external customers to meet the organizations objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working with Others</strong></td>
<td>Develop and maintain effective working relationships within a team or organization among diverse people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Service</strong></td>
<td>Provide quality and timely customer service that ensures customer satisfaction to both internal and external customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Management/Professional</strong></td>
<td>Effectively utilize personal management skills such as project management, organization, leadership, professionalism, and time management to meet or exceed the organizations objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
<td>Use various systems and software to maximize the efficiency of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Solving</strong></td>
<td>Use problem solving tools and principles of quality to identify and enhance an organizations’ performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math/Financial</strong></td>
<td>Apply general math and accounting skills to prepare, record, and track revenue and expenditures and other performance measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Business</strong></td>
<td>Apply basic knowledge of business principles and practices to achieve competitive advantage in the global marketplace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

average of 22.5 percent and the national average of 37.4 percent of residents that hold a bachelor’s degree (Higher Ed Compact Background Paper, 2011). This college joined the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland to help students enroll in college and earn a college degree. This group projects that a 1 percent increase in college graduates will increase the region’s economic output by 2.8 billion a year (Higher Education Compact, 2012). The associate dean stated the ABP “provides a flexible option for students who have to work to earn a degree” (Ellison, personal communication, April 13, 2012).

Currently, the A.A.B. in Business Management is the only program offered in the ABP learning community format at the downtown center. However, students who are not seeking an A.A.B. can enroll in the accelerated courses offered in the ABP. These
courses are offered at an accelerated pace, usually five to ten class sessions, and the courses are scheduled so that students can take one class at a time and finish the A.A.B. degree requirements in less than two years. The ABP courses are offered in three formats: traditional (seat), hybrid (part seat/part online), and online. The associate dean mentioned that the original plan was to begin students in traditional (seat) courses and then progress to hybrid courses and then to online; however, students enrolled in the delivery format that best meets their needs. The associate dean mentioned that program attracted working students who are motivated to complete college at an accelerated pace. A faculty participant stated the ABP students “…typically tend to be a little bit more focused because they have already made the commitment to go through the accelerated program.”

The ABP admission requirements include college placement into college level math and English and course prerequisite requirements. The courses are scheduled so that students can attend full-time each semester if they enroll in two courses each five-week session. The ABP traditional courses are held two days a week from 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. at the university’s Hospitality Management Center in downtown Cleveland.

Although the ABP is not designed for a cohort of students to begin and end the program as a group, the associate dean and a faculty member both mentioned that student-formed groups take the ABP courses together. A faculty participant stated that the organizational structure is “Not exactly lined up where every student is in every class together, but it works pretty close that way.”

This college offered the A.A.B. in Business Management in both the traditional format the accelerated format. The curriculum offered in the ABP is the same 70 semester credit curriculum that is offered in the traditional format. The associate dean
mentioned that the ABP attracted more working adult students than the traditional format that attracted traditional college students. Five of the six full-time Business faculty members have taught in the ABP and both programs used part-time faculty. Academic advising of students enrolled in the ABP is handled by the ABP program manager and students enrolled in the traditional Business Management program go to the college’s counseling center for academic advising. A comparison of the Accelerated Business Program and traditional Business Management program is shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Comparison of Business Management Accelerated Program and Traditional Business Management Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Accelerated Business Program</th>
<th>Traditional Business Management Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Working adults</td>
<td>Full-time students and working adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total credits</td>
<td>70 semester credits</td>
<td>70 semester credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>5 of the 6 full-time teach in the ABP</td>
<td>6 full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising</td>
<td>ABP program manager</td>
<td>Counselor in Counseling Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>New downtown facility</td>
<td>On main campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course structure</td>
<td>Two days per week, 6-10 p.m.</td>
<td>Traditional two days per week, varied days/times; blended with some online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course length</td>
<td>5-10 class sessions</td>
<td>Traditional = 32 class sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>New tables and chairs, large windows, contemporary building</td>
<td>Blended = 16 class sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Program manager and advisor</td>
<td>Variety of classroom styles with various types of furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Students are served a free dinner before class</td>
<td>Academic advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social environment</td>
<td>Students have access to lunch facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

106
The college has processes to continually measure effectiveness of instructional programs (AQIP Systems Portfolio, 2012). The associate dean mentioned that this is the second year of the ABP and the faculty and administration have started collecting and analyzing the data. The associate dean stated “We looked at the number of students who enrolled in fall 2011 compared to the number we retained in spring 2012. There were 104 students enrolled fall 2012 and 69 students enrolled spring 2012; this was a 66.3% retention rate” (Ellison, personal communication, April 13, 2012). She indicated that the retention rate is higher than the college’s average 1 year retention rate; however, the administration and faculty are developing strategies to improve this rate.

The associate dean indicated that they made ABP course length changes to improve student success after the first year and they are currently working on additional changes. The program was originally designed to offer the Business Management curriculum in an accelerated format so that students could earn a degree in 16 months. When the ABP was launched, all courses were five weeks in length. The associate dean indicated that the 5-week course structure was designed by administration. After the first year, administration sought faculty input to make changes to improve student success. Faculty suggested that some of the five courses be moved to a 10-week schedule. These courses include Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Business Communications, Managerial Accounting, and Business Strategies (the program capstone). The revised ABP required students to enroll in the program for 21 months to complete the degree requirements for an A.A.B. in Business Management.

One of the metrics the college used to measure academic success was the average number of years from initial class to graduation among full time students. This average
decreased from 5.0 in 2010 to 4.9 in 2011 (AQIP Systems Portfolio, 2012). The college’s administration is continuing to develop and implement strategies to reduce the time to degree completion to align with the state’s graduation initiative (Strategic Plan 2009-2014). The faculty is completing comprehensive curriculum reviews to streamline curricula. The associate dean stated that “Business faculty are modifying the A.A.B. Business Management curriculum to reduce the credits from 70 semester credits to closer to 60 credits, the minimum required by the Ohio Board of Regents” (Ellison, personal communication, April 13, 2012). These proposed curriculum changes are being reviewed by the curriculum committee and will be forwarded the academic vice president for approval. The associate dean also mentioned that administration and faculty are concerned about student success in the ABP online courses and they are currently discussing options for change.

**Participant profiles.** The participants in this case study included an administrator, a program manager/faculty, a full-time faculty member, and nine students enrolled in the ABP. The administrator has been employed as associate dean of Business at this college for two years. The program manager has been employed at this college for one year. The faculty participant full-time faculty member has taught business courses at the college for eight years. Prior to teaching, he was a small business owner for over 20 years. Nine of the students enrolled in the ABP Microeconomics course participated in a focus group interview; this was 100% participation of students who were invited to participate. Of the nine student focus group participants, seven were female and two were male students.
The participants were selected because of their direct involvement with the ABP. The dean provided the researcher the name of the program coordinator and suggested that he be interviewed. The program coordinator suggested a faculty member to be interviewed based on his years of experience at the college and his experience teaching in the ABP. The dean and program administrator were interviewed over the telephone and the researcher interviewed the faculty member on the main campus.

**Data collection.** The researcher collected documents pertaining to the ABP during a visit, through email, and from the college’s Web site. The researcher conducted a classroom observation in the ABP Microeconomics course that was held from 6 to 10 p.m. on a Thursday evening. The program coordinator recommended the Microeconomics ABP course for the classroom observation because it had a good representation of students based on age, credits earned, and ABP courses completed. The students were first year, second year, new to the accelerated program, and a group of 3-4 students had enrolled in several ABP courses together. The classroom observation and documents were used to triangulate data. For example, during the interview the faculty participant discussed student behaviors and involvement in group projects. During the observation, the researcher observed those behaviors and researched documents to gather more information on student expectations for the group project to verify the information and triangulate data.

The administrator and program coordinator were interviewed by telephone. The researcher used the eight questions listed in Appendix C to guide the interview. The faculty participant was interviewed in a lounge near his office and the eight questions shown in Appendix D were used to guide the interview. The average amount of time
spent during the telephone interviews with the administrator and the program coordinator was 30 minutes; the faculty interview took approximately 50 minutes. The researcher used nine primary questions outlined on the interview guide in Appendix D to guide the focus group interview with the ABP students. The focus group interview took place in a classroom after one of the ABP courses. All nine students who were invited to participate in the focus group interview stayed after class to participate in the interview. The focus group interview took approximately 30 minutes. In all interviews, the researcher asked additional questions to clarify information presented during the discussion. The transcripts of these interviews comprise 32 pages of data in this study.

The researcher conducted interviews to gain three different perspectives of the ABP learning community. The researcher learned how administrator, faculty, and students perceived the learning community environment. The interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to triangulate data from the document analysis and from among the various interviews. This gave the researcher the opportunity to ask specific questions about information that was discovered in the documents or mentioned by a participant. An example question the researcher discovered what that all of the documentation called this program the Accelerated Business Program; however, every person interviewed called the program Weekend College. The researcher scheduled a second interview with the director to seek an answer to this question. This methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to search through more than one mean to find an answer to a question.

After the document analysis and the interviews, the researcher conducted a classroom observation to observe student and faculty behavior in the learning
environment. The administrator and faculty emphasized that there is an increased level of student involvement in the ABP learning community; the observation allowed the researcher to witness the level of student involvement. The student behaviors observed in the classroom confirmed the involvement information that was communicated during the interviews and it gave the researcher a balanced picture of the learning community environment. The researcher also used documents to verify information presented in the interviews and to answer questions that arose through interviews and observations. In this case, the researcher was able to talk with students one-on-one during the dinner time and class breaks. While observing student’s giving chapter presentations, the researcher wanted to learn about the project instructions, length of time to prepare, and the grading criteria. The researcher asked students questions to seek answers and reviewed documentation such as the course syllabus and a student’s class notes that outlined project instructions to find answers. These informal one-on-one student discussions and additional documentation gave the researcher a more in-depth understanding. These triangulation strategies were used to verify information, cross examine the data, and gain a more in-depth understanding of the learning community. The use of more than one source and more than one perspective provided depth and richness to the findings. An overview of the findings of each case are presented separately in Chapter 4 and then the findings from across the three cases were combined and compared in Chapter 5.

**Overview of the findings.** The themes described below are the foundation for the findings of the ABP learning community case study. The themes and their extracted meanings were used to answer the four research questions for this study. This case study
provided descriptive details on the learning environment, pedagogy, and participants’ perspectives of this learning community.

The researcher coded and analyzed data throughout data collection. The researcher used NVivo’s query function to create a list of 27 codes for Model A that is shown in Table 9. The researcher used the four-cycle coding process shown in Figure 9 to identify the themes for Model A. During the first-cycle coding process, the researcher

Table 9

List of Codes Identified from First-cycle Coding for Model A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodates work and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in less time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to face connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social gatherings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialize curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
read the transcripts from the five interviews and the observation documentation and used NVivo to code common words and phrases into nodes. When data applied to more than one node, the researcher used the primary meaning of the statement to code the data into a node rather than coding each datum into multiple nodes.

The researcher then used NVivos word frequency including frequency distributions, tag clouds, and tree maps to further analyze the data during second cycle coding. During the third cycle coding, the researcher then compared the categories identified in the first-cycle coding with categories identified in the second-cycle coding to search for consistencies and to develop the themes. During the fourth-cycle coding process, the researcher conducted a final review of the data and the comparison categories brought forth the five major themes for Model A that are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model A Themes Resulting from Fourth-cycle Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first theme identified, student involvement, is an important theme in the ABP learning community. Both faculty and students suggest the ABP fostered student involvement and the involvement had a positive impact on student motivation. Administrators and faculty perceived ABP students as more motivated than students enrolled in the traditional business management program. The second theme, pedagogy, used in the learning community facilitated active learning and student collaboration. In
this classroom, the traditional lecture was replaced with students working together in groups and engaged in discussion.

The third theme is the ABP learning community structure that was designed to meet the needs of working adults. The unique ABP structure included classes that were block scheduled on days and times that were convenient to working adults and included a dinner social time prior to each class session. The third theme focused on the engaging learning environment. The students’ and faculty perceptions, based on their personal experiences, was that the learning environment is engaging. The students are engaged with one another and with learning both within and outside of the classroom. The final theme is social integration. The data showed that the ABP learning community fostered student integration and helped students’ form peer support systems. Faculty opinion was that students are empowered by their peers to do their best and this self-motivation helped students gain confidence needed to succeed.

The extracted meanings for each Model A theme are presented with rich details in the next section and an analysis of the Model A themes is presented in Chapter 5.

**Theme 1—Student involvement was enhanced in the ABP learning community.** Student involvement appeared to be the foundation of the ABP learning community. During the observation of the Microeconomics course, all nine of the students were involved in learning together and learning from each other. During the group presentations, the faculty observed from the back of the classroom as a group of two students presented the chapter. Students raised their hands to ask questions, participated in the discussion, challenged comments of other students, added further explanation of a concept, and debated with peers to support their standing. A high level
of involvement occurred with limited direction from the faculty member; the students were involved in learning together. The level of student involvement the researcher observed supported the comments shared by the faculty participant in the interview. The faculty participant stated “…oftentimes the students also explain it. It is a pretty open dialog, so I think students often learn well from other students.” However, the level of student involvement was at a higher level than the researcher expected. The volume of interaction, depth of the discussion, and the debate among the students throughout the observation was impressive. Students also expressed positive comments about the level of involvement in the learning community during the focus group interview. A student participant summarized her opinion of why students are more involved in learning in this environment:

Like we say, we are a smaller setting and able to just get that individual attention, but we as a group are able to ask questions. We don’t feel intimidated or anything. We have time to go over the material and again by everybody kind of sharing personal knowledge of something, it kind of helps to reiterate what the textbook is talking about.

Theme 2—Pedagogy used in the ABP learning community facilitated learning. The class structure of the ABP learning community enabled faculty to use pedagogy that facilitated active learning and student collaboration. The students meet two nights per week for three hours each night so there is time for lecture, discussion, role play, group activities, and projects. Faculty indicated that the learning community environment combined with the level of students enrolled in each course enabled faculty to use different pedagogy. A faculty participant stated “It does enable you to do a little
more creative things, with the small class size and a group that I think is very focused more so than what a normal class would be.” A different type of pedagogy is also beneficial because students in this learning environment tended to do more than is expected. Students’ strong work ethic and motivation were positive factors noted by faculty. There was evidence of extra effort during the classroom observation. The student presenters covered details of the chapter, used multiple outside sources to gain additional information, used visual aids, and asked a variety of questions to seek student engagement in the discussion. A faculty participant gave further evidence to support ABP students tend to go above and beyond assignment requirements:

…he (a student) did several interviews in the course of the semester where he actually got somebody from the federal government to talk about the gas industry and someone to talk about the farming industry based on different projects he did. He did a great job, it looked like a professional televised interview with him in his office and the person. It looked like a 60-Minutes kind of thing.

This example provided evidence of how the learning community successfully moved students to higher levels of learning. When students performed at higher levels, faculty often altered pedagogy to continue to challenge students and advance learning.

**Theme 3—The ABP learning community cultivates a community of learners.**

The ABP was designed to attract the working adult student population interested in learning about business and in earning an A.A.B. in Business. This institution implemented innovative strategies to attract this market and to build community among the students. The ABP is different from other programs offered at the institution. The
courses are accelerated, students meet two nights a week for four hours each night at a
downtown location, and the students are served dinner 30 minutes before each class. The
meal is free to the ABP students because the food is purchased and prepared by the
college’s culinary arts students as part of the curriculum and instruction for the culinary
arts program. This is 30-minutes of social time for the ABP students. This out-of-
classroom social time gave students the opportunity to socialize and talk about their
courses, homework, careers, and personal lives while eating dinner. This was an effective
community building strategy and it enhanced student learning. Faculty often participated
in the dinner and found the social time with students beneficial to student-faculty
relationships and to student learning. A faculty participant stated:

…we have the half hour dinner before the class and this kind of lends
itself to all kinds of discussions. Everything from what is going on in the
world to what is going on in economics which is what this course is. You
kind of allow students to get into that mind set and often times if they have
issues or questions they will bring it up during dinner. So we actually
discuss it over dinner. That lends itself very well to discussions.

The researcher participated in the dinner before the classroom observation. All nine of the
students enrolled in the course arrived early to eat dinner. The students in the ABP
socialized with each other, the faculty member, and with the culinary students who
served the meal. One group of two students used the time to work on their group project.
Another student worked with the faculty member on another course project. The
remaining students talked about their lives and compared summer and fall course
schedules. This entire group of students had only been together for 10 class meetings and
the level of community among the group gave the appearance that they had been together for several months. The evidence showed that the out-of-class social time facilitated community building among the students.

A sense of community among students was also witnessed during the classroom observation and acknowledged by both the students and the faculty during the interviews. The researcher observed strong level of community among the students and students learning together. A faculty participant described how a strong learning community helped students learn:

There is that forum where students help each other. If someone has a quizzical look, they don’t get it, if I am not getting it to them, maybe somebody else will explain it in their way that will get it to them. It allows for that. The environment does allow for that kind of discussion. I think it enables students to achieve, to do a good job because they all feel they are a part of it.

Students provided evidence that the ABP facilitated students learning from one another and helped students form relationships and support systems with their peers. A student participant discussed how the community of learners enhances learning:

Having a more personal relationship, if I hear something I will e-mail John or call John or whatever. In a larger classroom I might not have gotten to know or cared enough to do so. It all plays a part and all goes together.

**Theme 4—The ABP learning community fostered a positive learning environment.** The ABP learning community empowered students to work harder and enabled students to feel a sense of accomplishment in their success. In the learning
community, individual success was often shared among their peers and served as motivation for students to continually do better. Because of the accelerated pace, students completed a lot of work in a shortened period of time; therefore, they also received feedback on their work more often. The continuous feedback gave students positive reinforcement and ignited motivation to continue working hard. A participant commented that “Even though there is more load and all that, 5 weeks or 8 weeks or whatever, it is like the lesson plan is very gratifying to be able to complete this and feel a sense of accomplishment.” Another student compared the learning community classroom to a job because students work individually and together in the learning community just as employees work individually and together in their jobs. The student stated “You really have to be focused. You came to work and you came to go. Just like at work, you get a project and you do it, complete it.” The amount of work and the opportunity to work and learn together appeared to motivate students and also created a positive learning environment.

The researcher observed a collaborative, positive learning environment and students confirmed this opinion in the focus group interview. However, a faculty participant suggested that peer pressure may be the cause for students’ increased motivation and work ethic. The faculty participant stated:

There is a little bit of, I don’t know if I should say, peer pressure, that of wanting to do well. When it is a small group like that, where everybody knows each other, you don’t want to be the person that does not do well. Perhaps peer pressure is a factor in motivation; however, the comments students shared during the focus group interview did not indicate that students felt pressured by peers.
Theme 5—Social integration is fostered in the ABP learning community.

Social integration theories emphasized that learning communities provided students the opportunity to integrate with students and faculty. Student-student interaction, faculty-student interaction, and outside of classroom student interaction are variables used to measure social integration. The researcher used these variables to code information into social integration.

Student interactions were observed before class during dinner, during class, and at a social gathering at a local bar after class. The classroom had tables and chairs that accommodated approximately 25 students. One of the walls in the classroom was glass and students could see a lounge area in the hallway and the kitchen for the culinary arts program that also had a wall of windows. The class was scheduled for three hours from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.; however, the students were released about 8 p.m. Although the physical environment appeared to be a normal classroom and some of the students in the ABP class were taking class together for the first time, there appeared to be a high level of social integration. The students knew each other by name and some of the students engaged in conversations about their social lives as soon as they entered the classroom. The students’ non-verbal communications such as smiles, hugs, and sitting in close proximity of one another were other forms of evidence that supported strong student-student interactions. A student’s perception of how the learning community encouraged student-student interactions:

The word that comes to my mind is that this is more of an intimate atmosphere. We have a better chance for education, like we support each other. Like we miss each other, like Hey I missed you, where were you or
Oh I did not do that homework, did you? I guess it is a more personal relationship.

Student-faculty interaction also appeared to be supported. As students entered the classroom, the majority of the students engaged in informal conversation with the faculty member. The faculty member met with a student prior to dinner and advised him on his business plan that he was developing to start his own business. The faculty member assisted the student with a project that was beyond the scope of the course; this evidence supported student-faculty integration. Students shared positive comments about the ABP faculty during the focus group interview. One student commented “…I have noticed that the teachers are much more advanced also. Where some of us may fail in some areas, they know right where to pick us up and push us along.”

During the dinner, students socialized with the professor and talked about the course while they ate together. The faculty member knew the students by name, where they worked, and other information about the students. After observing the social integration among the teacher and students, the researcher questioned students about how long they have worked with this professor and the majority said only this course, 10 class meetings. When the researcher questioned the faculty member about the perceived integration, he stated “I typically do get a lot of interaction in my classes, but anytime we have nine students vs. thirty, and when you have them in that kind of environment where you have dinner together, you literally feel you know everybody.” The faculty member mentioned that although he does not like teaching evenings, he liked teaching in the ABP because he liked teaching and working with the students enrolled in this program. He mentioned that he usually selects at least one ABP course each semester.
Subtheme A—The ABP fosters student-student interaction outside of the classroom. It was evident during the class observation that students worked together outside of class. When the researcher arrived at the classroom an hour prior to class, a group of students were gathered in the hall practicing their speech. Another group of students were sitting on couches in the hallway socializing prior to class. During the observation, there were statements made about phone conversations and outside of class meetings. There was also a discussion about an African celebration event where two students socialized with the professor at the event. A student participant indicated that “Every time I call my teacher he answers the phone, he talks. They have e-mailed a few times. There are definitely open lines of communication. That is crucial.” This evidence supported students-faculty outside of class interaction.

After class, the students invited the professor to a social gathering at a downtown establishment. Seven of the nine students, the professor, and the researcher attended the gathering. For approximately 1-hour, the researcher observed student and faculty behaviors at the social gathering and witnessed the connection and caring the students seemed to have for one another. The students shared stories about their lives, goals, and the challenges of attending college. One student’s boyfriend also attended and it was obvious that he had already met some of the students at previous out-of-class gatherings.

Summary. The researcher heard positive comments about the ABP during the observation, the focus group interview, and informal conversations with students. Several students mentioned that they could not attend college if it was not for the ABP. The ABP learning community allowed students to fit college into their busy work and family schedules. Some students mentioned that distance education was the only other college
option and that they tried online courses, but missed the physical connection with students and faculty.

Although the ABP does not have specific admission requirements, of students formed a cohort and took courses together. The ABP fostered involvement and integration and meets the needs of working adults. The composition of most ABP classes is primarily working adults; many of the students work downtown and walk to class after work. The students appreciated the working adult composition of ABP courses. A student commented “I like to network with everybody…these guys are all professionals in here. They are all working.” In addition to meeting the academic needs of working adults, the college has successfully designed a learning community that is unique and helped students form support systems through involvement and integration. A faculty participant stated “The students are all attentive. They are very engaging. They are very interested…They probably feel a little bit like they are part of a unique program, rather than here on the big campus with students everywhere.”

The ABP has existed for approximately 1.5 years and has positively impacted student success. The unique learning community features such as the curriculum design, pedagogy, course location, and dinner social time before class met the needs of working adults.

Case Study of Learning Community Model B

Participant overview. The second college in the study opened in 1967 to serve the educational needs of the community. A group of community citizens believed their county needed a college and they convinced voters to approve a 1.7 mill property tax levy to support the college (Lerner, 1995). When the college opened, courses were held in
various community buildings including a church and the YMCA until a campus was built on 400 acres of land and opened in 1971. The college currently has 10 buildings on the main campus and three off-site locations and serves approximately 21,000 students each year.

After approximately 30 years of offering courses and programs in a traditional day, evening, and weekend course format, college administration wanted to offer courses in a format convenient for working adults. In 2002-2003, an administrator and a Business faculty member started development of an accelerated program to provide working students a convenient option to take college courses and earn an associate degree. When faculty designed the new curriculum model, administration considered a cohort learning community model where a cohort of students would start the program together and take a prescribed sequence of courses to complete the curriculum together. However, administration discovered that there were students who had already completed some of the courses required in a curriculum and these students did not need the entire curriculum. They also discovered that there were students interested in the accelerated courses who were not interested in earning a degree. For these reasons, the administration decided to offer the accelerated courses to any qualified student rather than developing a cohort model. The administration designed the new program to offer courses in a four hour block and scheduled the courses so that students could take two courses on Saturday. The director stated “Since the courses were offered on Saturday, the administration decided to call the program Weekend College.”

In 2004, the first Weekend College class was launched. Students could earn an Associate of Applied Business (AAB) in Business Management and the Associate of Arts
(AA) degrees by taking courses in the Weekend College. The Weekend College offered students an accelerated track to degree completion and made it easier for adults to balance life, work, and achieve their educational goals. The Weekend College was offered in a learning community format where a group of students could take two courses each five-week term. A faculty member stated that “…some students form a learning community and take the majority of the Weekend College courses together throughout the curriculum.” Another faculty member stated “Students may take the entire curriculum in the Weekend College format or they may combine Weekend College courses with traditional and/or online courses.”

The Weekend College courses are offered during fall and spring semesters in three five-week sessions to give students scheduling flexibility. The weekend courses are scheduled on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. This enabled students to take two courses, one day a week, for three sessions each semester. This schedule equals 18 credits and allowed a student to enroll full-time each semester and complete an associate degree in two years. Students who wanted to take courses all year could enroll in the college’s traditional summer session that included 5-week and 8-week course offerings.

The director stated “The program is designed to attract adult learners and the admission criterion is 24 years.” The Weekend College courses are available to students who meet the admission requirements. Students must meet two of the following three admission criteria:

1) 24 years of age or older

2) Three years full-time, post-secondary work experience
3)  3.0 high school g.p.a. or 2.75 college g.p.a. (minimum 8 semester credit hours completed)

In addition to meeting two of the three criteria, applicants were required to submit an application, a letter of recommendation, and meet with an academic counselor.

When the program was launched, all of the courses were offered in a 5-week format; however, faculty identified two courses that did not work well in the 5-week format. The Accounting I course was changed to a 10-week format and the Economics course was changed to an 8-week format. This was the first curriculum design change from the original plan. The second change was to expand the accelerated course offerings to meet the needs of more students and to increase enrollment. The director stated “Four years after the Weekend College was launched, administration wanted to increase the accelerated course offerings and they started offering accelerated courses two evenings per week.” The name of the program was changed from Weekend College to the Adult Accelerated Degree Program. The new structure gave students the opportunity to enroll in accelerated courses during the evenings and/or on the weekends. Although the formal name of this program is the Adult Accelerated Degree Program, Weekend College is the program title most commonly used within the college. The director stated, “The new name never really caught on.” The researcher used the program’s formal title Adult Accelerated Degree Program (AADP) in this study.

The AADP courses were designed to create a learning environment that engaged students in active, collaborative, and project-based learning. The AADP courses were offered in a special room with comfortable tables and chairs that can be easily moved to create learning spaces where students can collaborate and work together. A faculty
member stated “The improved physical features of the classroom help create a collaborative learning environment.” Another faculty member stated “The special location distinguished the AADP from other programs offered on campus and created the perception that AADP students are in a special program.”

The Business Management curriculum offered in the Adult Accelerated Degree Program is the same curriculum offered in the traditional Business Management program. Students enrolled in the AADP complete a comprehensive business curriculum that covered the program learning outcomes shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Model B Business Management Program Learning Outcomes

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Use critical thinking skills to solve problems and make decisions based on accepted business principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recognize the interrelatedness of international and domestic businesses, societies, and governments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Execute the four functions of management: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exhibit professional behavior appropriate for the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Demonstrate ability to function effectively as a team member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Apply effective communication skills in business settings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students completed 68-69 semester credits to earn an Associate of Applied Business in Business Management degree. The differences between the two options included curriculum model format, course schedule, location, academic advising, and academic support as shown in Table 12.
Table 12

Comparison of Business Management Adult Accelerated Degree Program and the Traditional Business Management Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Business Management Adult Accelerated Degree Program</th>
<th>Business Management Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Adults age 25 years and older</td>
<td>Students high school age and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Credits</td>
<td>68-69 semester credits</td>
<td>68-69 semester credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>6 FT Faculty and PT Faculty</td>
<td>21 Full-time Faculty and PT Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>New conference center</td>
<td>On main campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Counselor or Director</td>
<td>Counselor in Counseling Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Structure</td>
<td>One evening per week, 6-10 p.m.; Saturday 8 a.m.-Noon or 1-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Traditional two days per week, varied days and times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Length</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
<td>15 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Moveable tables and chairs, contemporary designed classroom with windows, building has newest technology and furnishings</td>
<td>Variety of classroom styles with tables and chairs or individual desk/table units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Program manager and advisor</td>
<td>Academic advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Collaborative environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The director stated, “There are 21 full-time faculty members in the Accounting, Business, Information Technology, and Economics Departments and six of these full-time faculty teach in the AADP.” The director maintained an AADP Blackboard site that included all AADP students. A syllabus for each AADP course offered is posted on this site so that AADP students can access the syllabus and complete the first week’s assignments prior to the first class session. If faculty used Blackboard, their site is linked to the AADP Blackboard site. The director stated, “Students come to the first course prepared and faculty devote approximately 10-minutes highlighting key points on the syllabus and about the course.”

Students were required to attend a mandatory AADP orientation prior to the start of their first course. Students learned about the AADP blackboard site, procedures,
course structure and attendance. Attendance was stressed at the orientation; however, the AADP does not have an attendance policy. Attendance policies are handled per course according to faculty guidelines that are outlined in the course syllabus. The director stated:

Some course content allows for flexibility and others do not. If students know they will miss a class, they may complete work ahead or complete a makeup assignment and in other courses they may have to skip a course and take it at a later date.

Students who enrolled in the Saturday AADP courses have a lunch break between the morning and the afternoon classes. This break was designed to give students time to eat and relax if they are taking two courses on Saturday. The administrator and both faculty commented during the interviews on how the lunch break has helped students form relationships with their peers. A faculty participant stated, “A bunch of them go to lunch together. Oftentimes they will leave campus and come back.” Although the break was not originally designed as a time to build community among students, it has served that purpose. The director stated “…she is thrilled that break has worked out as an opportunity for students to connect and build support.”

The AADP courses are offered fall and spring semesters and enrollment ranges from 55 to 85 each semester. Data tracking of student retention has been a challenge due to time and resource constraints; however, the director stated that “a rough estimate of AADP student retention is 70-75% compared to the institution’s retention rate that is approximately 30%.” Enrollment in the Business Management program continued to be a success; however, the Associate of Arts enrollment has declined and may be phased out.
in the future. A faculty member stated “Courses that previously had 20 or more students enrolled have recently declined to approximately 15 students.” The faculty member suggested that the increased online course offerings may be a factor that impacted the enrollment decline in the AADP. The college’s online programs and course offerings provided working adults another avenue to pursue higher education.

The director believed that peer support and the AADP two-year schedule are the two most important factors that have influenced the success of this program. The AADP learning community gave students the opportunity to establish friendships and establish a peer support system. The director stated “…many of the students become lifelong friends. There are five males who graduated from the AADP and all five enrolled in a bachelor program at Hiram.” Faculty and students mentioned that many AADP students graduate and immediately transferred their credits to a four-year college to complete their bachelor degree. A student participant stated “I graduated May 12 with my Business Management Associate Degree and I am going on to Cleveland State and in 2014 I plan to graduate with my bachelor’s degree.” The director stated that the 2-year schedule is an important factor because it gave students a map to degree completion. If a personal circumstance interfered with the prescribe two-year map, the director worked with the student to make adjustments and develop a revised map to degree completion.

**Participant profiles.** The participants in this case study included an administrator, two full-time faculty members, and 11 students enrolled in the AADP. The administrator is the director of articulation and transfer and she and a faculty member developed the AADP. Both faculty participants are full-time faculty in the Business department. Both faculty have taught traditional, blended, online, and AADP courses.
One faculty participant has taught AADP courses since the program was launched in 2004. The other faculty participant has taught AADP courses for several years.

The dean of the Business department recommended the researcher interview the director. The director provided the names of the two faculty members for interviews, the course for the classroom observation, and the students for the focus group interview. The director coordinated the focus group interview through email and the AADP Blackboard site. A telephone interview was conducted with director. In addition, the researcher maintained communication with the director through email and follow-up phone calls to find answers to additional questions that arose throughout the study. The researcher interviewed one faculty member in her office on the main campus and interviewed the other faculty member in a classroom in the college’s new university center.

Data collection. The researcher gathered data through documents, a classroom observation, and interviews for this case study. The researcher collected documents pertaining to the AADP during two visits to the campus, through email, and from the college’s Web site. Academic documents such as curricula, syllabi, instructional materials, AADP application, AADP course schedule, and AADP orientation handout were collected and analyzed throughout the study.

The researcher conducted the classroom observation in the AADP Management Philosophy and Practice capstone course and observed student behaviors in a natural setting. The program director recommended the AADP Management Philosophy and Practice course because it had a good representation of students near completion of their degree and it was taught by a full-time faculty member. The class where the observation took place was held from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on a Saturday in the college’s new conference
center. The building and classrooms were contemporary with modern furniture and innovative technology. It was the most high-tech higher education building the researcher had ever seen. The furniture and the arrangement of the furniture in the classrooms were designed for collaborative learning. In some classrooms, the tables were arranged in pods with whiteboards, computer connections, and projecting units at each pod.

The classroom where the observation took place was arranged similar to a conference room with tables that formed a U-shape and group workspace in the center of the room. When the researcher arrived, 30-minutes before class, a group of four students were using the instructor station and equipment to practice their presentation. The researcher sat at the side of the room and observed students’ interactions as they entered the classroom. The students greeted each other and engaged in personal conversation as they entered the room. One student brought coffee for her group teammates. Two students used the center tables to organize their presentation handouts. When the faculty member arrived, he greeted the students and answered questions students had about their presentations.

At 8 a.m., the faculty member started class by giving an overview of the team project. The project involved students working as management consultants with a business; the students identified an issue(s) and developed an improvement plan to address the issue. The students’ presentations and suggestions they made to the businesses were thorough. The students appeared to go above and beyond the instructor’s expectations for this project. It was evident that the students spent a great deal of out-of-classroom time together working on their projects. Two of the three groups made arrangements to continue working with the businesses to review implementation of their
plans. During the presentations, students asked questions and offered additional advice. The researcher observed active student involvement during the presentations. This classroom observation was an essential element for data triangulation. The researcher observed faculty and student behaviors and the interactions among the group of learners. For example, the faculty talked about student friendships in the interviews and the classroom observation enabled the researcher to observe those friendships. The students talked about project-based learning in the focus group interview and the researcher observed the culmination of the final project in the capstone course. This triangulation technique allowed the researcher to connect independent pieces of information and better interpret the learning community environment.

There were 14 participants interviewed for this study including an administrator, two faculty members, and 11 students. The researcher engaged in informal discussions with the director via email and telephone throughout the study and conducted a formal interview with the director after the other interviews and the class observation were completed. The researcher sought clarification of information and gathered answers to questions that arose throughout the study. The director was involved in the development, creation, and launching of the AADP in 2004. The director recommended the two full-time faculty members for interviews. The researcher conducted individual interviews with two faculty members and used the eight questions shown in Appendix D to guide the interview. The researcher conducted first faculty interview in the faculty member’s office on the main campus and was approximately 1-hour in length. This faculty participant has taught business courses at the college for over 20 years. The second faculty member’s interview took place in a classroom in the conference center and was
approximately 30 minutes in length. He has taught at the college for six years and has taught a variety of business courses in the AADP, traditional, and online formats. He preferred to teach traditional and AADP courses because he liked the face-to-face interaction with the students.

The researcher conducted a focus-group interview with 11 students including six female and five male. The director invited 13 students enrolled in the Saturday AADP class to participate in the focus group interview and two students declined because of previous obligations. The interview took place in a classroom in the college’s conference center. The researcher used the nine questions shown in Appendix E to guide the focus group interview that took approximately 30-minutes. The researcher also engaged in discussion with the students during the class break and after class. The researcher used the informal discussions with students to ask additional questions and to clarify information.

The multiple data collection techniques and the sequence of the data collection—document analysis, classroom observation, student focus group interview followed by two faculty interviews—allowed the researcher to clarify information and triangulate data throughout the study. An example of how the researcher triangulated data, the teacher and students talked about active learning through group projects and the researcher witnessed the culmination of a group project when students gave final group presentations during the observation. As another example, the researcher wanted to learn more about the instructions, length of time, and grading criteria for the project so the researcher asked a student to show the project outline and grading criteria. In addition to
seeing the project information, the researcher gained an in-depth perspective from the student.

**Overview of the findings.** The themes described below were the foundation for the findings of the AADP learning community case study. The themes and their extracted meanings were used to answer the four research questions for this study. This case study provided descriptive details on the AADP learning community based on the perspectives of people who have experienced this learning environment.

The researcher coded and analyzed data throughout data collection. The researcher used the four-cycle coding process described at the beginning of the chapter to identify the themes for the Model B learning community. During the first-cycle coding process, the researcher read the transcripts from the five interviews and the observation documentation and used NVivo to code common words and phrases into nodes. When data applied to more than one node, the researcher used the primary meaning of the statement to code the data into a node rather than coding each datum into multiple nodes. The researcher used NVivo’s query function to create a list of 26 codes for Model B that is shown in Table 13.

The researcher then used NVivo’s word frequency functions including frequency distributions, tag clouds, and tree maps to analyze the data during second cycle coding. During the third cycle coding, the researcher compared the categories identified in the
Table 13

*Categories Identified from First-cycle Coding for Model B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories Identified from First-cycle Coding for Model B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy, working adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must be prepared for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of class work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning community structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student higher performing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students stay together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students highly involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

first-cycle coding with categories identified in the second-cycle coding to search for consistencies and to develop the themes. During the fourth-cycle coding process, the researcher conducted a final review of the data and the comparison categories brought forth a list of five major themes for Model B that is shown in Table 14.
Table 14

*Model B Themes Resulting from Fourth-cycle Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Involvement</th>
<th>Student Relationships</th>
<th>Grouping of Students</th>
<th>Student Motivation</th>
<th>Learning Community Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The first theme identified, student involvement, appeared to be the foundation of the AADP learning community. The student involvement occurred both inside and outside of the classroom. One faculty participant stated “These students are highly, highly involved in each other’s lives.” The second theme, student relationships, was an important element in the AADP learning community. The peer relationships provided a support system for the students. A faculty participant referred to this population as a different kind of at-risk population. She stated “…these are busy, working adults who the risk is their life is just too busy to finish. They encourage each other and that is a huge thing to getting them to graduate.”

The third theme is the grouping of students in the AADP learning community. Both faculty and students made positive comments about the learning community composition of adult learners. Faculty suggested that they structured classroom activities and assignments to integrate students’ work experiences. A faculty participant stated “…most assignments I require a personal contribution of whatever the topic we are talking about, how have they seen this demonstrated where they worked, in their lives.” A higher level of learning occurred because of the breadth and depth of experiences the group of adult learners shared.
The fourth theme is student motivation. The administrator and both faculty perceived AADP students as more motivated than students enrolled in the traditional business management program. A faculty participant’s opinion “They are motivated because they see that their lack of a degree is holding them back. I have virtually no issue with late work, nonattendance, not doing the work, any of that kind of stuff.” The final theme was the learning community structure. The AADP curriculum model met the needs of working adults. The structure brought a group of students together for a four or an eight hour block of time once a week. The pedagogy and the lunch break provided students the opportunity to connect with peers. These five themes and their extracted meanings are presented with rich details. Data triangulation was used to validate information through multiple sources. An analysis of the Model B themes is presented in Chapter 5.

Theme 1—Student involvement was enhanced in the AADP learning community. Data collected in both the student and faculty interviews during the observation indicated that student involvement is enhanced in the AADP curriculum model. The Business Management curriculum taught in the AADP is the same curriculum taught in the traditional 15-week on campus format; however, the pedagogy used in the AADP was focused on student involvement. Learning concepts were designed around chunks of time to get students active and working together in groups. One faculty participant mentioned that he liked to use a “chunk of that time being either something physical where they are getting up and moving around as a group or something where I am not lecturing.” Another faculty participant’s strategy was to use active learning “…to
get students moving as much as I can and get them out of just passive learner mode into active learner mode.”

During the classroom observation, the researcher reviewed the course syllabus and examined how the course was structured and talked with students about the course requirements. The students were involved in a lot of outside of class learning while working on their final project throughout the five weeks. The faculty member who taught the course stated “For this class there is nothing online. I do give them an online platform for which they can collaborate for the project, but there is nothing required online. No texting, no assignment submissions online, no discussion boards.” The course design appeared to be heavy project-based with no online requirements because of the amount of outside-of-class time needed to complete the final project.

The evidence showed that the students were involved in learning both inside and outside of the classroom. When the researcher arrived for the classroom observation, two groups of students were preparing for their presentation. Other students socialized in the back of the classroom and outside the classroom. During the classroom observation, the researcher observed students giving their final project presentation. The final project was designed used to facilitate student involvement in learning. A faculty participant stated:

I try to get them to not only learn from me, but to learn from each other.

So we do a lot of group projects, group interaction, current events and they get to talk about that first thing in the four-hour block.

The researcher observed students involvement while listening to each groups’ presentations and through observation of the discussion, questions, and additional remarks the students made after the presentations. The level of work the students put into
their projects and presentation was evidence that the students were involved in many hours of work together outside of class.

A high level of involvement was observed during the class and was confirmed during two faculty interviews. A faculty participant’s commented about the AADP “It is more interactive than a traditional class. You are not just sitting there listening to someone.”

**Theme 2—Students in the AADP established relationships and friendships that are the foundation of the learning community.** The AADP learning community provided opportunities for the students to build relationships and friendships with a community of learners. The AADP was structured so that a group of students were together for 4 or 8 hours every Saturday for five weeks. A lunch break was scheduled between the two Saturday classes; the lunch hour was instrumental in helping students build relationships and friendships with other students. Students who enroll in both Saturday courses would often go to lunch together during the one-hour break. Some of the students enrolled in the morning class would go to lunch with the group on their way home and some of the students enrolled in the afternoon class would arrive for lunch before class. The lunch break fostered community among students outside of the classroom. It gave students time to relax, eat, and socialize with their peers. Although this break was influential in helping AADP students establish relationships with their peers, the researcher could not find documentation to verify this was an intentional design strategy.

An AADP was designed to help students’ build relationships through collaborative course assignments. A faculty participant stated “I do some portion of
lecture and then there is a good portion of group work where they are working on a case
together or they maybe have a project…” The relationships among students were obvious
during the classroom observation. Students helped one another and gave each other moral
support prior during the presentations. These relationships provided support for students
when they were challenged with difficult courses or life issues. A faculty participant
confirmed the importance of student relationships “They have not just said this is too
hard, I am getting out. There is enough encouragement that they hang around and stay
in.”

Theme 3—Social integration is fostered in the AADP learning community.

Data from all three sources—faculty interviews, student interviews, and the classroom
observation—documented social integration. The data showed social integration was
enhanced in the AADP through increased student-student interactions both inside and
outside of the classroom. Student-student interactions appeared to be strong in the AADP
learning community. Social integration was observed before class and during class.
Several students arrived to class 30-minutes early, when the building opened at 7:30 a.m.,
to socialize with their peers before class started. While students socialized before class,
the researcher heard conversations about events that took place in the students’ personal
lives. The students’ behaviors and non-verbal communications also demonstrated a social
connection among the students. After observing strong student-student interaction, the
researcher focused on the topic during a faculty interview. The faculty member
confirmed that social integration is stronger in the AADP compared to integration in
traditional courses; she indicated “The difference is among the students.” The adult
students connected with one another and they quickly become integrated as a community
of learners. During a faculty interview, the faculty member gave an example of the differences in student interaction between AADP students compared to students enrolled in traditional business courses. She stated:

In my regular classes nobody brings in donuts because it is one of the other students’ birthdays. In the Weekend College, somebody is always bringing in something because it is somebody’s birthday. I mean they are truly involved. They are on the phone with each other. They are talking to each other all week long in between classes. It is not forced.

Although some students stayed together from course to course and semester to semester, many students entered and exited throughout. A faculty participant stated:

I think because there are new ones coming in and other ones going out and although they do not start together and go all the way through to the end, there seems to be a core that have done that or they will bring somebody into the group. So there seems to be almost always a really strong group in there.

This level of student-student interaction provided students a support system where they could seek help with academics and to seek support in their personal lives. A faculty participant shared an example of how students supported one another:

They call and keep in touch. I mentioned they go to dinner. A bunch of them go to lunch together…they certainly know about each other’s lives. They know who has had a baby, who has little kids at home. They know all that and it is more than what would be talked about in a classroom
regardless of what you are talking about when introducing yourself or whatever. So, they are definitely really interested in each other’s lives.

The data from administrator, faculty, and student interviews and the classroom observation provided evidence of increased social integration among students outside the classroom. It was apparent during the classroom observation that the students did most of their project work outside of class. They visited businesses, talked with owners, conducted secret shopper/dinner experiments, identified issue(s), created action plans to address issues, and presented findings/suggestions for improvement to managers/owners. It appeared to be an excellent learning experience and all three groups went above and beyond the professor’s expectations for the project. For example, one group used the education/class project to negotiate lower price for a sign so that the owner could afford to purchase a sign for her business. Another example was that students made arrangements to return to a business as a secret diner to see if there was improvement after the manager implemented their recommendations for improvement. During the interview, the faculty member suggested that out-of-class engagement is programmed by the professor; he stated “I would not necessarily say there is an increase or decrease between in class and out of class, between Weekend College and the 16-week format unless it is programmed in by the instructor somehow.” The project the researcher observed was an example of how a professor programmed out-of-class experiences facilitated student-student interaction outside of the classroom.

The data showed that student learning and collaboration extended beyond the end of the class. Two of the three groups committed to continue to work with the businesses as they implemented the students’ improvement plans. Another faculty participant
confirmed that students work together outside of class in the courses she has taught; she stated “They have met outside of work. I am sure they met several nights during the week. I am sure they were Skyping and they were texting and they were communicating, all that kind of stuff all the time.” The faculty participant further commented that she does not see the same level of out-of-class student engagement in her traditional courses; she stated:

…they are talking to each other about their assignments, they’re helping each other, they are encouraging each other and so I see that as a big difference than the traditional classes. The traditional classes tend to come in, take the class, go home…these students are highly, highly involved in each other’s lives.

The social integration that was established while students are enrolled in the AADP learning community often continued after students graduate or exit the AADP. A faculty participant shared an example of a past AADP group of students; she stated:

They get together once a month and just have dinner and catch up and stay connected. They completed the program and then stayed connected one or two years later through social events. The talk about what they are doing next and they are so connected that it is just incredible.

**Theme 4—The AADP learning community improved students’ self-motivation.** The AADP is designed to meet the needs of working adults ages 25 and older. Students in this population have been out of high school for several years and some are intimidated and insecure about attending college. A faculty participant suggested that students “…don’t believe that they can compete when in fact they are so much more
motivated and truly so much better at these things and they have so much experience.” The AADP learning community connected students who have similar characteristics and insecurities and helped them students form support systems. The AADP 5-week course format gave students the opportunity to experience success in a short amount of time. Students see the results of their hard work after the first five weeks in the program, where students who are enrolled in traditional courses may have to wait 16-weeks to achieve results. A faculty participant suggested that “Getting those little wins throughout the semester and year help quite a bit.” The faculty indicated that after a few courses they see students become motivated and empowered by their academic successes. A student participant also confirmed that the environment helped students gain confidence and motivation “I thought I can do this for two years and I think the learning environment has actually spurred me to want to go further and do the four years. I maybe feel more comfortable doing the work and feeling confident.”

Job promotion opportunities were motivation for some of the AADP students. A faculty member’s perspective was that AADP students are “… mature students who are generally higher performing, more capable. They are more motivated because they are here for a reason like Bob is here to get that promotion and get a pay raise.” Another form of motivation that both faculty members mentioned during the interviews was that AADP students strived for higher grades and strived to learn more. A faculty participant commented “They want an A. If their A is not high enough, they want an explanation; not of how unfair I was but on how they could possibly do better next time. The level of the work is just really good.” This level of self-motivation and work ethic was the standard among AADP and the students expected all students to work hard to maintain this
standard. A faculty participant suggested that these students “…have very little time for people who do not follow the norms of the class. They have minimal tolerance for this.”

**Theme 5—The AADP structure that grouped adult learners in an engaging learning environment was an effective learning community format.** Interview data from all three constituents supported the importance of creating a learning community of adult learners. Adult learners have different needs and experiences than traditional-aged students and they are comfortable learning with other adults. When adults are grouped in a collaborative learning environment, they often learn from one another. Faculty members embraced this concept and used pedagogical strategies that facilitated involvement, interaction, and relationships in the AADP learning community. A faculty participant commented on the learning environment differences when adult learners are grouped “In this environment because of age and experience it is much more beneficial to have the interaction.” Another faculty participant shared her opinion of the benefits of grouping of adult learners in the AADP learning community:

I think because they are all working adults, they are in a similar age demographic, they have the same risk factors, as far as from a studying standpoint and they have the same concerns. They have children, they have aging parents, they are working, they are trying to get these courses in. Even though they might be different as far as genders, races, and things like that, there is so much commonality in their experiences that they bond very well. There is camaraderie in Weekend College that you do not see during the 16-week traditional Monday/Wednesday class on campus.
The level of learning that occurred in the AADP learning community was positively impacted by the grouping of working adults. Working students are able to apply concepts learned in class directly to their jobs and then share their experiences with their peers. A faculty participant stated “They are getting this feedback through work because they are actually able to apply it and that just gets them excited and they get an almost invincible feeling.” She mentioned that these students share these experiences with their classmates on a regular basis and that motivated students to take similar action. The faculty participant suggested that one student’s success often lead to other student successes. A faculty participant suggested that grouping is critical because AADP students are “. . . a different kind of at-risk population . . . these are busy, working adults who the risk is their life is just too busy to finish and they encourage each other and that is a huge thing to getting them to graduate.”

A pathway to degree completion was the most important strength that was mentioned by several students throughout the focus group interview. Working adults needed a structure that allowed them to earn a degree in a reasonable amount of time while they maintained their jobs and family responsibilities. The traditional college course structure where courses are offered at various times, various days of the week, does not meet the needs of working adults. The students discussed online course options during the interview and mentioned that those options do not meet their needs. The students stated that they preferred the AADP over online courses because of the interaction with students and faculty. A faculty participant also mentioned that students prefer the AADP over online courses; he stated “They want to be in the classroom. They want to meet with people, they want to listen to the professor.” The faculty participant
also stated that students feel the AADP “…was highly superior to an online course because it allowed the personal connection with the flexibility of the time.”

During the focus group interview, students shared stories of their past attempts to earn a college degree; several of the students had attempted to earn a degree more than one time and at more than one college. Students indicated the reason they did not complete a degree was the difficulty in scheduling college into their busy lives. The structure of higher education programs is often not conducive to the needs of working adults. These AADP students made positive comments about the structure of the AADP learning community and confirmed that the AADP was the reason they returned to higher education. A student commented about the AADP:

As adults we all have responsibilities, we work, we have families, we have children, whatever the case may be, we are used to working and getting things done and achieved and reaching our goals. We are used to going boom, boom, boom, I have to get this done.

Another student commented “You can go at your own pace. You can take one class or you can take more.” Another student participant stated the format “makes it possible for students to earn a degree within two years.” The AADP was a viable option for working adults to complete a two-year degree in two years.

**Summary.** The Model B learning community enhanced student involvement, integration, and motivation and it helped students establish relationships. There appeared to be several strengths in grouping adult learners in a learning community. The adult learners in the AADP learned from each other, supported each other, and motivated each other. A faculty participant’s perspective on the power of grouping adult learners:
They just keep going because they encourage each other, as opposed to often our students who are taking one course a semester and it is taking them 4-5 years to get through their associate’s degree. I don’t think we are seeing that at all with this program. I think we are seeing them really kind of blaze through this and get it done.

Another positive aspect of the AADP is the schedule. Courses were offered specific days and at convenient times each semester. The schedule did not change each semester so adults could arrange their work and personal lives around the AADP courses. The structure also enabled students to earn an associate degree in two years and the mini victories of success and course completion every five weeks motivated the students.

**Case Study of Learning Community Model C**

**Participant overview.** The third college in this case study was located in west-central Ohio and opened in 1969 under operational control of the Ohio Board of Regents. In 1971 a local Board of Trustees assumed legal, statutory, and fiduciary control of the college. This college shared facilities and with a regional campus of a large public university and is governed by a cost-share agreement. Prior to 1991, both institutions on this campus were governed by one chief executive officer. In 1991, the institutions separated leadership control and the two-year college hired its own chief educational officer as president. The separation allowed the two-year college to expand the scope of its curricula through control its general education courses and expansion of workforce development training. Although the college is now approved to operate as a community college by providing Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, the state would not permit the college, or four other co-located technical colleges, to change from a
technical college to a community college. In 2002, the college dropped the word technical from its name to symbolize the changed institution mission. This institution had eight buildings located on 565 acres. The college had five academic divisions: Allied Health, Arts and Sciences, Business and Public Service, Information and Engineering Technologies, and Nursing and enrolls approximately 4,200 students each year. These divisions offered programs in a traditional day and/or evening format and offered blended and online courses.

In 2005, the college’s Strategic Enrollment Action Planning Team developed a proposal to guide enrollment strategies to help the college maintain an optimum number of students and to meet graduation goals. The third objective in this plan challenged administration to develop new academic programs that generate enrollment growth and increase student retention (Strategic Proposal, 2005). The development of new programs aligned with the elements of the college’s strategic enrollment plan that included internal and external assessment, a marketing plan, retention and graduation strategies, and improvement of underrepresented student populations (Elements of Strategic Enrollment Plan, n.d.). The college’s Compass Council Committee challenged departments to focus on enrollment-generating activities needed for future institutional growth (Compass Meeting Minutes, March 24, 2005). A faculty participant stated “The college wanted to offer a learning format that met the needs of the working adult student population.” On July 12, 2005, the Strategic Enrollment Action Planning Team (APT) approved funding for a repackaged Business program (Keese Memo, 2005). In 2006, the Business and Public Service division launched the One Night A Week (ONAW) learning community designed to meet the needs of working adults.
The One Night A Week learning community was one of state’s first learning community curriculum models used in Business programs in Ohio’s public two-year colleges. The ONAW was designed to give working adults a convenient structure to earn an Associate of Applied Business (A.A.B.) in Business Administration degree. The ONAW learning community curriculum model was designed to keep a cohort of students together from the start of the program through degree completion. Each course was offered in an accelerated four-hour block format so that students could take one course at a time by attending class One Night A Week and earn an A.A.B in Business Administration in two years. The Business Administration curriculum provided students with knowledge and skills needed to be effective supervisors, managers, and leaders. A program description that highlighted competencies ONAW students learn is shown in Table 15.

Table 15

*Model C Business Administration Program Description*

The Business Management Major develops the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a modern organization. Students have an opportunity to discuss the application of modern theories with faculty who have both academic credentials and management experience. To prepare students to fully use management theory, specific skills are developed in role plays and exercises are included in management courses. The program prepares graduates to manage a small organization, assume supervisory positions in a large organization or start a business as an entrepreneur.

The ONAW used a selective admission process that included an essay, references, and pretesting to enroll a cohort of 21 students in each ONAW program. The ONAW courses were limited to only students accepted into the ONAW program. When the
ONAW first launched, three cohorts were launched each year. Now, the college launches two ONAW cohorts per year; one in January and one in August. A faculty member stated “There were large numbers of applicants and ONAW program waiting lists during the first few years.” Two ONAW offerings a year meet current enrollment needs.

The ONAW courses were held in a new building on campus in a room with new furniture that can be easily moved into various configurations to align with instructional needs. In addition to the well-designed classroom, the ONAW students and faculty have access to a computer lab with individual stations for all students and faculty selected the most appropriate learning environment for each course. The Business Administration curriculum offered in the ONAW is the same curriculum offered in the traditional Business Administration program. The Business Management curriculum covered the program learning outcomes shown in Table 16 (Learning Outcomes, 2012).

Table 16

_**Model C Business Administration Program Learning Outcomes**_

- Global/Diversity Awareness: students write an essay to reflect on the diversity awareness at Rhodes State College
- Technical Student Learning Outcomes: students apply decisions to problems and case studies
- Writing Performance: self-assessment of growth at Rhodes State College
- Students will answer the question identifying Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling as the four contemporary functions of Management as evidenced by answering Question 3 on Exam 1 correctly.
- Students will answer the question identifying SWOT analysis as a merging of internal and external strategy analysis by answering Question 29 of Exam 2 correctly.
- Students will answer the question identifying Planning, Organizing, Leading and Controlling as the four contemporary functions of Management as evidenced by answering Question 3 on Exam 1 correctly.
- Students will successfully identify management styles as part of a team research project.
- Students will successfully write a composition titled "My Management Style."
A faculty participant emphasized that “The One Night A Week replicates the curriculum that we use in the traditional class…the same book, same syllabus, the exams might be modified a little but it is 95% the same…” Another faculty participant indicated “The only difference is that the exams may be modified in some courses.” The data showed that students in the traditional business program took exams on-site in a proctored environment and students in the ONAW took exams proctored online. A comparison of the One Night A Week and the traditional Business Administration program is shown in Table 17.

Table 17

*Comparison of One Night A Week and the Traditional Business Administration Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One Night A Week Program</th>
<th>Business Management Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Adults age 25 years and older</td>
<td>Students high school age and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
<td>A.A.B. in Business Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Credits</td>
<td>67 semester credits</td>
<td>67 semester credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>3 FT Faculty and Adjunct Faculty</td>
<td>6 FT Faculty and Adjunct Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising Location</td>
<td>Program Liaison</td>
<td>Counselor in Advising Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Workforce Development center</td>
<td>Buildings on main campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Structure</td>
<td>One evening per week, 6-10 p.m.</td>
<td>Traditional two days/evenings per week, varied days/times; blended and online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Length</td>
<td>5-10 weeks</td>
<td>15 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Executive meeting room with moveable tables and chairs; access to a computer lab</td>
<td>Variety of classroom styles with tables and chairs or individual desk/table units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Program Liaison, Learning Center</td>
<td>Academic Advisor, Learning Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Friendly environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ONAW program received accolades from administration and the business advisory committee because it provided working adults access to higher education and a
pathway to earn an associate degree in Business Administration in two years. A faculty participant stated “The ONAW was also acknowledged during the Higher Learning Commission visit as a program that promotes access by offering a unique, flexible schedule.” Another faculty participant stated that the ONAW “…provided a service to fill a need; the need for a convenient way for working adults to get a college degree. These students are working adults who could not do it if they had to take traditionally scheduled courses.”

The ONAW learning community provided a convenient option for working adults to earn an associate degree in approximately two years. The ONAW’s degree completion rate was above the college’s average, the two-year college state average, and the national average. The ONAW learning community had a 71% degree completion rate average of 12 cohorts as shown in Table 18.

Table 18

One Night A Week Program Student Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Started</th>
<th>Current/Finish</th>
<th>Retention Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average 71.00%
The administration analyzed why there was a shift in the ONAW retention rate. A faculty participant stated that when the ONAW program started “…it attracted the cream of the crop and as enrollment as gone down we have gotten a little bit more turn over and a little bit less dedication. It is just the quality of the students.” The administration considered changes in services and will implement a curriculum change in fall 2012 when the 14th ONAW launches. A Human Resource Management major option was added to the ONAW curriculum in the fall of 2012. The ONAW enrollment cap of 21 increased to 27 in the fall of 2012 when the two curriculum options were offered to students. This was the first change to the ONAW since the program was launched. In the new curriculum format, students were able to select three specialized technical courses in human resources or business administration. In the new ONAW format, students began the program together as a cohort; will separate for five, five-week sessions to take program specific courses throughout the curriculum; and will return together to continue the ONAW course sequence. This expanded the ONAW’s market and gave more students an opportunity to enroll in this learning community.

**Participant profiles.** The interview participants included a dean, two faculty members, and 9 students including six female and three male students. The dean that the researcher originally worked with at the beginning of the study retired prior to data collection. During the data collection and analysis phase, the researcher worked with the new dean. The new dean recommended faculty interview and suggested a class for the observation. The new dean was a professor and associate dean at the college prior to being appointed dean of Business and Public Services. The dean recommended the faculty to be interviewed.
The first faculty member interviewed held a Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) certification taught Business and Human Resource Management courses at the college for several years. He was involved in the development, creation, and launching of the One Night A Week program and has taught courses in all 14 ONAW cohorts. The second faculty participant taught as a part-time instructor at the college for five years and taught traditional, distance learning, and ONAW courses. He also served as the One Night A Week program liaison. Other participants included the students who participated in the focus group interview and the faculty member and the students who were enrolled in the class that was observed.

**Data collection.** Procedural and academic documents pertaining to the ONAW, an observation of an ONAW class, and interviews were the data collection methods used for this case study. The researcher collected documents pertaining to the ONAW during two visits to the campus, through email, and from the college’s Web site. Academic documents such as curricula, syllabi, ONAW application, ONAW procedures manual, and assessment data were reviewed. Administrative documents such as the college’s Strategic Enrollment Plan, Compass Council Committee minutes, Action Planning Team (APT) memos, the Strategic Enrollment Action 2004-2004 Proposal, ONAW program documents, ONAW and ONAW liaison job description were reviewed to gain a comprehensive perspective the program. The researcher used the documents to triangulate data to analyze facts to support or explain statements made during the interviews (O’Donoghue & Punch, 2003). An example of how the researcher used multiple sources to triangulated data and verify information occurred when the researcher tried to gain a complete understanding of why the ONAW was developed. During an
interview, a faculty member stated the ONAW was developed to attract adult learners to increase enrollment to meet an institutional strategic goal. The researcher analyzed documentation and confirmed this information the strategic plan, meeting minutes, and memos.

The researcher conducted a classroom observation of an ONAW Managerial Accounting course to observe student behaviors in a natural setting. The ONAW liaison recommended the Managerial Accounting course because the students in the class were enrolled in the program for approximately a year and the course was taught by an experienced part-time faculty. The class where the observation took place was held on a Wednesday evening from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the college’s new Center for Workforce Development center. The building entrance included a conference room and the president’s suite and was decorated with mahogany walls and beautiful furniture and fixtures. The classroom where the ONAW class was held was a large executive conference/classroom with a similar appearance as the entrance; it is classier than any other classroom on campus according to comments made by the faculty and students. The teacher’s station had current technology the furniture was portable and could be arranged to meet instructional needs.

The ONAW liaison contacted the students for the focus group interview. The 14 students enrolled in the ONAW course were invited for a pizza dinner that would be served at 5 p.m. and to participate in a focus group interview at 5:30 p.m. The researcher observed students as they arrived to class. The students were greeted by the ONAW program liaison when they entered the classroom; the liaison worked from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. and provided service to ONAW students. The students engaged in informal
conversation with other students and the ONAW liaison when they entered the classroom and while they ate dinner. Relationships and friendships among the group of students were obvious. At approximately 5:20, the liaison thanked the students for coming to class early to participate in the focus group interview and he introduced the researcher. The liaison left the classroom during the interview so that students would feel comfortable answering the questions.

Nine of the 14 students invited to participate in the focus group, participated in the interview. The interview took place in the classroom and students sat in their normal seats. The researcher used the nine questions shown in Appendix E to guide the focus group interview. For approximately 40 minutes, the researcher engaged in discussion with the students. Several themes were evident throughout the interview; these themes included students’ appreciation for the convenient schedule, the comfortable learning environment, relationships with their adult peers, and the interaction among the students.

The sequence of the data collection—dean and faculty interviews, student focus group interview, and classroom observation—allowed the researcher to triangulate data using documents and a variety of perspectives. Additionally, the researcher had follow-up discussions with a faculty member, the liaison, and the dean to cross-check data from multiple sources (O’Donoghue & Punch, 2003). The researcher used NVivo for storage and analysis of the interview transcripts, analytic memos containing notes the researcher made during and after the interviews, and classroom observation notes.

**Overview of the findings.** The themes described are the foundation for the findings of the ONAW learning community case study. The themes and their extracted meanings were used to answer four research questions for this study. This case study
provided descriptive details of the ONAW learning community based on the perspectives of people experienced the learning environment.

The researcher coded and analyzed data throughout data collection. The researcher used the four-cycle coding process described at the beginning of the chapter to identify the themes for the Model C learning community. The researcher used NVivo’s query function to create a list of 24 codes for Model C that is shown in Table 19.

Table 19

*Categories Identified in First-cycle Coding for Model C*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Night A Week Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2f contact with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction among students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention to degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes learning enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased graduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job promotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time flown by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the first-cycle coding process, the researcher read the transcripts from the four interviews and the observation documentation and used NVivo to code common words and phrases into nodes. When data applied to more than one node, the researcher used the primary meaning of the statement to code the data into a node rather than coding each datum into multiple nodes.

The researcher then used NVivo word frequency data including frequency distributions, tag clouds, and tree maps to further analyze the data during second-cycle coding. During the third cycle coding, the researcher compared the categories identified in the first-cycle coding with categories identified in the second-cycle coding to search for consistencies and to develop the themes. During the fourth-cycle coding process, the researcher conducted a final review of the data and the comparison categories brought forth the five major themes that describe the Model C learning community are shown in Table 20.

Table 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model C Themes Identified from Fourth-cycle Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foundational themes of the ONAW learning community case study focused on student relationships, involvement, and integration. The cohort learning community model enhanced students’ relationships with their peers. The ONAW students formed close friendships and established support systems with their ONAW peers. These relationships extended beyond the classroom and beyond graduation.
The grouping of students theme was identified because the students valued the opportunity to learn with peers that have similar work experiences and lifestyles. The faculty also found value in grouping adult learners together; the grouping enabled faculty to move students to higher levels of learning. A faculty participant stated “This learning environment is easier to make more interactive. Students are coming from jobs and since they are already in work environment, they can give a lot of examples and have more discussion.”

The final theme was identified because student persistence was positivity impacted by this learning environment. The student retention rate and graduation rates for students enrolled in the ONAW are higher than students enrolled in the traditional Business Administration program. The researcher used data triangulation techniques to present these five themes and their extracted meanings. An analysis of the Model C themes is presented in Chapter 5.

**Theme 1—The ONAW helped students form relationships with their peers.**

In the ONAW, a group of students was together for four hours per week for two years. This time together allowed the students to get to know each other on a personal level. The students in the ONAW learning community developed relationships with their peers early in the program, grew the relationships throughout the degree program, and maintained the relationships and friendships after graduation. The personal connections among the students were evident during the classroom observation. The students connected with other students as soon as they walked into the classroom. Before the class started, a group of students left the classroom to socialize outside the building while others moved chairs to engage in discussion in small groups. The discussions the researcher overheard
appeared to be personal conversations and did not appear to be course related. Based on
the discussion topics and student comments, it appeared that students were familiar with
each other’s lives beyond what could be learned in a college classroom. Relationships
and friendships were evident. A student participant explained the relationships “We have
formed a bond. Everybody kind of knows and everybody is concerned about everybody
and what is going on in everybody’s life and things like that.”

The students’ relationships extended beyond the classroom. During the focus
group interview, students shared that they used Facebook, text messaging, and email to
socialize outside of the classroom. They indicated that most of the students in this
ONAW cohort communicated weekly on Facebook and that faculty and other students
were not included in their Facebook group. The amount of weekly interaction through
social media depended on the topic being presented in class. A student participant stated
“…depends what is going on in class on how questions we have on a particular
homework or whatever but it varies, sometimes not a lot and sometimes there is a lot.”
Students commented on how the use of social networking tools improved the outside of
classroom communication and supported student learning. A student participant stated:

We started a private Facebook group at the very beginning. Only the
people in the cohort are invited to join. We can post questions if we have
questions about a particular homework or something like that. So we have
been able to interact that way as well.

In addition to using social networking tools, the students stated that they got together in
study groups outside of class. Another student participant indicated that a group of
students got together at a local fast-food establishment to study. The students also mentioned that “We sometimes go out and celebrate the end of a class.”

The learning environment is different when the students are connected through friendships than when students are less connected on a personal level. During the observation, there were instances when students called on another student to answer a question that they could not answer. The students made statements about each other’s areas of expertise and work experience. It appeared that the students knew which student(s) to ask for help. Perhaps the researcher observed the leaders and followers that faculty mentioned during the interviews. When a faculty participant was talking about the relationships among ONAW students she stated “The learning environment is different from a traditional classroom. They become friends and there are some people that become leaders and there are some that become followers.” Another faculty participant’s perspective was that the relationships students form are exclusive and that there are subunits of friendships among the group. The faculty participant stated “…they bond and there are some people that with 15-20 people not everybody gets along, and you can tell in the lecture or discussions that some people might not all be friends.” After hearing faculty comments about subgroups, the researcher watched the group dynamics during the observation. The subgroups of friends were obvious based on where the students sat; however, all of the subgroups appeared to know a lot about each other and seemed to work together. After the observation, the researcher asked another faculty member about the relationships among the students and she stated:

There are certain people they connect with. There are probably two or three in a cluster. There are probably 3-4 clusters in a class of 15. Now do
clusters share with clusters, I don’t know. It is where they sit. It is pretty obvious.

A faculty participant suggested students form power through group association. He indicated that students sometimes form groups that they want to work with the majority of the time and his way to resolve that issue was to “…split the back row clan” when he assigned students to projects groups. Based on the observation and the comments from the students, it appeared that there were close subgroups of friends; however, relationships existed among the subgroups. The relationships also extend beyond the classroom.

**Theme 2—Student involvement was enhanced in the ONAW learning community.** The evidence collected from interviews and the classroom observation supported the theory that the ONAW learning community increased student involvement. The administrator and the faculty who were interviewed indicated that the ONAW students were more involved in learning than students enrolled in traditional courses. A faculty participant’s perspective on the differences in student involvement in the ONAW compared to traditional courses “I keep comparing it to traditional but there is just more activity and this is 6 p.m.” Another faculty participant commented “They respond to group discussions. They respond when you break them up into case studies. They are more engaged than a traditional class.” An increased level of student involvement was evident during the classroom observation; students laughed as they shared examples and they appeared to get along with one another as they made jokes and socialized before and during class.
During the ONAW class observation, the researcher observed a higher level of involvement than in some accounting classes where similar pedagogy was used in accounting courses. The students worked on accounting problems with the assistance of the professor. The professor put an exercise on the board and students worked through the problem while the professor walked around the room and assisted students individually. As soon as the instructor put the assignment on the board, the students moved their chairs to sit in small groups. As the students worked through the problems, they assisted one another. Two students in one group shared a textbook. Students asked questions to confirm understanding and participated in class discussion. The researcher observed students actively involved in learning together and peer help was part of the learning environment.

The increase in student involvement may be attributed to the type of pedagogy the ONAW faculty used in their classes. Faculty participants commented that they use a more active pedagogy in ONAW classes because the students are together for a four hour block and most of the students have worked all day and need to be actively involved. A faculty participant stated “I have this class for four hours and I do not talk entire time. I try to divide the class time with activities such as case studies, projects, videos, and small group projects.” Having students work in groups seemed to be a common pedagogical strategy. A faculty participant indicated that “As the night goes on, you have to have those activities later in the evening because you cannot lecture for four hours and I really try to have more group participation and dialog activities.”

Another faculty participant commented on how he used current events and presentations to get students involved in real-world business discussions and that he
required students to bring current events article to each class. He indicated that students engaged in “…great class discussions” when current event topics were introduced. This faculty participant also commented that there were healthy discussions in his business administration ONAW courses when students participated in team building and group case studies. The team building strategy this instructor mentioned was also mentioned during the student focus group. A student participant commented that the first class was focused on team building and that exercise had a positive impact on bringing the group of students together. The student participant stated “…it really helped get it so we could learn off of everybody’s strengths.”

**Theme 3—The ONAW learning community fostered social and academic integration.** The evidence from interviews and observations showed that the ONAW learning community fostered student integration. The integration created a comfortable learning environment, provided academic and personal support, and built students’ confidence. It was obvious during the observation that the students were comfortable with one another and comfortable in the ONAW learning environment. A student participant’s opinion “We are a small group and we all stay together so you feel very comfortable and relaxed. You get very familiar with everybody.”

During the observation, there appeared to be more student to student interactions than is observed in traditional two-year accounting courses. It is common for students to work accounting problems individually and with faculty support. However, the ONAW students immediately formed work groups and helped one another with the problems without direction from the professor. There were instances where a student asked another
student a question rather than asking the teacher. A student commented on the level of interaction among the students:

I see the interaction of the students, even in note taking; we discuss things that don’t really exist in your traditional classroom. I think that comes from being in the cohort. We have been together and we know each other and correspond and discuss.

The ONAW students were comfortable learning from one another.

The social integration among the students helped students form support systems. The support systems these students formed provided support for both academic issues and personal issues. If a student fell behind, another student was there to provide academic help. If a student was having challenges in his or her personal life, students offered support and encouragement. Several examples of support were shared by both faculty and students during the interviews. A faculty participant summarized his perception of how the learning community impact integration:

They are in it together. If one is struggling, they sit down and go over it for an hour or more until all of the students get it. That is something you don’t see in a traditional class. They are passing out wedding and graduation invitations to one another by end of two years. There are long-term friendships that come out of this experience.

In addition to academic support, the ONAW students appeared to support one another outside the classroom. During the focus group interview, a student pointed to a peer she called to fix her car and another peer she called when she needed help with taxes. She
stated “I can tell you what every single person here does…For networking purposes it has been really beneficial.”

The social integration appeared to have a positive impact students’ confidence in learning. Students demonstrated confidence when they asked one another questions. A student participant stated:

I think to a certain extent, we all feed off of each other. If one of us is struggling on something then usually it is a majority. When one of us gets it and somebody doesn’t, we are very willing to help each other out.

The students shared several examples of when they spent time between classes and helped one another through their social networking site. This was another example of how the ONAW enhanced students’ confidence and helped them establish a support system. A student participant gave a statement of evidence that the learning environment build a community of leaners “It has given me confidence. I also think that this whole team spirit, because I don’t just want to succeed, I want all of them to succeed.” A success story that supported the importance peer support was shared: A student started in the Adult Basic Literacy Program (ABLE), completed remedial courses, and graduated from the ONAW program. The faculty participant who shared the story stated “I don’t know if (student name) could have gone to a traditional class and completed that because she literally had a learning community. She had a support system and maybe some people reached out more to her.”

Student-student interaction had a positive impact on students; however, evidence did not show that the ONAW had positive impact on student-faculty interaction. The
evidence showed that students rely on other students to assist with learning and assignment completion more than they rely on faculty. A faculty participant stated:

They rely on each other more than they rely on me outside of class.

Because they are together through whole program, they become friends, they set up study groups and work together outside of class. I guess they don’t need me as much.

Another example that suggested student-faculty interactions may be negatively impacted in this type of learning community was the perceived power students’ gained through group bonding. The student group is a cohesive unit with collective power and at times the students used this power to make requests and challenge faculty.

A faculty participant talked about how the ONAW group bond affects faculty; he stated “That first night it can be a little intimidating because as an instructor you know they have bonded.” The faculty participant indicated he is now prepared for this type of behavior from the ONAW students. His strategy to deal with group power is to set the tone for the course and communicate that the faculty member is in control. The faculty participant indicated that his strategy was to give a pretest during the first class so that students could gauge what they know and what they do not know about the subject. He believed that this strategy gave the students less combined power; he stated “I stand right up to them. The reason I do that pretest is to sort of let them know who is in charge.”

Another strategy the faculty participant used minimize group control was to divide the subgroups of when he made group project teams. He stated “So when I break them up into groups, I purposely will do it random.” The faculty member’s approaches to dealing with the ONAW group power were effective. The evidence gathered during the
classroom observation supported positive student-faculty interaction. The teacher knew the students by name and appeared to have a good relationship with students.

**Subtheme A— The ONAW learning community fostered academic integration.**

The business management curriculum was structured so that all of the students in the ONAW could take all courses required in the curriculum in a specified sequence. This curriculum sequence started with foundation courses such as Computer Applications and English Composition and moved to advanced business courses. The cohort model combined with the specific course sequence ensured that all students had similar knowledge and skills. This academic integration was a strength of the ONAW program. In traditional business management programs, students self-select courses and seldom take courses in a prescribed sequence; therefore, students enter technical courses with a wide range of knowledge and skills. A classroom of students with various skill levels makes instruction more challenging. Faculty indicated that they can cover more material at a faster pace and move students to higher levels of learning when the students enter courses with similar knowledge and skills.

Another example of academic integration in the ONAW was the combining of courses. The microeconomics and macroeconomics courses were integrated into one course. The Arts and Sciences and Business faculty collaborated to integrate public speaking the introductory management course. Students took approximately 80% of the public speaking course and then move into the management course where a research project and a presentation were assigned. The final part of the project was a presentation and the presentation was observed and graded by both the public speaking and the management faculty. This curriculum integration facilitated a two class meeting
reduction in public speaking. The faculty also integrated business concepts and practices into the Business Communication course to strengthen students writing skills with an emphasis on business. Some of the integration was the outcome of assessment and the desire to improve student learning and some of the integration was the outcome of negotiation between Arts and Science and Business faculty to reduce the number of ONAW class meetings. During the negotiation process, faculty were concerned that more class meetings were given to Arts and Sciences courses than were given to Business. Business faculty sacrificed more face-to-face time than Arts and Science faculty. The faculty participant stated that “Arts and Science finally had to give and they did.” The negotiation resulted in academic integration that appeared to be a positive addition to the curriculum.

Theme 4—Grouping of students in the ONAW learning community

positively impacted student learning. Evidence of student bonding was identified in both student and faculty interviews. The students in the ONAW are a community of working adults with similar demographic characteristics. Their similar characteristics appeared to help students become comfortable with each other and the learning environment. Faculty often incorporated students’ work experiences into the classes. This made learning more personal and applicable and it also enabled students to learn more about each other. A faculty participant emphasized “…a lot of our work experience and our life experience play into in these classes.” As students learned more about each other, the ONAW learning community became stronger. The variety of work experiences among the students and faculty added depth to most discussions and everyone involved had the opportunity to learn. The faculty participant stated “I have actually learned things
that pertain to my job. From the coursework, discussions, and everything, I have applied a lot of it.”

The data showed that the creation of a cohort group of working adult students enhanced the learning experience. Faculty suggested that the academic and maturity level of students enrolled in the ONAW program was high; these students were usually working full time and managing their homes and family. A faculty participant stated adult learners “…have already been successful in juggling family and work and are motivated.” In addition to similar life experiences, adults also have similar priorities, and learning and earning a college degree is a priority. The ONAW students learned to multitask and they were motivated by the desire to improve their current position. A faculty participant emphasized the ONAW students “…are more studious, focused, dedicated.” He mentioned that this program is similar to an honors program at a four-year university. A part-time faculty member suggested that the students in the ONAW would not appreciate the learning environment in the day, traditional course offerings. She stated:

I would suspect that many of these students if they were in the day classes would find it very non-challenging and discouraging. Because the level of commitment, the level of life experience, the level of literacy and competence just is much higher here.

Another faculty participant stated that “…18-20 year olds have a little different priority.” The data from administrative, faculty, and student interviews supported the strength of grouping adult learners together in a learning community.
The grouping of students helped students build relationships. A student participant’s comments summarized how the learning community impacted integration. “We build a relationship together. We want to know how everybody’s life is and everything else. In the traditional class they do not get to know each other as well.” The ONAW students rely on their strong peer relationships to enhance learning. A student stated “If we have a question on assignments, we don’t call the instructors we call each other.”

**Theme 5—The ONAW learning community had a positive impact on student persistence.** The data showed that the ONAW learning community curriculum model developed high achieving students that persisted. The structure of the ONAW learning community was designed to meet the needs of working adults so that they could succeed in college and earn a degree. The ONAW attracted ambitious and motivated students and gave them a learning environment that enabled them to earn an associate degree. Graduates from the ONAW embraced lifelong learning and many continued their education to earn higher degrees.

The data showed that the ONAW attracted students who would not attend college if the one night per week, one course at a time, same day and time for two consecutive years format was not available. The data from the focus group interview and the faculty interviews suggested that the majority of the ONAW students had previous college experience that ended in non-degree completion. The students mentioned the challenges of college course schedules that required students to attend multiple days, at various times, and the schedule changes each term makes it difficult for adult students to succeed. After several months of trying to juggle college, work, and family, adult students often
drop out of college. The ONAW’s design addressed these issues and provided a manageable higher education option for working adults. The data was rich with positive student comments about the ONAW format. The data showed that the biggest advantage is one course at a time. One student commented on the importance of one course at a time: “I go to work and work a forty hour week and have studies and it gives you a chance study without having 3-4 classes to do full time.” A second student also gave evidence to support the importance of one course in a block schedule:

I think it is an easier to learn in this kind of environment because we are here for four hours a night working on the one subject. We have one subject at a time. They are not trying to cram 3 or 4 classes in at once. So it makes learning the material easier because you can focus. Plus, we have our classmates to bounce questions off of if we need help.

In addition to providing a course format that meets the needs of working adults, the ONAW also provided additional services saved students’ time and trips to campus. The services that were provided to ONAW students included registration, financial aid support, and ordering and delivering textbooks. The college implemented policies to address issues that influence ONAW enrollment and withdrawals; these included technology issues, textbook issues, and student dependence on staff service. The faculty commented in the interviews that these issues must be resolved within a day or two or students fall behind and they withdraw from the course. The faculty and administration are continually analyzing enrollment data and evaluating process improvement options. Now that online registration and book purchasing options are available to students, the administration is considering changing ONAW practices to require students to register
themselves and purchase their books. A faculty commented on this idea “Now that we have experience with the program, we believe that we will make them better students if we make them do more themselves. We may give them instructions and let them do some things on their own.”

The ONAW learning community attracts ambitious, motivated students. The students see this program as an opportunity to fulfill a goal and they put forth the effort to succeed. A faculty participant stated “They are more, I guess, ambitious maybe because they are working, they have a family, they are coming at night. They are more prepared, they are more dedicated.” The students in the ONAW appear to be more ambitious and motivated than students enrolled in the college’s traditional business program. A faculty participant stated “These students are motivated; they do extra work to learn and only about 30% of traditional students do extra work.” The faculty further mentioned “These students are a cut above the normal student; they are always very interested in doing everything. They want to learn.” An example the faculty participant shared is that in most classes when he offers bonus points, the students who need points will do the extra work and the other students do not complete the bonus work. He stated that when bonus points are offered in an ONAW course, every student does the extra work to earn the bonus points. The full-time faculty comment about the quality of students the ONAW attracts was confirmed by a part-time faculty; she stated that she “Enjoys teaching ONAW because they are different kind of student; they want to learn!”

The ONAW students are motivated as confirmed by 100% of the faculty and administrators interviewed for this case study. The students’ motivation facilitates a
quality work ethic and creates the high work expectation that all ONAW. The students are expected to attend class, to participate, and to do their best in the ONAW courses. The expectations are set by faculty; however, the implementation of the work expectations appears to be student driven. The majority of the students work hard and they expect every student to work at the same level. A faculty participant stated “If somebody does not pull their share of the road, they are not afraid. They won’t confront them, but I don’t know if they will maybe help him.” The students in the ONAW have similar responsibilities and challenges and excuses for not doing the work are not permitted. A faculty participant shared an example of how work ethic is student driven:

There was one person who was helping a social loafer. The rest of the group resented it. It was almost like this person was cheating…The rest of the cohort was resentful of this. It is like we are all working hard and why should you be helping this person. If they should fail, they should fail.

The ONAW learning community structure and the students the program attracted had a positive impact on student persistence. Students become confident and succeeded in this learning environment. A student commented “I think it has made me more confident. I am more apt to try new things now than I was before.” Another student stated “It is easier now that I know what I am capable of, in taking on new things; I know I will be able to get through them. I know I can do it now.”

The evidence showed that in addition to providing the structure for students to earn an associate degree, the ONAW developed lifelong learners. Students who earned a degree in the ONAW often continued in a bachelor program. Although the researcher could not find transfer data specific to ONAW students, faculty interview data showed
that a majority of the ONAW students furthered their education. A faculty participant stated “It has had a positive impact on student persistence. Not only persistence at (name of college), but many of these students go on for a bachelor degree right after they graduate from our program.” Another faculty participant suggested that the ONAW not only provided a means for students to earn an associate degree, he believed that the ONAW developed life-long learners; he stated “The majority of them become lifelong learners.”

The ONAW learning community had a positive impact on student persistence. The ONAW’s graduation rate and the time to degree completion rate are both above average. This learning community meets the needs of working adults. The words of a student summarized the impact of the ONAW:

   It is kind of surreal, when I first signed up for this, I thought what am I getting myself into? Every Wednesday night for two years? Am I really going to be able to do this? And now we are almost done. It is kind of surreal that we are almost done. It just seems like time has flown by, like we have not been here two years. It has made the learning enjoyable because we did not feel like it has been dragging on forever.

   **Summary.** The ONAW learning community is a quality higher education option for working adults. The students in the ONAW were involved in learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Students enrolled in the ONAW established relationships that provided both academic and personal support during challenging times. The social integration among students helped students establish friendships and relationships that were critical to student success. The students appreciated learning with students who had
similar characteristics and the students gained self-motivation and confidence from one another and their successes in the ONAW. The ONAW had above average student retention and degree completion rates. It offered students the opportunity to work full time, manage family and personal obligations, and earn an associate degree in two years. The curriculum and experience gave students new knowledge and skills and confidence to succeed. The ONAW developed lifelong learners.

**Summary of Themes of Three Learning Community Case Studies**

The three learning community curriculum models described in the case studies were unique in structure and they met the needs of working adults. All three learning communities used different approaches to create unique learning environments that facilitated student involvement and social and academic integration. Student involvement was a primary theme in all three learning community models as shown in Table 21.

Table 21

*Summary of Themes from Three Learning Community Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes Model A</th>
<th>Themes Model B</th>
<th>Themes Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
<td>Grouping of Students</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Student Motivation</td>
<td>Grouping of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three learning environments used similar pedagogy to increase student involvement. The pedagogy included a variety of active learning strategies that facilitated student collaboration and community building. Group activities, projects, and presentations were common pedagogical strategies.
Four themes were identified in two of the three learning community models—social integration, student relationships, grouping of students, and learning community structure. First, social integration was apparent through student-student interactions within the classroom and outside of the classroom. Faculty used a variety of techniques, including team building exercises, to build community among students. Second, student relationships were observed during the observation and the importance of these relationships were confirmed though students’ comments in the interviews. Faculty also confirmed that the students build lasting relationships and friendships that often extend beyond the class, program, and graduation. The relationships that students formed with their peers provided both academic and personal support. Third, the grouping of students was a theme in two of the three cases. The grouping of working adults in a learning community was supported by the administrators, faculty, and students. Students appreciated the common interests and life experiences they had with their peers and they appreciated learning from one another.

Lastly, the learning community structure was an important theme. All three learning communities had unique structures designed to meet the needs of the working adult student. All three used a block course schedule that was offered during the evening or weekend, offered students the opportunity to stay in a cohort, and provided a path for students to earn an A.A.B. in approximately two years. These structural characteristics are important for the working adult who had limited time for college. Working adults could fit college into their busy lives when there was a structure that did not change from semester to semester. Although the three learning community models are different, they all have a similar structure.
The researcher used two ways to summarize the findings of this multi-case study as they related to the researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework. First, the researcher used three matrices to connect the details and supporting facts of each case with the conceptual framework of this study. The matrix of evidence is divided into three sections—student involvement, social integration, and academic integration and persistence. The student involvement findings from the three cases are shown in Table 22. Motivation was not included in the researcher’s original matrix designed during the literature review; however, it was added because the findings showed it was an important component of learning communities.

Table 22

*Multi-case Study Matrix of Evidence of Student Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Community Environment</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learner Centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group projects</td>
<td>Small group projects</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion/debate</td>
<td>Group in-class activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Active learning in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little lecture</td>
<td>Thread activities into lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Group projects outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cohort of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate in activities</td>
<td>Scheduled lunch between classes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn from peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn from peers’ work experiences</td>
<td>Semi-cohort of students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Outside of class study groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go beyond minimum standard</td>
<td>More interactive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help each other</td>
<td>Peers motivate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn from each other</td>
<td>Active learners</td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-directed to get work done</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do extra work to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put forth effort</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The social integration findings from the three cases are shown in Table 23.

**Table 23**

*Multi-case Study Matrix of Evidence of Social Integration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Integration</th>
<th>Learning Community Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student – Student Interactions</strong></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong Peer Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Become lifelong friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social networking weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on peers more than faculty for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students become confident, empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student – Faculty Interactions</strong></td>
<td>Connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside of Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialize at dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual help before class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings in office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Similar to Traditional Courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prefer email communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some see faculty on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited Need for Faculty Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside of Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly contact with ONAW liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email communication with faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students Socially Connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactions outside of class</strong></td>
<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>required a lot of outside of class time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Off campus study groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication via Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student retention was positively impact by all three models. Model A’s fall 2011 to spring 2012 student retention rate was 66.3%, Model B’s estimated retention rate was 70-75%, and Model C’s average student retention and graduate rate was 71%.
The academic integration and student retention findings from the three cases are shown in Table 24.

Table 24

*Multi-case Matrix of Evidence of Academic Integration and Retention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Community Environment</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Integration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkage of courses</td>
<td>Business Courses Each Term</td>
<td>Business and AA Courses Each Term</td>
<td>Integrated Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No direct linkage</td>
<td>Specified Course Sequence; however, student begin enter continuously</td>
<td>Sequenced courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students take different formats (accelerated, traditional, online)</td>
<td>Students take different formats (accelerated, traditional, online)</td>
<td>Integrated course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping of students (Cohort)</td>
<td>Similar Student Characteristics Format attracts working adults</td>
<td>Similar Student Characteristics Work experience 24 years or older</td>
<td>Cohort Model Students 25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students together 2-evenings per week</td>
<td>Students together 4-8 hours on Saturday</td>
<td>Working adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections across disciplines</td>
<td>Courses required for A.A.B. offered in accelerated format</td>
<td>Courses required for A.A.B. and AA offered in accelerated format</td>
<td>Specified Course Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-program collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts integration across courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Retention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Retention</td>
<td>Fall 2011 to Spring 2012 = retention rate = 66.3%</td>
<td>Director estimated student retention = 70-75%</td>
<td>Average retention rate of first 12 cohorts = 71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, the researcher used NVivo’s query and node frequency features to align the categories identified in each case with the conceptual framework of the study. A conceptual framework summary of the node frequencies for each case is shown in Table 25.

Table 25

*Multi-case Conceptual Framework of Node Frequencies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building Community</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Student Interactions</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactions Outside of Class</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linkage of Courses</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grouping of Students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connections Across Disciplines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Learning communities facilitated student collaboration and group learning. Students’ were positively impacted by their involvement in the learning communities and students gained confidence and motivation through their experiences and successes in the learning communities. Student relationships were positively impacted and the bonds that students formed in the learning communities provided support critical to student success.

The three case studies provided best practices that can be used to design learning community curriculum models in other programs and at other two-year colleges. Two-year colleges need to move away from the traditional course structure that does not meet
the needs of the adult student population. The demographics of two-year colleges are the reason programs need to be offered in new, innovative formats. Two-year college administration could learn curriculum design strategies from these three case studies and they could implement new ways to offer associate degrees. National and state initiatives emphasized the need for two-year colleges to graduate educated adult workers to meet workforce needs. New, innovative curriculum models would help two-year colleges achieve this goal.
Chapter Five

Analysis, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The findings in Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive, rich description of three business learning communities as experienced by students, faculty, administrators, and the researcher in their natural setting (Creswell, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Stage & Manning, 2003; Stake, 2006; Yin, 1989). The researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework was used to interpret and analyze the findings to provide a detailed description of each model, to provide a cross-case analysis, and to compare the similarities and differences among the models and in relation to theory (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989). Each learning community model was analyzed as a bounded entity and analyzed from a cross-case perspective to answer the four research questions (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1998).

1. How do three learning community curriculum models shape the learning environment to facilitate student involvement in community college business programs in Ohio?

2. How do three learning community curriculum models shape the learning environment to facilitate student social and academic integration in community college business programs in Ohio?

3. What can we learn from three different learning community curricular models in order to improve practice and positively impact student involvement and social and academic integration?

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4. How do three learning community curriculum models used in community college business programs in Ohio align with learning community research?

Additionally, the cross-case analysis filled the four gaps Bailey and Alfonso (2005) identified in their critical analysis of practices outlined in the Achieving the Dream initiative: 1) it added to the academy of community college research, 2) it provided details of learning community best practices, 3) it provided evidence from multiple institutions, and 4) it expanded learning community research. The analysis described the real-life context of three unique learning community curriculum models used in business programs at public two-year colleges.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence from among the six sources of evidence Yin (1989) suggested for case study methodology: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts to triangulate data and analyze the finding of this multi-case study. The participants’ comments, feelings, and interpretations were used to analyze the data for each case and in the cross-case comparison (Stake, 1995).

**Analysis of Findings**

The researcher evaluated the six structures used to report case study findings: linear-analytic, comparative, chronological, theory-building, suspense, and unsequenced (Yin, 1989). Since the purpose of the study was to describe, explain, and explore how three business learning community models are implemented public community colleges in Ohio, the researcher narrowed the six structures to three—linear-analytic, comparative, and chronological. The linear-analytic and the chronological structures did not align well
with a curriculum model case study; therefore, the researcher used a comparative-analysis structure to present the findings of this multi-case study.

The researcher used a two-step comparative analysis structure to compare the multi-case data and themes with the theoretical propositions defined in the conceptual framework for this study (Saldana, 2009; Stake, 1995). First, the findings of the singular case were compared to the conceptual framework theories. Second, a cross-case theme to theory comparison was conducted. The researcher used subthemes identified in the literature review to strengthen the analysis of student involvement and social and academic integration. The subthemes used to analyze student involvement included pedagogy, community building, and self-motivation (Astin, 1984). Student-student interactions, student-faculty interactions, and student interactions outside the classroom were subthemes used to analyze social integration (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Linkages of courses, grouping of students, and connections across disciplines were subthemes used to analyze academic integration.

To analyze student involvement, the researcher focused on students’ physical and psychological energy that was spent on learning. This included independent learning and learning with and from their peers. The researcher looked for evidence of community among the students and faculty and analyzed how this community and collaboration impacted support. To analyze student integration, the researcher focused on student-student interactions and student-faculty interactions and how these interactions influenced learning. The researcher observed student interactions inside the classroom and used responses to interview questions to analyze students’ perception of how inside and outside of classroom interactions impacted their learning. To analyze academic
integration, the researcher focused on curriculum design strategies that were used to
group students, link courses, and create cross-discipline connections. The researcher
analyzed curriculum structure, course sequence, and cross-curricula integration. The
theories, themes, and theoretical constructs used to analyze and report the findings of this
multi-case study are shown in Table 26.

Table 26

**Summary of Themes and Subthemes Used to Analyze Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Themes and Subthemes</th>
<th>Theoretical Constructs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Involvement Theory</strong></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Students’ physical and psychological energy applied to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Astin, 1984)</td>
<td>Peer groups</td>
<td>Impacts involvement and persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty-student relationships</td>
<td>Impacts development and persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Generates involvement; energy devoted to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building community</td>
<td>Collaboration; support systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure</strong> (Tinto, 1993)</td>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>Social communities influence students’ commitment to goal completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-student interactions</td>
<td>Active learning; learn from each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-faculty interactions</td>
<td>Empowers students’ intellectual growth; fosters active involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student interactions outside of class</td>
<td>Form learning communities; fosters relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic integration</td>
<td>Connections across curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grouping of students</td>
<td>Similar demographics and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linkage of courses</td>
<td>Curriculum structure; course sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connections across disciplines</td>
<td>Faculty collaboration; course/theme integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher used NVivo’s qualitative software to extract the data and themes
identified in each case and compare them with the themes identified in the literature review. The researcher generated new queries that aligned with conceptual framework of this study. This analysis process was replicated singularly for each case and then combined for the cross-case theme to theory analysis (Yin, 1989). The conceptual framework summary of the node frequencies was provided in Chapter 4 and the data for each case were extracted and used in the analysis in Chapter 5.

**Overview of the Analysis of Findings**

Although all three curriculum models were unique in structure, the findings showed that the three learning community models restructured the curricula and classroom environment (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). The theory of involvement suggested that students who are involved focus more physical and psychological energy toward learning (Astin, 1999). The findings in this multi-case study provided evidence that students enrolled in these business learning communities applied higher levels of energy toward learning. The findings in all three cases also showed increased student involvement through the use of pedagogical methods that allowed students to create knowledge together (Tinto, 2006). Pedagogy used in the three learning community models included a variety of active learning strategies that facilitated student collaboration and gave students the opportunity to learn together. Additionally, all three models used unique approaches to build community among students to enhance student involvement. These approaches included group projects, activities, and an interactive learning that fostered community building. These strategies increased collaboration and group learning in all three curriculum models. The findings also showed that students were involved in active and group learning both inside and outside the classroom.
Bers and Smith (1991) used components of Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1980) study to determine that social integration and academic integration affects student persistence at community colleges; they found that social integration has a greater impact than academic integration. The findings of this multi-case study supported this research. The findings showed that social integration, particularly student to student interaction, is positively enhanced in the three business learning community models. The findings confirmed that social integration, as defined by student to student interactions both inside and outside of the classroom, is enhanced in the three learning communities.

Research showed that the more students are involved in learning with each other and faculty, the more students learn (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 2006). Additional research on faculty-student integration suggested that students at community colleges perceive social contact with faculty as being instrumental in degree completion (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1985). The findings from Model A supported the theory that learning community curriculum models increased student-faculty involvement and interactions. This model connected students and faculty for a dinner social time each week and there was evidence of other school activities that students and faculty attended together. Perhaps this is because of the faculty member’s interest in connecting with students or it may be because more college activities are offered at this larger institution. However, the findings from Models B and C did not support the theory that student-faculty interaction was instrumental in degree completion. The findings of these two models suggested that student-student integration is strong and this connection may reduce the need for faculty-student interaction. Perhaps the difference in results could be attributed to the fact that the majority of students in this study are adult learners in learning communities compared to
other studies that may have included traditional age, 18 years and older, college students. The findings from Model C suggested that student-faculty relationships are less important than student-student relationships. Perhaps the bonds that students formed in the Model C community allowed the students to rely on each other for education support and learning rather than relying on faculty. The findings from all three cases also suggested that student-faculty conversations or dialogue that occurred outside the classroom were usually initiated by the student. In Models B and C, there was limited evidence of faculty-initiated communication or connection outside of the classroom. However, the evidence showed that both of these colleges attempted to enhance student-faculty integration through an annual lunch or dinner social gathering to connect faculty with students enrolled in the learning communities.

Academic integration by grouping of students and linkage of courses is supported in all three learning communities. Evidence from administrators, faculty, and students show the positive aspects of students learning with similar peers. Models B and C used admission requirements to form a group of adult students in the learning community; and a similar group of adult students was created by the course schedule location in Model A. Using the three measures—grouping of students, linkages of courses, and connections across disciplines—Model C was the only model that supported academic integration. The Model C learning community had a specific course sequence that students were required to follow; the courses were intentionally sequenced from the beginning foundation course to the capstone course. There was also evidence of course linkages and integration of concepts across disciplines in Model C. Academic integration, as defined by connections across curriculum, was not present in Models A and B.
The analysis of findings showed multiple narratives and examples to explain how singular learning community models facilitated student involvement and social and academic integration. After the analysis of each case, a cross-case comparative analysis is presented. The researcher used these analyses to present best practices on how learning community curriculum models were used to improve student involvement and social and academic integration. This analysis included recommendations for future research.

**Analysis of Learning Community Model A**

The structure of the Accelerated Business Program (ABP) learning community is a linked-course learning community model (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). The courses required in the A.A.B. in Business Management are offered in an accelerated block format on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings between 5:30-10:00 p.m. (Cuyahoga Community College, 2012). The courses are linked so that students can complete the A.A.B. degree in four semesters. The ABP course offering structure provided students a comprehensive learning experience that started with foundation courses the first semester and moved into advanced courses in subsequent semesters (Hill, 1985; Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). The structure gave students the option to take the entire curriculum together as a cohort or students could take ABP courses combined with courses in other delivery formats.

The ABP learning community model is structured to meet the needs of working adults. First, the ABP courses are offered at a convenient time and a convenient location for working adults. Second, the college served the students a free dinner before class, which removed another obstacle for adults who go directly from work to college. Third, it provided students a set schedule with courses offered the same days and times throughout
the two-year curriculum. This gave working adults a convenient way to fit college into their busy lives and it offered flexibility if students need to change their schedule due to personal commitments such as job and family. If students need to stop out for personal reasons, there was a convenient pathway for students to return to college and complete their degree. Lastly, the ABP connected students with similar peers and helped them establish friendships and support systems.

The current four semester ABP structure required students to take 13 to 20 semester credits each term to earn an associate degree in 16 months. This is an intense load for a working adult. After two years of offering the ABP, the college is making curriculum and schedule changes to the ABP to reduce the student load each semester. The proposed curriculum changes will required closer to 60 semester credits and the new ABP course schedule will be redesigned to reduce per semester credits; students will be able to complete the A.A.B. requirements in approximately 24 months. This program change will provide students a more manageable course load each semester.

Methods used to facilitate involvement in the Accelerated Business Program learning community. The ABP learning community was structured to facilitate student involvement both inside and outside of the classroom (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1998). The pedagogy used in the courses connected students through group projects and active learning strategies. The free dinner and 30-minute social time before each class fostered involvement by connecting students in an informal social setting outside of class. Students connected with each other and the faculty member on a more personal level during the social time. The students in the ABP were involved in learning together and learning from each other both inside and outside of the classroom. The researcher
observed a high level of involvement by the depth of the discussion and the debate among students during the classroom observation and a similar level of involvement outside of the class. The pedagogy the researcher observed appeared to be similar to pedagogy used in other delivery formats; however, the data provided evidence that there are higher levels of student involvement in projects and assignments.

*Pedagogy.* The pedagogy the researcher observed in the classroom generated peer interaction and involvement with the curriculum and the students. Rather than the professor presenting the chapter in a lecture format, a group of students presented the chapter. The students presented the chapter using a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted important concepts, showed additional research on the topic, and incorporated questions for the students. Based on the high level of student engagement and the debate among the students, it was evident that the students were actively involved in learning.

*Community building.* Students and faculty confirmed through 10 comments in two interviews that the ABP builds community among students. The ABP used innovative strategies to build community among students such as the dinner social time and the classroom location in a facility that provide comfortable spaces for group meetings and student socialization. The hallway outside the classroom had comfortable chairs and couches for students to lounge in while socializing before and after class and students used these spaces to socialize. The peer group and faculty-student involvement helped students develop personal relationships with their peers and faculty.

The evidence from the ABP learning community supported Astin’s (1999) theory that involvement facilitated active learning and increased students’ connections with
peers, the program, and the college. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that involvement was the theme with the highest node frequency. In two interviews, students and faculty gave 15 statements and examples of how the pedagogy used in the ABP facilitated involvement. The number of comments that supported involvement and the node frequency distribution among the subthemes for the ABP are shown in Table 27.

Table 27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model A Involvement Themes and Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.

**Methods used to facilitate social and academic integration in the Accelerated Business Program learning community.** The ABP successfully altered the educational environment and climate and fostered social and academic integration. Student-student and faculty-student interactions were observed both inside and outside the classroom. The ABP students developed peer support systems, evidenced the groups of students who sat together and socialized together before, during, and after class. The integration among the students made it difficult to identify the cohort students who were going through the program together from the students who were taking this class together for the first time. The student integration among all students, the new students, and the cohort of students, is evidence that the ABP facilitated social integration. The evidence also showed that social integration extended beyond the classroom. The students socialized at after-class
gatherings and the researcher observed the students exchanging personal email addresses and phone numbers so they could maintain contact throughout the summer and to ensure that they registered for the same ABP courses in the future.

Students were involved in learning with each other and with the faculty member before class, during class, and after class. This behavior supported the theory that stated the more students are involved in learning with their peers and faculty; the more students learn (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 2006). The researcher observed several examples of student-student and faculty-student interactions that facilitated student learning. In one example, the faculty member met with a student prior to class and advised him on a project that was beyond the scope of the course. In another example, students were discussing course material before class and the faculty member also engaged in the informal discussion of course content. Course content discussions also took place during the after-class social gathering. The faculty member appeared to understand students’ backgrounds and goals, which Mannan (2001) suggested is an important component in faculty-student interactions.

The findings from the classroom observation and the researcher’s informal discussions with students supported increased social integration among students outside of the classroom; however, evidence of outside of class integration was not emphasized during the faculty or student interviews. The researcher’s opinion is that the ABP students view the social dinner time as part of the program and not as an outside-of-class activity. During informal discussions before class and at the after class social gathering, the researcher heard about several social gatherings and events the ABP students attended together; however, these were not mentioned during the interview.
The findings of this study supported Bers and Smith’s (1991) findings that social integration has a greater impact than academic integration. The grouping of students in the ABP learning community was a significant component that influenced academic integration. Both students and faculty commented positively on the ABP structure and the opportunity to learn with working adults, which was the primary composition of the class. The ABP linked courses; however, this component was not emphasized during the interviews or the classroom observation. The researcher did not find evidence to support ABP cross-discipline curriculum or instructional connections.

The findings of this study supported Terenzini & Pascarella’s (1994) findings that the educational climate and cohesive environments within the curriculum and outside the curriculum increased students’ social and academic involvement. The evidence from the ABP learning community supported Tinto’s (1993) findings that faculty-student relationships empower students’ intellectual growth and encourage students’ active involvement in learning.

Social and academic integration are enhanced in the ABP. Social integration is the more important component. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that students and faculty made 21 statements related to social integration and 12 related to academic integration. Nine faculty and students commented positively about the working adult composition of the class and nine comments about student-faculty interactions. The frequency of comments that supported social and academic integration and the distribution among the subthemes for the ABP are shown in Table 28.
Table 28

*Model A Student Integration Themes and Node Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student - Student Interactions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student - Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interactions Outside of Class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Linkage of Courses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grouping of Students</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connections Across Disciplines</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.

**Analysis of Learning Community Model B**

The Adult Accelerated Degree Program (AADP) has successfully offered an accelerated track for working adults to earn an Associate of Arts (AA) or an Associate of Applied Business (AAB) degree for the past nine years. This college was one of the first Ohio public two-year colleges to offer an accelerated Business Management program designed for working adults. The AADP learning community structure made it easy for adults to balance life, work, and education. The block schedule and co-registration option gave students the option to take courses together in a cohort and it also allowed students to take AADP courses with courses offered in other formats. The block schedule enabled students to take two AADP courses on Saturdays; one from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and one from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. each five week session. Students could attend the three five-week sessions and earn 18 credits a semester. The AADP model is a course cluster learning community model that makes it easy for working adults to earn an associate degree in two years (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). Students appreciated the one day a week,
five-week course cluster schedule that allowed students to fit college into their busy lives and provided a two-year pathway to a degree.

The AADP two evenings a week 6-10 p.m. option has not been as successful as the weekend option; therefore, the evening offerings have been reduced to two courses per semester. The findings from the student focus-group interview suggested that the two evening a week option was too difficult for students to work into their schedules due to children’s activities and work. This option may be phased out in the future due to low enrollment. Throughout the case study, 100% of the participants referred to the program as Weekend College. The researcher conducted a follow-up interview with the director to inquire about the correct name of the program; the director stated that the new AADP name never caught on and that people preferred to call the program Weekend College.

When the AADP was developed, the administration considered making the AADP a 100% cohort learning community model where a group of students would take the entire curriculum together. The administration’s decision to use a course cluster learning community model, rather than a coordinated studies learning community model, has worked well for the students and the college. Some students form a cohort and complete the entire course sequence together and other students enroll in AADP courses if they fit into their schedules. The lunch break has been a positive component in helping students become involved and socially integrated. Groups of students eat lunch together during the lunch break between Saturday classes; this break fostered student relationships. The administration did not build the break into the program as a strategy to connect students outside of the classroom; this was an unplanned benefit of the weekend
format. Students and faculty provided comments on how the break gives students the opportunity to interact and get to know one another.

The new, modern facility where the AADP courses are offered is the most impressive learning environment the researcher has ever experienced. The hallways that connect the classrooms are large open spaces with modern, comfortable furniture arranged in clusters to provide comfortable spaces for students to collaborate. There are technology pods where small groups of students can sit in a sectional sofa and video conference or virtually connect with students from anywhere in the world. The furniture and technology in the classrooms is equally impressive. The portable desks with whiteboards and projectors are perfect for the collaborative, project-based learning activities that occur in AADP courses. Of the five classrooms the researcher viewed, none of the furniture was arranged in the standard lecture classroom structure with student desks facing the instructor station at the front of the room. This facility and the classrooms within the facility could be a template for designing classrooms of the future.

In addition to having the facilities and instructional tools needed to create an engaging learning environment, AADP faculty designed their courses to foster relationships among faculty and students as suggested in Geri, Kuehn, & MacGregor’s (1999) research. The researcher observed students’ end product of a “real world” project that was assigned in the capstone course. The project connected students within the group and also connected students with community businesses.
Methods used to facilitate involvement in the Adult Accelerated Degree Program learning community. The AADP learning community is structured to facilitate student involvement through the structure of the program and through course design. The one day a week, block schedule format kept students, who enrolled in two courses, together for nine hours a week. During the nine hours students were together, they also used class breaks to socialize and connect. During the observation, the researcher noticed that the majority of the students spent their break time socializing in the lounge area and on the furniture outside of the classroom. Some of the students also took lunch together and had an additional each week to socialize, connect, and establish relationships. The AADP also gave students the opportunity to experience success in a short amount of time; students earned their first grade in five weeks. This success helped motivate students; this finding was emphasized by both faculty and students.

Pedagogy. The AADP structure, the classroom and social areas in the facility, and the course structure supported an active pedagogical approach to learning. The faculty used the four hour block of time to incorporate pedagogical strategies that created a collaborative, active learning environment in the classroom (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The active learning approach was evident during the classroom observation and students and faculty emphasized that active learning pedagogy was used throughout the curriculum. The capstone project gave students the opportunity to identify a business, a problem, and design a solution to address the problem. The students did an exceptional job with this project; they demonstrated synthesis, analysis, and evaluation skills. Two student groups indicated that
they have agreed to continue working with the businesses they helped after the class ends to assist with implementation of their plan.

The students and faculty also indicated that the course activities and projects often interrelated with students’ jobs; this gave students the opportunity to learn from their peers’ work experiences. This supported Terenzini & Pascarella’s (1994) findings that the active learning approach gives students greater responsibility for their own learning and allows students to learn from their peers. The integration of work and learning added value to learning and gave students the opportunity to see concepts applied in various work situations. The various examples discussed with and observed by the researcher supported this finding.

Community building. The findings suggested that the AADP structure builds community by closely connecting students with similar peers. These connections helped students establish relationships and support systems. The peer relationships and the community of working adults also helped students deal with their insecurities because they were grouped with students who may have the same insecurities and challenges. The researcher observed a high level of support among the students; they worked together and helped each other before class and during breaks. The AADP group of students was a connected community of learners.

The findings from the interviews and the observation confirmed that student involvement is enhanced in the AADP learning community model. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that involvement was the theme with the highest node frequency. Building community was a more important component than the pedagogy. In three interviews, students and faculty gave 16
statements regarding the importance of building community. The theme to theory findings and the frequency of comments that supported involvement for the AADP are shown in Table 29.

### Table 29

**Model B Student Involvement Themes and Node Frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pedagogy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Building Community</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.

**Methods used to facilitate social and academic integration in the Adult Accelerated Degree Program learning community.** The findings from faculty interviews, student interviews, and the classroom observation documented that the AADP learning community facilitated social and academic integration. The AADP is structured to encourage student social and academic interaction within the classroom and outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1993). The evidence presented in the faculty and student interviews and observed the classroom showed there is a significant amount of student interaction outside the classroom. It was apparent during the classroom observation that the students did the majority of their final project work outside of class.

**Social integration.** The findings supported the theory that learning communities build student-student and faculty-student relationships. Although not all the students stay through the entire curriculum, there is a high level of social integration that occurred in a short amount of time.
The findings do not support Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington’s (1985) findings suggested that students at community colleges perceived social contact with faculty as being important in degree completion. The students did not emphasize the importance of student-faculty interaction and they did not indicate their desire to have more student-faculty contact. The findings from this case study indicated student-student and student-faculty interactions are similar. This finding was not expected based on the student-student interactions that the researcher observed in the classroom and based on the findings from the faculty interviews. The researcher expected the student-student interactions to be of higher importance than student-faculty interactions based on the level of student interaction that was observed. Faculty participants suggested there is not a difference in student-faculty relationships among business students who attend traditional courses and those who attend the AADP. The college supported student-faculty integration; it holds an annual luncheon for AADP in an effort to foster student-faculty integration.

**Academic integration.** Of the three subthemes used to analyze academic integration, grouping of students appeared to be the most important. The AADP learning community facilitated grouping of adult learners and the findings suggested that faculty and students believed this is an important component of the AADP. The students indicated that they appreciated learning with a group of mature, motivated adults. They mentioned that the grouping of adults created a comfortable environment in which they feel that they were supported and understood.

Faculty and students also indicated that the AADP learning community generated motivation. The researcher sensed a high level of self-motivation among the students
based on the level of work they put into their final projects. Students appeared to want to do as well or better than their peers during the presentations; the researcher heard comments that confirmed this finding. The faculty suggested that the AADP learning community facilitated student motivation and that self-motivation is higher in the AADP than in the traditional Business Management program. The researcher suspected that in addition to the grouping of students, the fact that the AADP learners are 24 years or older may be a contributing factor in self-motivation.

The findings supported the theory that learning communities increased social and academic integration. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that grouping of students was the most influential component in facilitating integration. The theme to theory findings with the frequency of comments that supported student and academic integration in the AADP are shown in Table 30.

Table 30

*Model B Student Integration Themes and Node Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Student Interactions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactions Outside of Class</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linkage of Courses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grouping of Students</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connections Across Disciplines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.
Analysis of Learning Community Model C

The One Night A Week Program (ONAW) has produced business associate degree graduates for the past eight years. The ONAW launched its 14\textsuperscript{th} ONAW cohort in fall 2012. This college was one of the first Ohio public two-year colleges to offer an accelerated Business Administration program designed for working adults. The ONAW has an average student degree completion rate of 71\% among the first 12 cohorts. This program has graduated a significantly higher percentage of associate graduates than the national associate degree completion rate of 37.89\% (Fingerhut, 2008). This retention statistic supported the theory that learning communities increase student retention (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008; Tinto, 1998, 2000). The ONAW graduates have the knowledge and skills to work as supervisors, managers, and leaders in businesses that support the economy.

The ONAW is a cohort based, block schedule learning community structure that is referred to in literature as a coordinated studies learning community (MacGregor, 1994; Tinto, 1998). The ONAW is an interdisciplinary model that linked courses from the Business and Arts and Science programs and keeps a cohort of students together through the entire curriculum (MacGregor, 1994; MacGregor, Smith, Mathews, & Gabelnick, 2002; “Washington Center,” n.d.; SENSE, 2009). A selective admission process is used to enroll a cohort of 21 students in the ONAW Business Administration program. The ONAW admission standards include an essay, references, and pretesting. Only students accepted into the ONAW program may enroll in the ONAW courses. The admission standards are used to create a learning community of adult students who test college ready in reading, English, and math.
The ONAW program was acknowledged during the Higher Learning Commission visit as a program that promoted access by offering a unique, flexible schedule. The program is unique because it groups adult learners together for the entire curriculum. This gives students the opportunity to become involved with one another and to establish relationships with their peers. The ONAW is flexible because it made it easy for students to fit college into their busy lives. Students have a set schedule for two years and this helped students’ schedule work and personal responsibilities around their college schedule. Several students enrolled in this program mentioned that they tried college in the traditional course format and they were not able to complete their degree because of the constantly changing schedule from term to term. These students indicated that if it was not for the ONAW format, they would not have been able to attend college and earn a degree.

Methods used to facilitate involvement in the One Night A week learning community. The findings from the classroom observation and administrator, faculty, and student interviews supported the theory that the ONAW learning community curriculum model increased student involvement. The ONAW’s student retention and graduation rate supported Astin (1984) and Tinto’s (1993) findings that learning communities increased student involvement and student persistence

Pedagogy. The pedagogy the researcher observed in the managerial accounting course appeared to be similar to pedagogy commonly used in accounting courses; however, the students appeared to be actively involved in learning together. The students moved their chairs to sit in small groups to assist one another while they worked on the assignment and two students shared a textbook in one group. The students and faculty
were actively engaged in the discussion throughout the class. The faculty and students commented on how the four hour block schedule provides time to have collaborative assignments and projects during class. This was a positive contrast to traditional scheduled courses where group project time is limited because of the limited class time and the time spent starting and ending class. During the observation, the students were in their seats and prepared for class to begin at 6 p.m.; it was obvious that students had completed their out-of-class work and they came to class ready to learn. In this model, the courses and faculty changed; however, the students, pedagogy, and learning structure stayed the same. This was an important ONAW design component; the students appreciated the structure.

**Building community.** The ONAW learning community developed a community of adult learners. Evidence of student bonding was supported in student and faculty interviews. The factors that appeared to stimulate student bonding included demographic similarities, time together in class, and assignments. Students in the ONAW were together for four hours each week for approximately two years; they got to know each other on a personal level and they formed relationships with one another. The ONAW students have formed a community of learners.

An involvement theme that emerged in the findings of this case, which was not identified in the literature review, was self-motivation. The findings suggested the ONAW learning community developed high achieving, highly motivated students. Faculty used terms such as ambitious, dedicated, prepared, interested, confident, and capable to describe the ONAW students. Students also commented on how the ONAW has helped them gain confidence and the desire to do their best. Another finding that was
unique to this learning community was that ONAW students have perceived power. The findings showed that the group dynamics caused students to become empowered and confident. In this model, the faculty is the outsider coming into the group and faculty mentioned that group is comfortable challenging an instructor. The faculty devised strategies to control the students’ perceived group power and administration discusses this issue with new faculty prior to their first ONAW class.

The findings showed student involvement is enhanced in the ONAW learning community. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that involvement was the theme with the highest node frequency and that pedagogy and building community were important components. The motivation theme also had a high frequency of comments that supported involvement. The theme to theory findings and the frequency of comments that supported involvement for the ONAW are shown in Table 31.

Table 31

Model C Student Involvement Themes and Node Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building Community</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.
Methods used to facilitate social and academic integration in the One Night A Week learning community. The ONAW has successfully modified environmental variables and created a cohesive environment that increased students’ social and academic involvement within and outside of the classroom; this supported Terenzini & Pascarella’s (1994) findings. The findings from the ONAW also supported the theory that students who are socially and academically integrated within the college have a higher commitment to an institution and degree completion (Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The ONAW students are integrated and successful; the seven year retention rate of 71% is above the two-year college state and national averages.

Social integration. The ONAW findings also supported Bers and Smith’s (1991) findings that social integration has a greater impact than academic integration. The ONAW learning community fostered strong student relationships and helped students form a sense of belonging. The student-student relationships are strong inside and outside of the classroom. The students in the ONAW become socially integrated early in the program, remained integrated throughout the degree, and some maintained friendships after graduation. The evidence also provided support that student-student integration has a positive impact on student learning. Students learned from one another inside and outside of the classroom. Students shared several examples with the researcher during the interview and in informal discussions during the class break of how they relied on their peers for help with homework and learning.

Although student-student interactions were an important component in the ONAW, the findings did not support the theory that faculty-student relationships are
enhanced in the ONAW learning community. The ONAW students are actively involved in learning; however, the involvement appeared to be powered by student-student relationships rather than faculty-student relationships. The student-student integration is strong and students relied on their peers to assist with learning and assignment completion more than they relied on faculty. The researcher observed students relying on each other for help during the classroom observation. There were several times when students walked to another student to get help rather than waiting for the faculty member to provide assistance. The findings also showed that students met in study groups outside of the classroom to help each other with assignment and to study. The findings also showed that ONAW students communicated on a weekly basis on Facebook and through other forms of social media; often times these communications regarded homework assignments. The level of group support and learning outside-of-the classroom is not common among students enrolled in traditional business programs in public two-year colleges.

**Academic integration.** The findings showed that the ONAW learning community cultivated academic integration. The ONAW provided curricular coherence by strategically structuring technical and elective courses together and it reduced the division of disciplines (Hill, 1985; Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). The business management curriculum is structured so that all of the students in the ONAW take specific courses in a specified sequence. This ensured that all students have similar knowledge and skills and it enabled faculty to move students to higher levels of learning in a shorter timeframe. The ONAW has also fostered connections across programs; the Business and Public Relations faculty worked with the Arts and Sciences faculty to
design the course sequence. Faculty from these programs also worked together to integrate the public speaking and a management courses and to integrate business concepts and practices into the Business Communication course. Another example of academic integration is the microeconomics and macroeconomics courses that were integrated into one course. This level of academic integration is not common in traditional Business programs at two-year colleges.

The theme to theory findings and the frequency of comments that supported social and academic integration for the ONAW are shown in Table 32. The findings showed the ONAW fostered social and academic integration. The findings in the theme to theory comparison presented in Chapter 4 showed that social integration has the highest node frequency. This frequency was slightly higher than involvement and over twice as high as the academic integration. This finding may be prominent because during the interview, the faculty shared several examples of how the curriculum was integrated and gave examples of how faculty accomplished the curriculum integration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Node Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student - Student Interactions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student - Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interactions Outside of Class</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Linkage of Courses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grouping of Students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connections Across Disciplines</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.
Cross-case Analysis of Three Learning Community Models

Two models were used to frame the multi-case analysis and report the findings. First, the researcher used the *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework to interpret, evaluate, and compare the three cases (Merriam, 1998). Second, the researcher used Astin’s (1999) Input-Environment-Output model to analyze how each learning community impacted students’ learning experience from program entry to exit.

The researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework was used to analyze student involvement, engagement, academic integration, and social integration across the three business learning community models. A comparative analysis strategy was used to compare the themes identified in each case with the theories outlined in the researcher’s conceptual framework that is shown in Figure 10.

![Diagram showing the power of the learning community: Wood's conceptual framework.](image)

Figure 10. The power of the learning community: Wood’s conceptual framework.
The three learning communities were unique in their design and structure, yet they were similar in how they impacted student involvement, engagement, social integration, and academic integration. *Social* is a term that best describes the environment of Model A. The facility was located in the city’s public square with restaurants and bars on both sides of the building and across the street. The entry of the educational building was an open space for business get-togethers; students walked by business executive social gathering with individuals enjoying appetizers and cocktails in the main entry of the classroom building. The furniture in the halls and large glass walls created an open, social environment. *Collaborative* is a word that describes the learning environment of Model B. The state-of-the-art facility was designed for student collaboration inside and outside of the classroom. *Relationships* is a word that describes the learning environment for Model C. The faculty and administrators knew the students and the students knew each other on a personal level. The students socialized with their peers on a weekly basis outside of the classroom through social networking and group study sessions.

The themes that evolved from the three learning community models were also similar across the multiple cases and the majority of the themes were supported the literature. Student involvement emerged as an important theme in all three models and it was the most important theme in Models A and B. It was the second most important theme in Model C; student relationships appeared to be slightly more important in this model. Four themes—integration, student relationships, grouping of students, and learning community structure—emerged in two of the three learning community models. A summary of themes from the three learning community curriculum models is shown in Table 33.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model A Themes</th>
<th>Model B Themes</th>
<th>Model C Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
<td>Student Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Structure</td>
<td>Grouping of Students</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>Student Motivation</td>
<td>Grouping of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>Learning Community</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Involvement and engagement.** The findings showed student involvement is the most important theme across the three learning community models. The findings in all three cases showed that students were involved peers and engaged in learning inside and outside of the classroom. The three models used a block schedule and faculty used pedagogical strategies that facilitated active learning and collaboration. The faculty created a learning environment that nurtured student relationships and involvement and increased student engagement. Students from all three models commented on how the learning environment helped them get to know their peers and engaged them in learning.

**Pedagogy.** The pedagogical strategies used in these three learning communities created collaborative, active learning environments that facilitated student involvement (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993). The curriculum content and pedagogy included a variety of in and out of class group projects that fostered student relationships (Geri, Kuehn, & MacGregor, 1999). The students in all three learning communities took responsibility for their own learning, applied their learning to their work experiences, and showed appreciation for the opportunity to learn from their peers’ work experiences. This finding supported Terenzini and Pascarella’s
(1994) findings that suggested students involved in active learning take greater responsibility for their own learning. This finding also supported Knowles (1984) suggestion that adult learners are self-directed, have an accumulation of experience, and need for immediate application of new learning to solve problems.

The findings in this multi-case study supported the theory that collaborative learning strategies such as peer learning groups and problem-based learning projects helped students become socially integrated (Stage, et al., 1998). This evidence contradicted Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan’s (2000) findings that suggested active learning strategies that involve group work do not improve students’ social integration. The students in all three learning community models were socially integrated with their peers and engaged in the learning environment.

**Building community.** Models B and C created a community of adult learners through admission requirements that required students to be a minimum age to enroll; Model A created a similar learning community of adult learners through the course schedule and location. The faculty and students in all three models expressed positive comments about learning with a class of adult students. The findings showed that students learn from their peers’ work experiences and that the experiences the students bring into class discussions enhanced learning.

**Motivation.** The findings from the three models showed that the learning community had a positive impact on students’ motivation. Faculty and students in all three models commented on how students benefited from learning with similar peers and how these connections increased students’ motivation. Student gained confidence, became self-motivated, and were empowered and encouraged by their peers. A faculty
member in Model C suggested that students see other students with similar work and personal challenges succeed and that increased their desire to do as well in the courses and to succeed. This finding also supported Knowles (1984) suggestion that adult learners are internally motivated and benefit from the connection of experience and new learning.

The findings from the interviews and the observation confirmed that student involvement is enhanced in the three learning community models. The findings from the theme to theory comparison that were presented in Chapter 4 also showed that student involvement had a high node frequency across the models. The node frequency distribution of the theme to theory comparison supported the multi-case findings shown in Table 34.

Table 34

Summary of Themes Used to Analyze Involvement Among The Three Learning Community Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building Community</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.

**Social integration.** The findings showed that social integration is positively impacted in all three learning community curriculum models. The social integration helped students establish friendships and support systems that are critical to student success. Social integration among groups of students is not common in traditional business programs at community colleges. Students enrolled in traditional business
courses are often on campus for short periods of time to attend class and they do not have the opportunity to become socially integrated. Traditional courses are usually offered in shorten periods of time, which makes it challenging to incorporate projects and activities to foster student integration. Therefore, students in traditional business programs often do not have the opportunity to become socially integrated and establish relationships with their peers. Social integration is one of the most positive aspects of the business learning communities; students in these communities felt connected with each other and the learning environment.

The findings showed that Model C, the model that keeps a cohort of students together throughout the curriculum, had a greater impact on social and academic integration than Models A and B; these models do not keep an entire cohort of students together. The findings for Model C showed that student-student interactions inside and outside of the class were enhanced; however, student-faculty interactions were not enhanced. These findings showed that close student-student connections reduce the need for faculty-student interactions. The findings in Model C also indicated that students perceive power and challenge faculty. Group power was not a finding in Models A and B.

**Academic integration.** Academic integration through grouping of students was supported all three models. The grouping of adult learners created a comfortable, supportive learning environment. It also provided students the opportunity to connect and establish friendships with similar peers. The Model C learning community linked courses across the curriculum and connected courses across disciplines. Faculty from two disciplines redesigned courses by merging content and used a project across two courses;
the project was evaluated by faculty from both disciplines. This academic integration strengthened the courses and the curriculum and it reduced the total class sessions. It also generated collaboration among faculty from two disciplines. Model C was the only model in this study that incorporated connections across disciplines through content integration and combined courses. Models A and B could be strengthened by increasing academic integration.

All three learning community models offered courses in an accelerated format where approximately half of the curriculum was covered outside of class. Faculty did not have specific guidelines to follow for the 50% of the course that was not taught in the classroom and they were not required to use a course management site. In two of the three courses the researcher observed, it was obvious that a significant portion of work was completed outside of the class. However, other than a syllabus that listed weekly assignments, there was limited evidence to show that half of the curriculum was covered virtually.

The findings from the interviews and the observation showed that social integration and academic integration through grouping of students was enhanced in the three learning community models. Academic integration through course and content linkages was also enhanced in Model C. The findings from the theme to theory comparison that were presented in Chapter 4 also showed similar results through node frequency across the models. Model C had the highest node frequencies in both social and academic integration; however, it had the lowest student-faculty interactions. Model C also had significantly higher node frequencies for connections across disciplines. Models A and B had identical node frequencies for student-student and faculty-student
interactions. This finding was interesting because these two models are the most similar in structure and they both have open enrollment where students enter and exit the learning community every course. Model A had the fewest outside of class interaction node frequencies, which does not align with the researcher’s opinion based on the classroom observation and the interviews. Perhaps the students in Model A perceived the social dinner time as part of the class and they do not view that at outside of class interaction. The summary of multi-case themes to theory comparison of social and academic integration is shown in Table 35.

Table 35  
*Summary of Themes Used to Analyze Social and Academic Integration Among The Three Learning Community Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node Frequencies</th>
<th>Model A</th>
<th>Model B</th>
<th>Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Integration</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Student Interactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student - Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactions Outside of Class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integration</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Linkage of Courses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grouping of Students</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connections Across Disciplines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This theme to theory comparison was presented in Table 25 in Chapter 4 and this section was extracted to expand the analysis.

The second model used to frame the multi-case analysis and report the findings was Astin’s (1999) Input-Environment-Output model. The researcher used this model to analyze how each learning community impacted students’ learning experience from program entry to exit. Astin’s Input-Environment-Output model was used to connect the findings of this multi-case study to a framework that can be used to guide higher
education institutions in the development of policies and practices that impact students’ college experience and success.

**Input component.** The input component of the three learning community models used program admission criteria, such as college preparedness, age requirement, and work experience, and the course schedule to create a cohort of learners with similar backgrounds and experiences. Models B and C used admission requirements, with a minimum age, to create a community of adult learners; and Model A created a similar community through the day, time, and location of the courses. The three models used a block schedule format with courses offered days and times convenient for the working adult student population. The learning community structures attracted working adult learners and the environment retained the adult learners.

**Environment component.** The environment component of the learning community models showed how redesigned curriculum and instructional delivery techniques created a community of learners. The pedagogy used in these models enhanced students’ involvement and integration. The curriculum design sequenced courses to give students a strong foundation of knowledge and skills and moved students to higher levels of learning. Model C is a cohort model that required students to take all of the courses together and Model A and B gave students the opportunity to stay together as a cohort throughout the two year program. However, Models A and B also allowed other students to enroll in the courses offered in the learning community.

The three learning community curriculum models altered the environment to affect outcomes in relation to people, the environment, and the educational setting. The physical, human aggregate, organizational, and social environmental components were
altered to improve the campus ecology (Strange & Banning, 2001). The three learning communities were taught in physical settings where the building architecture, classroom layouts, and community space within the buildings was different than traditional college buildings and classrooms. Models A was taught in a contemporary downtown building that opened two years ago; it had comfortable community spaces and classrooms with floor to ceiling windows that created an open environment. Models B and C were taught in the newest, most modern buildings on campus. The Model B learning community was located in a new state-of-the-art education facility that opened this year. The interior architecture was designed to create formal and informal learning spaces to support collaboration and various types of interaction inside and outside of the classrooms. There were comfortable spaces for small group confidential discussions in private settings, rooms and spaces for large group discussions, and spaces for groups to sit around large computer monitor for virtual collaboration. The high-tech classrooms had portable furniture that could be moved for large classroom or small breakout group discussions. The entire facility had a collaborative, high-tech atmosphere. The physical settings of each learning community provided educational spaces where students could feel included, connected, and safe.

The human aggregate of behaviors of the people within the environment differed among three models. The geographical locations of the three community colleges influenced the diversity among student characteristics; the students were diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, social, and economic characteristics. The urban, suburban, and rural location of the colleges had cultural influences on student behaviors. Model A was located in an urban community in a building located in the public square of one of Ohio’s
largest cities. There was ethnic, age, and gender diversity among the students; a teenage student was from another country. Model B was located in a suburban location outside of a large city. Based on comments made during the interviews, there appeared to be both students who lived in suburban locations and students who lived in the city. Model C was located in a rural location and the majority of students appeared to be from the community. The students mentioned positive comments about their small community and also mentioned. The background characteristics of the students the three learning communities appeared to affect the social climate of each learning community. The common background characteristics among the students in all three learning communities were work experience and family. These characteristics were emphasized and used to bring students together in the learning environment.

The organizational structure of each learning community was altered to influence student behaviors. Entities within each college worked together to modify the class location, course schedule, class structure, support services, curriculum, classroom environment, and pedagogical strategies to influence student behavior. The organizational changes were supported through institutional policy and procedure modifications. The organizational structure had a positive influence student behavior and retention.

The social climate and culture of each learning community was unique and different than the climate in traditional courses. The collective perceptions of the administrators, faculty, and students indicated that the social climate and culture in the learning community was different than in a traditional college classroom. These perceptions were communicated during the interviews and observed by the researcher.
The college administration at each institution recognized the importance of these four environmental components—physical, human aggregate, organizational, and social—and altered them to shape each learning community. The social climate and culture of each learning community was collaborative, friendly, and supportive.

**Output component.** The output component of these learning community models are increased student retention and degree completion. The student retention rates were significantly higher than state and national averages. The learning community student retention rates ranged from 66.3% to 71%. The findings from all three models provided evidence that the learning community provided a structure and environment that helped students achieve their educational goals. Administrators, faculty, and students involved in all three learning communities shared examples of students who continued their education immediately upon graduating with their associate degree. Examples of student friendships and relationships that extended beyond graduation were also shared.

The researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* framework and the multi-case findings provide best practices that can be used to guide the design and development of business learning communities at community colleges. The findings showed that designing a learning community curriculum model is a goal worthy of attainment, especially to serve the working adult population of community colleges.

**Limitations**

The data for this study were collected from three public community colleges in Ohio. The findings represented one person’s encounter with a complex phenomenon in the academy. The findings represented one researcher’s experience with three learning community curriculum models used in business programs in three public community
colleges in one state. The findings provide a treasure trove of information; however, they are not intended to represent all learning community curriculum models.

The sources that contributed to the findings are limited to academic documents related to each learning community, observations of one class at each college, and interviews with administrators, faculty, and students involved in each learning community. Each case study is limited to selected participants over the age of 18 as approved by The University of Toledo’s Social, Behavioral, and Educational Institutional Review Board (SBE IRB). The data represented the perspectives of between 11 and 14 students, faculty, and administrators who were involved in each of the three learning communities. Their perspectives may not represent all students involved in each learning community. The colleges, learning communities, and participants were purposefully selected and the sample size is not sufficient to allow the findings to be generalized to business or other programs offered in public community colleges.

**Recommendations for Practice**

This study confirmed that the learning community curriculum model is an effective way to build student involvement and facilitate social and academic integration. The multi-case findings provided best practices for development of learning community curriculum models that meet the needs of community college students, particularly adult learners. The student population served by community colleges would benefit from curriculum designs that are structured to fit into students’ busy lives.

This multi-case study was about learning communities used in three business programs. Business programs are one of the largest enrolled programs in community colleges and student retention and graduation rates could be positively impacted by the
development and implementation of more learning communities in more business programs. However, the findings of this study support the implementation of learning communities for two-year college programs, especially where the curriculum lends itself to integrating content across multiple courses.

Although the findings of this study focused on academic learning community curriculum models, non-discipline based learning communities could be implemented to foster student involvement and integration. Examples include first-year learning communities or honors learning communities. The advantage of non-discipline learning communities is that they connect students from multiple disciplines. However, the challenge with non-discipline based learning communities is the limited time community college students spend on campus. They usually do not spend outside of class time on campus; therefore, they may not participate in learning communities that take place outside of the classroom.

Two-year college students are different than four-year college students; therefore, two-year college students would benefit from a curriculum model that is structured to accommodate their busy schedules. Each of the three learning community curriculum models offered a unique structure and schedule that gave students the flexibility needed to earn a college degree. The structures provided students a pathway to degree completion in approximately two years. The comprehensive, contextually rich description of each learning community provided ideas that could be used to design learning communities.

Community colleges should use results from CCSSE and other forms of engagement data to identify gaps and redesign curriculum models to fill those gaps. The
The college classroom is often the only on-campus place two-year college students connect with peers and faculty due to their obligations outside of the college (Tinto, 1993). This is why it is important for faculty to use pedagogical techniques that facilitated active learning, collaboration, student involvement, and social integration. Faculty could use the findings of this multi-case study to redesign business curricula and course structures to increase student involvement and facilitate social integration.

College administrators and professional organizations could provide faculty training on learning communities and pedagogical techniques that facilitate student involvement. Faculty who understand the dynamics of learning communities and the impact collaborative pedagogical strategies has on student involvement, social integration, and student retention would be more willing to change.

Ohio’s strategic plan requires colleges to increase the number of college graduates to support the economy. Colleges and professional organizations such as the Ohio Association of Community Colleges could organize more attention on curriculum models that improve student retention and graduation rates.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This multi-case study presented findings on how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. This study provided a comprehensive, contextually rich description of three learning community from an insider’s perspective and provided anecdotal data on how these learning community models impacted student retention and graduation rates. An important recommendation for future research is to analyze retention and graduation rates of these learning communities compared to a matched group of non-learning community models.
students. A quantitative study would move beyond the learning community curriculum design and analyze the quantitative data that mirror this study. This type of study could determine if the learning community format makes a difference in graduation rates and other outcomes across the three models.

Another recommendation that could contribute to this multi-case study would be an in-depth curriculum analysis of the differences in class size, academic requirements, and evaluation methods across delivery formats including learning community, traditional, and online. A comparison of course workload requirements including assignments, projects, and evaluation methods would add depth to this study. Examples of research questions could include: Is student learning evaluated the same across delivery models? Is there a difference in workload requirements across delivery models?

Another recommendation for future research that could contribute to this multi-case study is to conduct a post-graduate study of students who were enrolled in these business learning community curriculum models to see how many continue their education and earned bachelor degrees. A comparison of bachelor degree attainment among students who were enrolled in learning community curriculum modes compared to students who were enrolled in traditional business programs would add to the academy.

Lessons Learned

**Professional lessons learned.** The researcher learned that learning community curriculum models are an effective curriculum model for business programs in community colleges. The learning community models enhanced student involvement and integration and increased student retention. The block format enabled faculty to use
pedagogy and andragogy that facilitated active learning and collaboration. The researcher learned that adult learners appreciated the opportunity to learn with similar peers and to learn from their peers’ work experiences. The learning community environment enabled students to establish peer support systems that are important to adult student success. The researcher learned that learning communities are an effective way to restructure programs so that working adults can fit college into their busy lives and earn an associate degree in approximately two-years.

**Personal lessons learned.** The researcher learned about using qualitative research and how to conduct a case study. The researcher experienced the challenges associated with conducting multiple case studies at the same time; the field work time-consuming and it was challenging to keep the information learned separated. Case study research is interesting and it was challenging to keep focused on the research questions when sorting through interesting documentation. The researcher learned the value of triangulation of data and that it was a time-consuming process. The document analysis was the most challenging part of the study because of the difficulty locating documents. The researcher had to rely on deans, who were extremely busy and had limited time to give to the researcher, to locate specific documents that were discussed during the interviews. The researcher enjoyed personally connecting with administrators, faculty, and students during the interviews. The researcher found the observations to be one of the most valuable components of the study because it enabled the researcher to personally experience each learning community. The researcher appreciated the opportunity to follow-up with administrators and faculty to ask additional questions and seek
verification of findings. Additionally, the researcher learned that there are substantial differences in facilities, policies, and procedures between large and small two-year colleges.

**Conclusion**

National leaders have developed strategic initiatives that call upon higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, to graduate more students in less time to meet future workforce needs (Obama, 2010). Ohio’s leaders are developing a strategic plan that has set goals for higher education institutions to increase the number of college-educated citizens to sustain Ohio’s economic viability (Petro, 2012). Business programs, one of the largest enrolled programs in community colleges, will play a significant role in producing college graduates needed to meet future workforce needs. In order to meet these national and state goals, higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, must redesign curriculum models to increase student persistence and degree completion.

Two-year colleges serve the majority of adult learners in higher education. These students are on campus for limited periods of to attend class due to their external obligations. Adult learners’ non-academic obligations are often their priority and time and energy spent on education is often merged among their many commitments. Two-year colleges must develop curriculum models that provide adult students a structure that fits into their busy lives and a learning environment that fosters student involvement and integration.

Astin’s (1984) research demonstrated the importance that student involvement has on student persistence and degree attainment. Tinto’s (1993) research moved beyond
stating the importance of student involvement; it identified how the educational environment can be altered to increase student involvement. This researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework and the results of this multi-case study expanded Astin and Tinto’s research by providing details on how academic learning communities can be used to increase student involvement and social and academic integration in two-year college business programs.

This multi-case study provided evidence on how three unique learning communities enhanced involvement, engagement, social integration, and academic integration. Pedagogical examples of active learning strategies and learner-centered instructional techniques demonstrated ways to increase student involvement. Each learning community model offered unique ways to use community building and collaboration that helped students establish support systems. The findings showed the benefits of improved social integration through student-student interactions, student-faculty interactions, and interactions that occur outside of the classroom. The findings showed an example of how academic integration connects programs, faculty, and curricula across departments. The learning community curriculum model is a classroom approach to improving student involvement, and integration in two-year colleges.

Adult learners have limited time on campus and this restricts their connection and involvement with their peers, faculty, and the college environment. Due to work and personal obligations, the college classroom is often the only on-campus place these adult learners connect with peers and faculty (Tinto, 1993). Colleges, particularly two-year colleges that serve a high percentage of adult learners, need to merge theory, research, and practice to reform curriculum models used in higher education (Tinto, 1998). The
researcher’s *Power of the Learning Community* conceptual framework and the findings of this study provide a resource for college administrators to use in the development of learning community curriculum models that meet the needs of two-year college students.
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Appendix A

Consent Form

November 2011

Dear Educator/Students,

My name is Vicky Wood and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at The University of Toledo. I am conducting a case of learning community curriculum models. My research topic is *A Case Study of Learning Community Models used in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio*. This study will document how learning community curriculum models are used in business programs in three public community colleges in Ohio.

As part of my research, I will complete field work at each institution to conduct interviews, perform observations, and collect documents. The interview should take approximately 1 hour and the researcher will ask you five to six broad questions. Your participation is voluntary. There is no anticipated risk involved in your participation of this study. If you participate, you may decline responding to any question and you may stop the interview at any time. The decision to participate or not participate will have no impact on grades at X. All gathered material will be kept confidential. The results of the interview will be communicated in a dissertation research paper, possibly shared at an education conference, and possibly published in an education journal.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please contact me at 740-251-8024 or my research advisor, Dr. David Meabon, (edu). You may also contact the X at X (edu), with questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant.

By completing and submitting the participation form you are indicating your consent to participate in the study and verifying that you are 18 years of age or older.

Thank you for taking the time to help us gather information on how on learning community curriculum models are used in community college business programs.

Thank you,

Vicky Wood, Doctoral Student
The University of Toledo
Appendix B

Interview Guide for Learning Community Administrators

Project: A Case Study of Learning Community Models used in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio

Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Vicky Wood
Interviewee:

Introduction:
I am a doctoral student at The University of Toledo. I have been working on this degree for over four years and completion of my dissertation is my final requirement.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this case study is to present findings on how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. I will interview administration, faculty, and students, observe a learning community class, and collect documents from this institution to learn about the X. I will collect and analyze the data and communicate my conclusions in a dissertation report. The results may be shared with members of this institution and other people in higher education.

Interviewer’s Intention:
The interview should take approximately 1 hour and it will be recorded for documentation. I will ask you a series of questions and would like to engage in an in-depth discussion of your experience in the learning community. You may request to not answer a question and you may stop the interview at anytime.

Questions/Concerns/Comments?

Questions:
1. Could you describe your learning environment?
2. Could you describe the classroom activities and projects?
3. In what ways (or how) does your learning environment foster student involvement?
4. Could you give me examples of when you worked with students inside and outside of the classroom?
5. How does your program (or courses) help students make connections between and among their social and academic environments?
6. What are the most positive qualities of this learning environment?
7. If you could change one or two aspects about this program or learning experience, what would they be?
8. How has the learning community curriculum model affected student persistence and achievement?
Appendix C

Interview Guide for Learning Community Faculty

Project: A Case Study of Learning Community Models used in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio

Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Vicky Wood
Interviewee:

Introduction:
I am a doctoral student at The University of Toledo. I have been working on this degree for over four years and completion of my dissertation is my final requirement.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this case study is to present findings on how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. I will interview administration, faculty, and students, observe a learning community class, and collect documents from this institution to learn about the X. I will collect and analyze the data and communicate my conclusions in a dissertation report. The results may be shared with members of this institution and other people in higher education.

Interviewer’s Intention:
The interview should take approximately 1 hour and it will be recorded for documentation. I will ask you a series of questions and would like to engage in an in-depth discussion of your experience in the learning community. You may request to not answer a question and you may stop the interview at anytime.

Questions/Concerns/Comments?

Questions:
1. Could you describe your learning environment?
2. Could you describe the classroom activities and projects?
3. In what ways (or how) does your learning environment foster student involvement?
4. Could you give me examples of when you worked with students inside and outside of the classroom?
5. How does your program (or courses) help students make connections between and among their social and academic environments?
6. What are the most positive qualities of this learning environment?
7. If you could change one or two aspects about this program or learning experience, what would they be?
8. How has the learning community curriculum model affected student persistence and achievement?
Appendix D

Interview Guide for Students Enrolled in the Learning Community

Project: A Case Study of Learning Community Models used in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio

Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Vicky Wood
Interviewee:

Introduction:
I am a doctoral student at The University of Toledo. I have been working on this degree for over four years and completion of my dissertation is my final requirement.

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this case study is to present findings on how three learning community curriculum models are implemented in business programs in public community colleges in Ohio. I will interview administration, faculty, and students, observe a learning community class, and collect documents from this institution to learn about the X. I will collect and analyze the data and communicate my conclusions in a dissertation report. The results may be shared with members of this institution and other people in higher education.

Interviewer’s Intention:
The interview should take approximately 1 hour and it will be recorded for documentation. I will ask you a series of questions and would like to engage in an in-depth discussion of your experience in the learning community. You may request to not answer a question and you may stop the interview at anytime.

Questions/Concerns/Comments?

Questions:
1. Could you describe your learning environment?
2. Could you describe the classroom activities and projects?
3. In what ways (or how) does your learning environment foster student involvement?
4. Could you tell me about a time when you connected with a peer or faculty?
5. Could you give me examples of when you worked with a peer/faculty inside and outside of the classroom?
6. How does your program (or courses) help you make connections between and among the social and academic environments?
7. What are the most positive qualities of this learning environment?
8. What impact has this learning experience had on you?
9. If you could change one or two aspects about this program or learning experience, what would they be?
Appendix E

Interview Log

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex:</td>
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Field Notes:

Analytic Memo (*Interviewer’s Reflections*):

Appendix F

Observation Field Notes Log

**Project:** A Case Study of Learning Community Models used in Business Programs in Three Public Community Colleges in Ohio

**Date:**
**Setting:**
**Observer:** Vicky Wood
**Time:**
**Length of Observation:**

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## Appendix G

### Case Study Matrix of Evidence

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<td><strong>Pedagogy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Building Community</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Integration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student – Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student – Faculty</td>
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<td>Interactions</td>
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<td>class</td>
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