

DISSERTATION

THE PRESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES'  
ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Submitted by

Susan L. Bigelow

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2011

Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Karen Kaminski

Timothy Davies  
Donald Venneberg  
Martin Shields

Copyright by Susan L. Bigelow 2011

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### THE PRESIDENTS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES' ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Some colleges have embraced an economic development role in order to benefit the economy in the community and the region both directly and indirectly. In order for rural communities to benefit from the community college in a significant way, the college leadership must adopt an economic development agenda. The dual processes of developing a commitment to rural communities and learning economic development skills as a college president or in preparation to serve as a college president are not well studied and represent a gap in the literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to construct a substantive theory with a core category and related categories that provides an explanation for how presidents of tribal colleges and community colleges in rural areas come to understand economic development and how they act on that understanding. The general research question was “what is going on here” with presidents at the intersection of tribal and community colleges and their rural communities in the area of economic development. The single situation grounded theory was constructed from interviews with eight presidents and referrals from two experts. The presidents led tribal and community colleges that have been members of the Rural Community College Alliance, were “associates” or “tribal”

colleges, and were located in communities of less than 50,000. RCCA member colleges considered for this study were small and medium enrollment community colleges in rural serving areas and tribal colleges located in rural areas.

The theory's core category was *embracing the economic development role* which means adopting as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. Critical to the contextual framework categories was the pronounced rural bias, affinity for tribal or community colleges, and personal humility of the presidents. The causal categories of *motivated by personal values*, *understanding the economic development role*, and *motivated by the environment* worked together in a process and led to *embracing the economic development role*. After *embracing this role*, the presidents acknowledged *taking economic development actions* or taking them on more robustly. Six high level groups of economic development actions led by these presidents were: developing leaders and leadership capacity; thinking and acting regionally; coordinating closely with industry in workforce development; being present throughout the service area; welcoming the community to the college facilities; and promoting healthy communities.

It is possible this study will add to the field of leadership training for community college leaders and a better understanding of leadership in a rural setting. This theory may be useful to presidents who are asked to take on an economic development role, those who wish to hire a president who embraces this role, and professional associations that hope to mentor current and future presidents for tribal and community colleges in rural areas.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding faculty at Colorado State University who shepherded my classmates and me through the process of better understanding community colleges, their history, their future and the students they serve. They acknowledged that we were practitioners and encouraged us to learn from each other.

My experiences in the Community College Leadership Program and my life have been enriched by the four other women in the Steel Magnolias cohort. Their humor and strength in the face of life, school, and work adversities and their commitment to the community college mission have encouraged me.

My professional colleagues have supported me, helped me, and covered for me while I was away attending class or simply working on coursework and the dissertation research and writing. They have also tolerated my lengthy discussions, or maybe monologues, about my papers and research project.

I have been inspired by the presidents who participated in my research project. Bob, Jack, J.D., Mary Ann, Mary Ellen, Matilda, Russell, and Troy are servant leaders committed to rural communities or their tribes and their colleges. I could not have completed this study without their candidness in sharing their stories. I enjoyed the time I spent with them and their stories.

I wish to acknowledge God's assistance and inspiration. I appreciate Dr. Tim Davies' encouragement with my using a religious metaphor in development of the

grounded theory and thank him for the many conversations about the similarities between a religious calling and a calling to community and economic development.

I would like to thank my husband, John, for his unwavering belief that I could and would complete this project, for his humor, and input as I read segments of the manuscript to him, and for his insight as we discussed our rural upbringings and our commitment to rural communities.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my family: my parents, Ed and Mildred, who taught me the value of putting in a good day's work; my husband, John, who committed with me to make a difference in our family, our church, and our community; our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, John, Jim, Marti, Paul, Daniel B., Greg, Jennifer, Connor, Sydney, Rusty, Heidi, Marilyn, Otis, Bonez, Hannah, Parker, Liam, Carly, Kristi, Matt, Alex, Daniel M., and Katie, who have expanded my capacity to love and taught me what is really important about life. I share with them my love of reading, my commitment to learning, my hope that I do make a difference, and my faith in God.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Economic and educational challenges in rural areas.....	2
Community college missions .....	3
Problem.....	5
Purpose .....	8
Research questions .....	9
Researcher’s perspective .....	9
Significance .....	12
Summary.....	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Economic development .....	14
Community colleges and economic development.....	16
Rural and what defines it.....	19
Rural economic development.....	20
Rural community colleges and tribal colleges .....	20
Rural community college initiative.....	21
Classifications. ....	23

Presidential influence on the college missions.....	24
Summary.....	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	27
Rationale and assumptions for design.....	27
Type of design .....	28
Grounded theory elements. ....	28
Integrating data sources.....	29
Building quality into the research design.....	30
Researcher’s role .....	31
Site and sample selections.....	32
Developing the pool. ....	33
Selecting participants. ....	34
Choosing next participant. ....	37
Gaining access to participants.....	37
Participants. ....	38
Data collection techniques.....	39
Managing and recording data.....	40
Data analysis procedures .....	41
Methods for verification and trustworthiness.....	42
Summary.....	44

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTION OF GROUNDED THEORY .....	46
Organization of data and presentation of theory .....	48
Research questions .....	49
Theory overview.....	50
Substantive theory.....	50
Contextual framework.....	52
Core and axial categories. ....	52
Core category. ....	53
Axial categories: Causal conditions and consequences.....	54
Contextual framework: Introduction .....	57
Contextual category: Rural bias .....	59
Proximity to home: My parents still live there. ....	60
Fit with community, culture, and values: Your values have to fit with their values.....	63
Familiarity with individuals: Because you know the people.....	72
Compassion for people: What they want is a decent job.....	73
Contextual category: Affinity for tribal/community colleges.....	76
Contextual category: Being president .....	78
Day to day operations: Teamwork is a big part of that.....	83
Long range vision: I see the big picture.....	84

Implementing their vision: This is the way I'd do it.....	85
Contextual category: Reputation for economic development.....	89
Core category: Embracing economic development role.....	93
Cross case analysis.....	98
Relationship to contextual framework.....	100
Axial category: Motivated by personal values.....	101
Caring and sharing.....	102
Freedom to choose.....	103
Making a difference.....	104
Belief in value of work.....	106
Relaxed in rural community.....	107
Perspective of poverty and wealth.....	108
Relationship to core category.....	109
Relationship to other axial categories.....	109
Axial category: Understanding economic development role.....	110
Becoming aware of economic development role.....	112
Being influenced by person/people/event or experience.....	112
Learning about economic development role.....	114
Relationship to core category.....	115
Relationship to other axial categories.....	116
Axial category: Motivated by environment.....	118
Matching actions to needs.....	119
Belonging to the community.....	120

Seeing with critical eyes.. .....	121
Responding to adversity.....	122
Creating jobs and stopping out-migration.....	123
Having a voice at the table.....	124
Relationship to core category.....	125
Relationship to other axial categories.....	126
Consequence: Taking economic development actions.....	127
Developing leaders and leadership capacity.. .....	130
Thinking and acting regionally.. .....	134
Coordinating closely with industry in workforce training.. .....	136
Being present throughout the service area. ....	139
Welcoming the community to the college facilities.....	140
Promoting healthy communities. ....	142
Relationship to core category.....	143
Review of metaphor .....	144
Summary.....	146
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....</b>	<b>149</b>
Research results .....	150
Evaluation and interpretation .....	151
Interpretation.....	152
Validation of the results. ....	154
Researcher's expectations.....	158
Comparison to other studies .....	160

Economic development role.....	160
Importance of fit with rural places.....	160
Leadership styles.....	164
Limitations of the study.....	166
Implications.....	167
Conclusion.....	169
Why the problem is important.....	170
Importance of the findings.....	171
Larger applications of the findings.....	171
Suggestions for further research.....	172
References.....	174
Appendix A: Rural Community College Initiative Colleges.....	181
Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Informed Consent.....	183
Appendix C: 110 Colleges for Potential Pool from RCCA Membership.....	185
Appendix D: Initial Correspondence to Potential Participants.....	188
Appendix E: Member Checking Follow-up Email to Participants.....	190
Appendix F: Cross Case Analysis to Support Selection of Core Category.....	191

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>General Information for Participants in the Study</i> .....	39
Table 2 <i>Relationships between Grounded Theory and Metaphor</i> .....	145

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.</i> Contextual, core, and axial categories in relationship to each other.....	51
<i>Figure 2.</i> Position of core and axial categories within the contextual framework. ....	59
<i>Figure 3.</i> Grounded theory causal conditions, core category, and consequences. ....	94
<i>Figure 4.</i> Personal values relationship to other axial categories. ....	110
<i>Figure 5.</i> Understanding economic development role relationships to other axial categories. ....	118
<i>Figure 6.</i> College is "of" the community versus community "owns" the college.....	121
<i>Figure 7.</i> Motivated by environment relationships to other axial categories. ....	127
<i>Figure 8.</i> Taking economic development actions in relation to the core category.....	144
<i>Figure 9.</i> Grounded theory categories and concepts. ....	148
<i>Figure 10.</i> Contextual, core, and axial categories in relationship to each other.....	151

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Rural America matters” was the first principle of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), a project aimed at helping the most distressed rural communities by empowering their community colleges to engage in community and economic development leadership (MDC, 2001). Economic development professionals and community college leaders recognize the “common destiny” shared by rural community colleges and the rural areas they serve (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007, p. 19; Torres & Viterito, 2008). Rural communities, with all their uniqueness, shape the community colleges and those who lead them, and the reverse is true, as community college presidents shape their colleges and sometimes the communities (Eddy, 2007; Torres & Viterito, 2008). Analysis of the Rural Community College Initiative indicated that presidential leadership style and commitment influenced the college and community team’s success at implementation of the proposed strategies (Eller, Jensen, Robbins, Russell, Salant, et al., 2003). My study is about presidents who lead rural community colleges and tribal colleges, their initiatives to improve the rural communities in which they reside, and understanding how these leaders develop their perspectives regarding the colleges’ role in economic development.

Many recent initiatives such as the U.S. Department of Labor’s Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) program sought to assist regions to “integrate economic and workforce development activities and demonstrate that talent development can drive economic transformation in regional economies” (U.S.

Department of Labor). The WIRED programs and others of the same era rewarded or lured, depending on the predisposition of the leadership, community colleges to engage in economic development partnerships that went beyond workforce development.

Workforce development, economic development, and community colleges meet at a crossroads – or do they? Nearly two decades ago, Katsinas (1994) stated that “perhaps no subject within the community college arena has sparked as much interest as involvement in economic development” (para. 3). Community colleges are still discussing economic development and their role in it (MDC, 2001, 2003).

For this study, rural is defined as small and medium enrollment colleges in rural serving areas. Since there is more than one definition for rural, I chose the definition that fits my purpose of studying the smaller of the community colleges (Cromartie, 2008). Tribal colleges are those identified by the Carnegie Classification system and for this study are limited to those that have significant similarities in surrounding population to the small and medium-serving rural community colleges as verified by the U.S. Census data.

### **Economic and educational challenges in rural areas**

Rural communities, regardless of how they are defined, are different than their suburban and urban counterparts (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006). Economic and workforce development strategies for rural areas are also different because reality is different; rural areas are characterized as having low population, lower educational attainment, lack of developed economic clusters, lower access to markets, and lower returns for increased education (Goetz & Rupasingha, 2005; Shields & Snyder, 2007).

The educational attainment gap between metro areas and rural areas is a major contributor to the disparity between rural and urban area economies. Education, therefore, is promoted by researchers and economic development practitioners alike as an effective rural economic development strategy (Gibbs, 2005; Shields & Snyder, 2007). Over half of America's community colleges are located in rural areas (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006).

Tribal colleges, like rural community colleges, directly impact the economic prosperity of their students and their region by providing programs to help their students overcome barriers to higher education and to achieve their educational goals (Deschenie, 2007; Institute for Higher, 2007). A report on tribal colleges and universities and their benefits to Native Americans cite "low college access and degree achievement rates" as persistent problems (Institute for Higher, 2007).

The Rural Community College Initiative, a demonstration project conducted from 1994 to 2001, identified two goals: (a) access for a rural workforce to be educated; and (b) economic capacity of rural communities (MDC, 2003). The RCCI project managers observed that increased access to education without economic capacity in rural areas simply increased the out-migration of the area's educated people (MDC, 2003). Some rural and tribal community colleges have reached beyond their curricular mission to embrace less traditional roles in economic development and economic development leadership (Torres & Viterito, 2008).

### **Community college missions**

Cohen and Brawer (2003) list "academic transfer preparation, vocational-technical education, continuing education, development education, and community

service” as five curricular functions of the comprehensive community college (p. 20). Community colleges may not adopt all the curricular functions in their unique mission and programs and some community colleges may adopt additional roles such as local contract training, small business assistance, workforce, economic, and community development (Bailey & Averianova, 1999; Dougherty & Bakia, 1999; Dougherty & Bakia, 2000; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Grubb, Badway, Bell, Bragg, & Russman, 1997; Torres & Viterito, 2008).

The correlation between educational attainment and economic vitality creates external pressures on educational leaders to adopt a mission that supports economic development (Goetz & Rupasingha, 2005; Gibbs, 2005). Economic development may conflict with other more traditional community college missions such as transfer education. Most community college presidents who indicated a shift in missions from 1999 to 2004 cited an increased priority for workforce and economic development (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2004). Community college presidents may experience pressures to place a high priority on economic development, external pressures to support the local economy, and internal pressures to increase revenues (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000).

While community colleges may not be “all things to all people” there is considerable pressure for community colleges to meet the needs of their local community (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2004; Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cross, 1985, p. 35). Cross (1985) contends that community colleges that reach out to meet the local needs “would become a major force for the improvement of the local community through education” (p. 40). These missions vie for attention, prominence, and resources (Bailey & Averianova, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; McPhail

& McPhail, 2006). The Rural Community College Initiative viewed community colleges as having the “capacity and mandate to be involved in both place-based economic development and people-based education and training strategies” (MDC, 2003, p. 2).

## **Problem**

The impact rural community colleges can provide for their economies is significant; however, adopting strategies that specifically benefit the local economy is not a core curricular mission for community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Cross, 1985). In order for rural communities to benefit from the community college in a significant way, the college leadership must adopt an economic development agenda. The problem is that leadership may not view enhancing the local economy or meeting the needs of the local workforce as critical missions of the college. The leadership of community college presidents is required for rural community colleges to adopt and implement an economic development mission (Eddy, 2007; Torres & Viterito, 2008).

The dual processes of developing a commitment to rural communities and learning economic development skills as a community college president or in preparation to serve as a community college president are not well studied. Eller et al. (2003) identify leadership styles and commitment as critical to effective implementation of economic development strategies at tribal and community colleges in rural areas, but do not expound on how college presidents develop effective leadership styles or a commitment to an economic development mission. I believe the study of how successful economic development presidents of tribal and community colleges develop their commitment and perspective of this college mission represents a gap in the research.

The variety and, sometimes, contention between the comprehensive community college mission aspects have been well explored and literature is prevalent (Bailey & Averianova, 1999; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Cross, 1985; Dougherty, 1994; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; McPhail & McPhail, 2006). Likewise, educational attainment and workforce training and their impact on the economic prosperity of rural areas is a well discussed correlation (Cromartie, 2008; Gibbs, 2005; Giloth, 2000; Goetz & Rupasingha, 2005; Shields & Snyder, 2007; Young, 1997). The RCCI project brought this discussion of the correlation between educational attainment and economic development into a demonstration project that is well documented and evaluated (Eller et al., 2003; MDC, 2001, 2003; Torres & Viterito, 2008).

Relevant literature on leadership styles and developing leadership skills was plentiful and available. Community college leaders may learn, adopt, and mix leadership styles from servant-leader to change agents to situational leadership (Collins, 2001; Northouse, 2003; Spears, 2004). Zigarmi, Fowler, and Lyles (2007) organized their self-help leadership book on a matrix of situations and leadership roles. In the organizational context, they stated that leaders will need a set of skills to answer the question “how do I focus systems and inspire people to move together toward a strategic outcome? (p. 43). All the leadership theories aside, “the choices that leaders make and how they respond in a given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics” (Northouse, 2003, p. 302). Covey (1990, 1991) called this ethical consideration moral compassing – having an internal compass to an external set of principles. Northouse (2003) discusses several leadership approaches and theories and, also, provides abundant references for other leadership texts. I believed there was a gap in the understanding of how committed and

successful leaders of tribal and community colleges in rural areas develop their perceptions and skills related to the colleges' role in economic development. I explored this gap and developed an understanding of the process of perception and skill development from the perspective of the college president. It is possible my research will add to the field of leadership training for community college leaders and a better understanding of leadership in a rural setting.

Boggs (2003) implored leadership development programs to “do a better job of preparing people to meet the challenges of leadership basing their curriculum on “problems current leaders are facing” (p. 19). Two surveys of community college presidents and one task force on community college leadership identified the following list of skills needed by community college leaders:

In its 2001 survey, AACC asked presidents to identify the most important skills for future leaders. Responses included financial planning “knowhow,” the ability to forge partnerships, the ability to improve and maintain relationships within and outside the college, the ability to develop a “clear vision,” excellent communication skills, political savvy, and adaptability (Shults, 2001). Weisman and Vaughan (1997) identified a complementary list of important leadership skills in their 1996 survey, including the ability to bring the college together in governance, the ability to mediate, a good command of technology, a high tolerance for ambiguity, understanding and appreciating multiculturalism, and an ability to build coalitions. The AACC Board Task Force on Leadership Development (AACC, 2002) identified the following essential leadership skills: understanding and implementing the community college mission; effective advocacy skills; administrative skills; community and economic development skills; and personal, interpersonal, and transformational skills. (Boggs, 2003, p. 20)

Other than the study conducted by Rankin (2008), I did not find any other work directly related to the rural community college presidents' perceptions of economic development or training in economic development skills. Reports from and on the Rural Community College Initiative provide the most in-depth look at rural community colleges and economic development (Eller et al., 2003; Torres & Viterito, 2008). I did

not find any literature about how presidents develop their perspective on economic development; however, Eller et al. (2003) distinguishes between leaders who are committed to community development and those who are not and compares their leadership styles in a brief observation. Eller et al. (2003) does not delve into the discussion or research about how presidents develop the commitment or the leadership style that proves most successful. Boggs (2003) reports that presidents identified “community and economic development skills” as critical, he recommends that those aspiring for leadership develop those skills (p. 19). RCCI evaluators observe that leadership style and commitment affect effectiveness but do not recommend how those skills are obtained outside the RCCI project (Eller et al., 2003).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to construct a substantive theory with a core concept and related concepts that provides an explanation for how presidents of tribal colleges and community colleges in rural areas come to understand economic development and how they act on that understanding. The grounded theory study describes how presidents who have supported an economic development mission at tribal and community colleges in rural areas developed their perceptions of the economic development role for the college and how they demonstrated their commitment to that mission. The purpose was not to identify a common understanding but to explore the perceptions held by the college presidents; the many ways they reached those understandings; and actions they believed demonstrate their commitment.

## **Research questions**

The general research question was “what is going on here” with presidents at the intersection of rural community colleges and their rural communities in the area of economic development. The following guiding questions were used in interviews to gain understanding: What initiatives do presidents identify as part of their rural community college’s mission? What experiences influence their understanding of economic development? How emphatically do they embrace the economic development mission for the college? What skills do they identify as needed to succeed at implementing an economic development strategy? How have they developed those skills? What leadership styles do they use to effectively implement an economic development strategy? In addition to questions that were used as prompts, demographic data about the participants and descriptive data about the colleges they lead was gathered. These questions included: age, gender, tenure at institution, and tenure in position of president. Descriptive information about the college included: enrollment, funding model, governance model, and comprehensiveness of programs. Other demographic and descriptive questions were included as theoretical sampling continued to develop concepts.

## **Researcher’s perspective**

I am familiar with the context being studied which should help me as a researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I am an experienced economic development practitioner, have served on statewide boards and national committees for economic development, and have a professional certification as an economic development professional. Educated first in engineering and then in business administration, I spent twelve years in the role of

local and regional economic development practitioner. In this role, I advocated for resources to meet the workforce needs of local industry, demand driven, and the training needs of unskilled workforce, supply driven. Often, the apparent solution was available at the community college.

I am also familiar with community colleges: I attended two community colleges in Wyoming and California, and I served on a community college advisory committee for a decade. I witnessed the change in one community college's contribution to the local economy and associated support from local industry based on a strategy to be responsive to local workforce needs. Working with the administration, I helped the college gain resources to fund expanded workforce training.

I have worked as a senior administrator of a community college district for five years and have studied in the Community College Leadership program at Colorado State University. Although a novice researcher, I am "knowledgeable about . . . [the] substantive area" which is the intersection of community colleges and economic development in a rural setting (Clarke, 2005, p. 294).

I am personally committed to rural communities and believe passionately that the community college should be leaders in economic development planning and implementation in their communities. I also believe that education is the most pragmatic solution for economic advancement for individuals and communities (Gibbs, 2005; Institute for Higher, 2007; Shields & Snyder, 2007). For these reasons, I am particularly interested in rural community colleges, their initiatives to improve the communities in which they reside, and the leaders who influence these colleges' directions and successes. Although I am interested in the quantitative analysis that supports any conclusion, I am

most interested in analyzing the qualitative data to construct a substantive theory grounded in those data. My bias is that I believe strongly that the community college should be involved in economic development and that the college president should grasp that role and lead that effort, not just perceive the economic development role.

I have several prior expectations about commitment to rural places, choosing rural places over career progression, and personal epiphanies about their role as college presidents. I believe I will find that the presidents in this study, selected on the basis of their reputation for support and success at implementing economic development initiatives, will have an extraordinary commitment to both community colleges and either rural or tribal communities. I believe this will be demonstrated by them having passed up opportunities to “move up” a career ladder that would have required them to leave a rural or tribal setting. I believe the presidents will tell stories about their personal epiphanies regarding their colleges’ responsibility or opportunity to support their local economies through educational leadership. I believe I will find what Eller et al. (2003) called a “more collaborative decisionmaking style” will describe many of the presidents (p. 39). If the interviews are not consistent with these assumptions, I will be surprised. Because I have pre-formed assumptions, I will be extra mindful of comparing my findings to the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

I have been a member of the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) since 2007. I have attended two annual conferences and one round-table held in conjunction with the American Association of Community Colleges meeting in 2008. I developed and co-presented a break-out session on economic development projects led by community colleges at the RCCA meeting in 2008. I met several of the RCCA members

and potential participants, the organization's president, and other leaders at one or more of these meetings.

### **Significance**

The results of this study should be beneficial to the economic development profession, legislators, and other funding agencies as they engage community colleges in a joint economic development agenda, develop a common language, and share a mission. It also should be useful to those who lead community colleges in rural settings, adapting to what may be a different political, geographic, and cultural landscape (Leist, 2007). The findings may help those who are hiring presidents and other leaders for rural and tribal colleges to adapt the job descriptions to recognize the skills that are needed (Bowman, 2009; Leist, 2007). Organizations that provide professional development for those aspiring to community college leadership and those already in positions of leadership at rural community colleges may find this research helpful in developing presentation content and format (Boggs, 2003).

My primary audience was educational leaders, specifically of community colleges. Eller et al. (2003) identified leadership styles as making a difference in how effectively presidents of rural community colleges implemented strategies developed by the Rural Community College Initiative. Findings from my research may contribute to the field of leadership development for community colleges specifically in rural communities. Professional development programs for future college leaders abound; however, even the leadership of the American Association of Community Colleges finds gaps in skill building needed by college presidents (Boggs, 2003; Kim, 2003). This observation indicates that leadership or leadership styles for specific situations such as

administrators for community colleges can be learned or developed. The basis for my research is that presidents of rural community colleges, who are supportive and successful in implementing economic development strategies in rural communities, have developed or learned that perspective, and have undergone a process of developing that perspective. My research may contribute to the development process for future rural community college leaders who endeavor to learn and adopt a perspective of support for an economic development role.

This research may provide the basis for additional research, building on what I develop or filling in other gaps that are identified in this project. I hope to expand my findings from this study with subsequent research. The story which may inform audiences about the theory of how community college presidents develop their perspectives of economic development will be developed using a qualitative research methodology.

## **Summary**

Although not viewed as core to the community college's curricular mission, some colleges have embraced an economic development role in order to benefit the economy in the community and the region both directly and indirectly. The Rural Community College Initiative is one example of colleges that have adopted this mission. The WIRED initiative is another demonstration of economic development and education leaders cooperating on regional issues. How college leaders in rural and tribal settings have learned or adopted a perspective of economic development cooperation or leadership represents a gap in the research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The intersection of interest for this study was economic development and community colleges. The context of interest was the rural setting. The perspective was from the president of the rural community college. This chapter includes a literature review concerning economic development, community college missions, rural economies, the role of community colleges in economic development, and the influence of the president over the community college direction. Additional material was obtained and reviewed to fill in the gaps identified during data analysis, confirm or challenge the constructed theory. Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), Charmaz (2006), and Clarke (2005) recognize that there will be some literature review or some expertise in the field prior to embarking on the data collection for a grounded theory study.

### **Economic development**

Economic development can be defined as a profession, a body of initiatives to improve an economy, and an explanation of how economies develop. Krugman (1990) developed a formal model to explain why manufacturing and population concentrate in a few centers; this model is an outgrowth of the study of economic geography. Economic geography, and its “most striking features,” explained Krugman (1990, p. 1), is understandable to laymen.

For example, one of the most remarkable things about the United States is that in a generally sparsely populated country, much of whose land is fertile, the bulk of the population resides in a few clusters of metropolitan

areas; forty percent are crowded into a not especially inviting section of the East Coast. (Krugman, 1990, p. 1)

Krugman (1990) narrates a hypothetical story and then develops a formal model that explains how population centers in the “hinterlands” have fixed locations based on agricultural or other natural resources. Urban area locations are not fixed. His model attempts to “shed light on the key questions of location: why and when does manufacturing become concentrated in a few regions, leaving others relatively undeveloped?” (Krugman, 1990, p. 3). His model explains this aspect of location decision using the “interaction of economies of scale and transportation costs” (Krugman, 1990, p. 3). This model explains why rural populations struggle to maintain sufficient population to have a viable economy of scale and why many economic development initiatives stress recruiting, retaining, or growing manufacturing firms.

Nearly 20 years ago, Katsinas (1994) reported that most of the literature about economic development is written by those outside the community college circles and published in journals not often read by community college leaders and practitioners. Recently, the Council on Competitiveness (2008) encouraged (economic) development practitioners to “make a point of reaching out to the presidents of each higher education institution” recognizing that it is difficult to understand how higher education institutions work from the outside (p. 14). Practitioners in economic development and education are reaching across the boundary and cooperating on regional economic development projects. This cooperation requires them to “redefine both their goals and missions” (Council on, 2008, p. 20).

Economic development professionals view economic development with a broad lens and define it as “a program, group of policies, or activity that seeks to improve the

economic well-being and quality of life for a community, by creating and/or retaining jobs that facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base” (IEDC, n.d.). A national policy agenda developed by economic development practitioners included workforce development among its six economic development strategies (IEDC, n.d.).

Giloth (2000) contrasted demand side and supply side workforce and economic development in his discussion of the federal workforce development initiatives. He linked employment training to regional economic development. Giloth discussed community colleges and their role in providing training and education that supported career advancement.

Harper-Anderson (2008) performed a statistical study in which he measured whether the depth or frequency of the connectedness between workforce and economic development practitioners or agencies would affect the outcomes of the initiatives. His research found that increased connectedness resulted in positive change in the economy. He referred to workforce development as working on the supply side of labor and economic development working on the demand side.

### **Community colleges and economic development**

There is general agreement that workforce training and responding to the community’s needs are part of the community college’s comprehensive mission and that the role of training the workforce is growing (Bailey & Averianova, 1999; Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cross, 1985; Dougherty & Bakia, 1999; Dougherty & Bakia, 2000; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Gracie, 1998; Grubb, Badway, Bell, Bragg, & Russman, 1997; Katsinas, 1994; Kwitek, 2005; Levin, 2000; Torres & Viterito, 2008; Young, 1997). While Dougherty and Bakia see contract training as a potential revenue source,

they also commented that growing the role of contract training, a role led by industry, could “weaken their commitment to traditional values of education and the transfer function” (p. 236). In North Carolina, the vocational-technical training role which was directly focused on providing a trained workforce for industry was seen as an equal role with transfer education and continuing education (Gracie, 1998). Young and Kwitek would agree with this acceptance of workforce training as an integral and equal role for community colleges, not simply a revenue source. In fact, Kwitek (2005) commented that workforce training was an “integral piece” and maybe “the most important” part of economic development (p. 18). Young (1997) emphasized that workforce training was just one aspect of the community college’s role and that the community college should move beyond the comprehensive community college model to the *new* college model and provide leadership in community development. Gracie recognized the workforce training efforts by community colleges played a supporting role to the state’s economic development initiatives. Whereas Dougherty and Bakia saw workforce training as weakening the community college, Gracie, Kwitek, and Young viewed workforce development as an integral and necessary role that tied the community college into a larger agenda through partnerships with state governments, communities, workforce agencies, and employers.

Dougherty and Bakia (2000) looked at three aspects of contract training provided by community colleges: content of the training, origins of the contract training mission, and the impact on the colleges. The authors used three different research methods: case studies, literature review, and evaluation of national studies to understand the content of contract training. The researchers selected 20 community colleges in five states that

provided contract training for five different industries and interviewed stakeholders for each of these programs. They also conducted document analysis for greater understanding. In evaluating the information retrieved from the colleges, the researchers identified recurring themes and sub-themes. The researchers conducted an extensive review of national studies and literature to understand the origins of contract training, reviewing the evolution over a span of three decades. They identified several themes for evaluation of the impact on community colleges. They concluded that “while it clearly does bring community colleges more revenues, students, and political clout, (contract training) may also weaken their commitment to traditional values of education and the transfer function” (p. 236).

In North Carolina, from 1989 to 1998, workforce development was characterized as distinct from economic development but supportive of the larger economic development initiatives (Gracie, 1998). Gracie explained that “discussions at the state level are beginning to shift toward funding the educational enterprise based on outcomes, effectiveness, and efficiency” (p. 53). Outcome measures for workforce training “illustrate the value of the North Carolina community college system to the state’s economic development efforts” (p. 60).

Kwitek (2005) examined three case studies in which communities were engaged with high-tech industries in what was defined as an economic development activity. He stated that workforce training, according to his literature review, was an “integral piece” and maybe “the most important” part of economic development (p. 18). In organizing his literature review he used “economic development and workforce training” in describing

all three categories (p. 19). He clearly equates or at least links workforce training and economic development in his language.

### **Rural and what defines it**

The term “rural” conjures different environs for different people. For many, rural is a perspective. Rural can be defined by administrative boundaries, land-use patterns, economic influence, population density, surrounding areas, connecting areas, or population (Cromartie, 2008). The most prevalent method of defining rural is everything that is not already defined as urban or non-metro (Cromartie, 2008; Gibbs, 2005; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). The Federal Government uses at least two dozen definitions of rural; however, places with populations greater than 50,000 are always considered urban while places with populations less than 2,500 are always considered rural (Cromartie, 2008). There is a big gap between the 2,500 and 50,000. There is in fact a rural to urban continuum that allows places to be considered urban for some purposes and rural for others (Cromartie, 2008). Authors of most of the literature regarding “rural” reviewed for this study did not provide the definition they used or assumed in their study.

Rural areas make up 85% of the land mass but only 15% of the country’s population (Miller & Kissinger, 2007). Over 45 million Americans reside in rural areas, a population that is “characterized as underperforming in bachelor’s degree attainment, having higher poverty rates and fewer opportunities for advancement” (Miller & Kissinger, 2007, p. 27).

## **Rural economic development**

Education is one strategy for rural economic development; “enhancing the human capital stock” or increasing the educational attainment of the local population has a positive economic benefit on the individuals and the community (Shields & Snyder, 2007, p. 41; Gibbs, 2005). Based on Census data that demonstrate trends for educated young people to leave rural areas, Shields and Snyder (2007) recommended that rural areas focus on “enhancing the skills and capabilities of those innovative workers that are less likely to move” (p. 42). Gibbs (2005) cited faster earnings and income growth in rural counties with higher educational attainments, although slower than the metro counterparts. In addition to other disadvantages of living in a geographically isolated community, college graduates realize a lower return on the investment of obtaining a higher education degree by working in a rural setting (Goetz & Rupasingha, 2005).

## **Rural community colleges and tribal colleges**

Rural and tribal colleges have similar and distinct challenges. Similar challenges include geographic isolation, generally lower educational attainment rates, increased poverty rates, depressed economies, and high percentages of first-generation college students (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007; Institute of Higher, 2007; Shields & Snyder, 2007). Rural community colleges have challenges attracting leadership and faculty, “bridging the resource gap,” creating a critical mass for low-enrollment courses, economies of scale, dealing with technology shortcomings, and helping their communities become sustainable (Cejda, 2007; Eddy, 2007; Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007, p. 19; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Leist, 2007; Murray, 2007). They also have opportunities to influence

their communities through leisure education, cultural enrichment, economic development, and educational opportunities (Miller & Kissinger, 2007).

Student enrollments are evenly distributed across rural, suburban, and urban community colleges with roughly one million served by each group (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Total enrollment in rural community colleges is skewed toward the 110 large and 303 medium colleges, with only 7 % of the students enrolled at the 140 small rural districts. The difference identified by researchers, that may impact the workforce development role, is economies of scale. Hardy and Katsinas summarized this section.

The economies of scale that exist for the delivery of workforce training at urban and suburban community colleges (and even large rural community colleges) may not exist at the 140 small rural community colleges, and are also unlikely at many of the 303 medium rural community colleges (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007, p. 9).

Gipp, the “unofficial historian of tribal colleges,” believes in the “power of the tribal colleges to provide students not only with job skills but also to instill them with pride in their culture, language and heritage” (Pember, 2008, para. 13). This statement includes both education for the purpose of economic self-sufficiency and economic health of the community and a commitment to valuing the Native American culture. Tribal colleges, like rural community colleges, directly impact the economic prosperity of their students and their region by providing programs to help their students overcome barriers to higher education and to achieve their educational goals (Deschenie, 2007; Institute for Higher, 2007). A report on tribal colleges and universities and their benefits to Native Americans cite “low college access and degree achievement rates” as persistent problems (Institute for Higher, 2007, p. i).

**Rural community college initiative.** The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI), a pilot project funded by the Ford Foundation and directed to assist community

colleges in the most distressed rural areas, selected nine community and tribal colleges in 1994 and later added 15 colleges to the project. These 24 colleges were characterized as serving distressed rural areas (Torres & Viterito, 2008). As a follow-up to the initial project, case studies were conducted with eight of the participants. The qualitative data was supplemented with data from public sources. The technical assistance and networking provided by the RCCI project resulted in four themes: “embracing the role of change agent; adopting a mission focus on planning; enhancing student success; and developing efforts to sustain change” (Torres & Viterito, 2008, p. 7). One avenue for change was adopting economic development as part of the colleges’ missions, missions that included entrepreneurship, small business development, collaboration, and networking (Torres & Viterito, 2008).

The 24 colleges, their 2003-2004 enrollments, community populations in 2000 and Carnegie Classifications are shown in Appendix A. The enrollments as calculated by IPEDS ranged from 289 to 9,032 and the populations of the communities in which they are located ranged from 164 to 176,576, a very wide range (Carnegie, n.d; U.S. Census, n.d.). When the rural-serving large institutions are eliminated from consideration, the largest community by population is 48,411; this population is consistent with the definition of rural used by the USDA (Cromartie, 2008). The tribal colleges in the RCCI project are small to very-small in enrollment size and are located in communities with population less than 2,500 (Torres & Viterito, 2008; U.S. Census, n.d.). In community size and enrollment, the tribal colleges in the RCCI project are similar to the rural-serving small community colleges.

**Classifications.** As a result of work by Katsinas, Hardy, and Lacey, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching modified its classification system for community colleges to present subcategories in the 2005 Basic Classifications (Carnegie, n.d.; Hardy & Katsinas, 2006; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007; Katsinas, 2003). The criteria for category assignment included rural-, suburban-, or urban-serving, size, single-campus versus multi-campus, special use and other considerations such as whether the college is part of a four-year university (Carnegie, n.d.). A test of the custom listings available from the updated Carnegie Classifications using the criteria associates, public-rural serving, and exclusively undergraduate two-year resulted in a listing of 594 colleges. Hardy and Katsinas (2006) and others who had reviewed their model concluded that the improved precision using the Katsinas, Lacey, and Hardy 2005 Classification System for 2-year institutions can help colleges better tell their story and the stories of similar institutions. Hardy and Katsinas summed up their research and research conducted by others with “rural community colleges are unique institutions” (p. 15).

The rule-of-thumb that everything over 50,000 is considered urban was not used for the new classification system. For the Carnegie Classifications system the population cut-off for whether a community college is considered rural is 500,000 (Carnegie, n.d.; Hardy & Katsinas, 2006). Rural includes all community colleges located outside Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) and Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs) and those within MSAs with populations less than 500,000. The large, medium and small-serving designation within rural is determined based on the numbers of students served by the institution using 2,500 and 7,500 as the break points (Carnegie, n.d.). The large variation in population within the rural categories probably explains why

Hardy and Katsinas (2007) found that there is “greater variation in rural community college category than in the urban and suburban categories” and why small and medium serving rural community colleges are different than rural large, suburban and urban (p. 8).

### **Presidential influence on the college missions**

The community college presidents’ jobs are becoming more externally focused (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2004). The economic development role is an externally focused role in which the president engages with the community (Cross, 1985). Presidential buy-in is required for community colleges to expand their role in economic development in the region (Torres & Viterito, 2008). Attitude toward rural places does matter and should be considered in hiring new presidents (Leist, 2007). *Habitus* may explain why some college presidents have a commitment to rural areas. In discussions about why students attend college, *habitus* was defined as “the enduring, internal system of attitudes, beliefs, actions and fundamental values, acquired from the immediate family, school, and community environments” (Paulsen, 2001). *Habitus* is sociologist Bourdieu’s theory of class structure and how class structures form based on the “embodied disposition shared by members of a class” (Hinde & Dixon, 2007). In this context, the *classes* are residents of rural or tribal communities.

Leaders of eight tribal colleges discussed their efforts to span the boundaries between tribal and Western, providing rigorous academics and rich cultural context. Being a change agent was one of the characteristics that the eight presidents said was needed to be effective at leading tribal colleges and universities (Bowman, 2009). Both Eddy (2007) and Leist (2007) mention trips to the grocery store as being lengthy and providing opportunities to interact with community constituents. Rural and tribal cultures

require that the college presidents be on the job all the time, representing their colleges and responding to the community (Leist, 2007; Bowman, 2009).

In the summary report on the Rural Community College Initiative's multi-year project, the assessment team commented on the impact the presidents' leadership styles and level of commitment to economic development had on the success of the RCCI initiatives (Eller et al., 2003). The Assessment Team found distinct differences between presidents who adopted an economic development mission and those who did not:

Presidents who already had or who adopted a more collaborative decisionmaking style and a commitment to long-term community development generally produced larger, more enthusiastic teams and more varied projects than directive presidents who followed a more assertive, short-term management strategy of "ready, fire, aim." . . . Presidents who were perceived to be interested more in a legacy than in the community made it difficult to achieve RCCI goals based on inclusion. (Eller et al., 2003, p. 59)

The presidents, their perspectives, and their leadership appear to influence whether the college adopts an economic development mission and whether the initiatives are effective. Leading a rural community college is a different job (Eddy, 2007). Leaders in rural settings develop their leadership different than their counterparts in suburban and urban settings (Eddy, 2007). Leaders at rural community colleges have a "highly visible role" and less anonymity (Eddy, 2007, p. 285). Their leadership and leadership style matters (Eller, et al., 2003).

## **Summary**

The study of economic geography sheds light on why populations in general concentrate in urban areas, leaving the remainder of the country sparsely populated.

*Habitus* explains why some people strive to remain in rural areas and build the economy

that they can. Rural economies may never be as strong as their suburban and urban counterparts, but an educated population may help even a rural community have a thriving economy. Rural community college and tribal college presidents have an opportunity to lead cross-boundary initiatives that will make a difference in their communities' economies.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of conducting the research was to “develop knowledge that will guide practice” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 11). I chose a research topic in intersecting fields in which I am a practitioner and active in at least three national associations. These intersections provided me the opportunity to present the research and findings to national audiences.

### **Rationale and assumptions for design**

A qualitative methodology provided the story which may inform audiences about the theory of how rural community college and tribal college presidents developed their perspectives of economic development. I chose a grounded theory approach for discovering how presidents developed their understanding, honed their skills, and implemented economic development strategies (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007). Although there are several qualitative research strategies, I used grounded theory based on the purpose of discovery matching the research design (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Grounded theory provided a systematic method of building a theory which fits the perspectives as related by the participants. Observations and document review help explain and support emerging categories and relationships (Clarke, 2005). The methodology allowed me to connect with the participants, discover their stories, examine the complexities of their experiences, and follow their lead to develop a theory that was grounded in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The substantive theory was developed iteratively in parallel to interviews, observations, and document review. The theory which was constructed from emergent concepts and their relationships provided a plausible explanation for how these presidents for tribal and rural community colleges came to understand economic development and how they acted on that understanding. Qualitative research, specifically grounded theory, allowed me to engage with the participants on a personal level. The presidents' stories became part of the data set.

### **Type of design**

I used a grounded theory methodology for a single situation, tribal and community colleges in rural areas whose presidents were supportive of the colleges' role in economic development, and developed what is referred to as mid-level theory or substantive theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). On the outset, rural community colleges in communities with less than 50,000 residents and tribal colleges were treated as a single situation. Corbin emphasized researchers should choose between *describing* or *theorizing* and follow-through on that intent. My intent was to theorize. Examining community college presidents in other situations such as larger rural, suburban, and urban community colleges (different geography) will allow other researchers to formalize a more general theory across situations.

**Grounded theory elements.** I followed Corbin's (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) lead and built my process on the common elements for grounded theory as absolute musts in the research design: "constant comparative method of analysis, the use of concepts and their development, theoretical sampling, and saturation" (p. 303). I used analytical tools that fit me best as the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008;

Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although, I completed a preliminary literature review, prior to embarking on data collection and analysis, I returned to the literature review and added content to fill in the gaps that were identified during the research analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). The additional literature review was incorporated into Chapter 5.

**Integrating data sources.** Integrating observations of the interview settings and an analysis of documents was consistent with the grounded theory techniques developed by Strauss and Glaser and further developed by Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The transcribed interviews made up the bulk of the data set. In addition to the transcripts, I used a few observations of the interview settings and analysis of public documents such as college mission statements, board meeting minutes, and press releases (Clarke, 2005). I collected some public documents prior to the interviews and created a sheet of potential questions that I used to keep the interviews moving, see Appendix B for interview protocol. I collected demographic information about the participants and descriptive information for their colleges during the course of the interviews. I wrote observations about the setting and my reflections on the interviews in a notebook immediately following each interview.

Recognizing my own lack of knowledge about tribal histories and culture and in order to place the tribal college presidents' comments in context, I reviewed several historical accounts of the tribes associated with my research and other North American tribes. One reference book was recommended by one of the tribal college presidents. This research led to researching the connections between tribal histories and the emergence of western towns and informed my analysis.

During the analysis phase, I reviewed recent demographic data about the

communities in which the eight presidents lived to provide context to their comments about poverty, racial diversity, and employment sectors, and to understand mobility of the population and population trends. The range of diversity is discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Building quality into the research design**

Quality research speaks for itself, “resonates with readers’ and participants’ life experiences,” and can be improved by including the following elements in the research process (a) methodological consistency; (b) clarity of purpose; (c) self-awareness; (d) training in qualitative research; (e) sensitivity for the topic, for the participants, and for the research; and (f) methodological awareness (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302). I incorporated these elements to improve quality.

My purpose was to conduct a research project that adds knowledge to the field of community college leadership and to do so by theorizing or building a theory from emerging categories. The theory was a plausible explanation for how presidents develop their perceptions concerning the role of the college in economic development and act on those perceptions. The theory was well-grounded in the data.

I was aware of my bias in this field of research, so I purposefully kept extensive memos regarding the interviews and the data analysis. I reviewed these memos with my spouse and my methodologist. I discussed my feelings and responses to the process of analysis and recorded these in memos. This helped me be aware of the “influence that the research” had on me (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 303).

In addition to completing two graduate courses in qualitative research methodologies and analysis, I read several dissertations that used grounded theory as a research method and studied qualitative and grounded theory resources by Corbin and

Strauss (2008), Clarke (2005), Charmaz (2006), and Creswell (2007). My adviser and methodologist are both experienced in qualitative research methods and provided guidance during research design, research, and analysis.

My experience writing grant applications for a variety of community and college based projects prepared me to be sensitive to the topic, the participants, and the research. I become engrossed in the topic at hand learning more about the topic than needed for the project whether the project provided support services for students, created a biotechnology program, or extended a sewer system to help a company create jobs (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I came to this project with an existing sensitivity for rural communities, community colleges, and college leadership.

In order to maintain consistency in data collection and data analysis, I planned to use a software program designed for qualitative research. I abandoned this plan early in the analysis and relied on Microsoft Word and the search feature. I documented decision points and decisions in memos. I reviewed my methods with my advisers and colleagues periodically to gain concurrence on processes and discussed decision points, decisions, and possible consequences.

### **Researcher's role**

The researcher is part of the research process (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Clarke (2005) and Charmaz (2006) see the researcher as much more integral to the research itself and even place the researcher “within” the research itself. Traditional grounded theory, as described by Clarke, sets the researcher as “*tabula rasa*” where the researcher would attempt to be as objective as possible, using her

understanding of her bias to subtract that bias from the analysis. Clarke and Charmaz encouraged the researcher to use her memos as data in the analysis.

As an interviewer in unstructured interviews, I became a participant and instrument in the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain that grounded theory methodology does not “separate who we are as persons from the research and analysis we do” (p. 11). Charmaz (2006) and Clarke (2005) place the researcher within the research recognizing that their intuition about not only what is said or seen but also about the gaps should be included in the analysis and subsequent theoretical sampling.

### **Site and sample selections**

The Carnegie Classifications was modified in recent years to differentiate among types of associate degree granting institutions (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006). Of the 14 categories, the ones which I used in the study were: small and medium-serving public associates degree colleges and tribal colleges. There are 142 public rural serving small, 311 public rural serving medium, and 32 tribal colleges. This provided a pool of 478. Additionally, the participants were restricted to those who were members of the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I selected several institutions that I knew should be in the resulting list and verified its accuracy.

My first plan for this research project was to focus on rural community colleges. I included tribal colleges because tribal colleges were a large presence within the Rural Community College Alliance membership. Tribal colleges were included in the initial Rural Community College Initiative as part of the grant-funded project. Following the conclusion of that project, many tribal colleges continued working with rural community

colleges in the Rural Community College Alliance venture. For this reason, I believed that it was important to include tribal colleges in the study. Tribal colleges are identified in the Carnegie Classification System.

**Developing the pool.** Criteria and listings were used to create a more homogenous, less diverse, pool of potential participants. This step supported the single-situation approach in grounded theory. The pool of potential participants included presidents at colleges that met three criteria (a) current or past members of Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA, personal communication, February 3, 2010), (b) Carnegie Classification of associates degree rural-serving small or medium or tribal (Carnegie Foundation; Hardy & Katsinas, 2006), and (c) community population of 50,000 or less (U.S. Census). The first criterion, RCCA membership, limited the potential participant pool to colleges that have identified themselves as rural and interested in having an economic development role. The second criterion, Carnegie Classifications, limited the list to accredited colleges and to colleges of a limited enrollment range. The third criterion ensured rural based on a population size consistent with rural as used for this study, less than 50,000.

The Rural Community College Alliance was an outgrowth of the Ford Foundation-funded Rural Community College Initiative. The RCCA was an affiliated council with the American Association of Community Colleges that endeavored to help rural community colleges “partner with their communities to improve education and work for economic prosperity” (“AACC Affiliated”; RCCA). Although RCCA was affiliated with the American Association of Community Colleges, RCCA membership was open to rural community colleges and tribal colleges on a shared belief and values

basis, and not restricted to those who are also members of AACC. Membership was also available for “professionals and students” interested in “rural education and rural development” (RCCA).

RCCA provided contact information for the member colleges (RCCA, personal communication, February 3, 2010). Using the RCCA membership list, the Carnegie Foundation’s classification system and the U.S. Census data for community population, I created a listing of the 110 colleges that met the three criteria with the contact information to be considered for participation in the study. The Rural Community College Alliance has grown from its RCCI roots to include nearly 200 members at one time or another (personal communication, February 3, 2010). The Carnegie Classification identified 1,689 institutions for which the undergraduate instructional program was “associates.” The intersection of RCCA members and Carnegie listing for “associates” was 157 institutions (personal communication, February 3, 2010; Carnegie). Of the 157 institutions, 120 were classified as either rural-medium or rural-small, or tribal. Of the 120 institutions, 110 were located in rural communities with populations less than 50,000 (U.S. Census). These 110 colleges are listed in Appendix C.

**Selecting participants.** Whether colleges met the three criteria discussed earlier was objective. The criteria for whether a president should be recommended for participation was subjective and was based on whether the president was both successful and enthusiastic about the college being involved in an economic development role and has demonstrated successful implementation of economic development initiatives at rural community or tribal colleges. Since this criterion was subjective, two experts who knew the pool of candidates were asked to start the “snowball or chain” (Creswell, 2007; Miles

& Huberman, 1994, p. 28). This method is referred to as reputational case selection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process ensured that the participating presidents met the criteria and increased the quality of the study. The snowball or chain method of identifying subsequent cases or participants helped me identify “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” and was one of the methods recommended for “inductive, theory-building analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). I asked the experts why they believed that a specific president fit the criteria established.

I chose two individuals as “key informants” or experts to help with participant selection in order to set boundaries on my study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 26). My proposed study was enriched because I interviewed presidents who fit the criteria explained earlier and provided information-rich interviews. I met both experts at conferences for the Rural Community College Alliance. It was apparent to me that they were both well-known in this circle of presidents and that they were highly regarded by the membership. When I asked them if they would participate in my study to help identify who I should interview, both expressed their willingness. Both experts could be considered peers with the participants in many ways, but would not be potential participants in their current role.

Expert A impressed me with his commitment to rural areas in a presentation he made at the 2008 annual RCCA conference. In addition to serving as president of a rural community college for 30 years, he “personally conducted in-plant workforce training; taught adult basic education with pre-literate learners; taught sociology, history and journalism at the community college; taught graduate courses at Florida State University,

the University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi State University and acted as guest lecturer at the Universities of Florida, Alabama, Auburn, and Peabody College” (personal correspondence, March 1, 2010). He served as president of one of the initial 24 RCCI colleges and following retirement from the college continued to assist with the evolution from the pilot project to the Rural Community College Alliance.

In addition to serving as president of a rural community college, Expert A has served and continues to serve in leadership positions with many local and regional economic development organizations. He served in many civic roles and was active in conducting executive searches. In summary, he knew rural community colleges, continued to be engaged in workforce and economic development initiatives, and knew presidents of the RCCA colleges. His commitment to rural areas was strong. He explained that he and his wife moved to a rural area five decades ago “to pick up a year or two of experience and move on to the world of academe” (personal correspondence, March 1, 2010). They did not move on. They continued to live and work in this rural community because “they found a place to rear a family and try to make a difference” (personal correspondence, March 1, 2010).

Expert B served in faculty and leadership roles at community colleges for more than a decade and was actively involved in the Rural Community College Alliance. He was a “frequent presenter on rural issues at conferences and across the country and internationally” and to national legislative committees (personal correspondence, March 3, 2010). In addition to knowing the current RCCA membership, he was personally very engaged with tribal college presidents. He was Native American and an enrolled tribal member (personal correspondence, March 1, 2010). His personal research interests were

“leadership in higher education and recruitment and retention of students at rural community colleges” (personal correspondence, March 3, 2010). He indicated that he would help me identify participants based on the criteria, gain access to participants specifically tribal college presidents, and understand cultural sensitivities with interviewing tribal college presidents (personal correspondence, March 1, 2010).

**Choosing next participant.** I worked with the experts to identify potential participants, from the 110, who represented different categories of rural-small, rural-medium, and tribal and geographies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This plan created a pool from which I chose participants based on theoretical sampling. I selected the second and following participants who I believed could “contribute to the development of theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). This selection was based on a fit with the initial data, initial data analysis, and referrals from the two experts (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Clarke, 2005). The identification of participants who represent “different” situations allowed for analysis based on within cases such as gender of president or size of college and across cases such as president demographics or college characteristics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach was also supported by Clarke (2005) as she advocated that researchers gather data that show the differences along a continuum instead of seeking participants whose data lends itself to a central tendency on a normal curve. Data gathered during the research helped me identify other continuums along which to seek data. I did not analyze the data along any of these other characteristics for this study and leave that as a possibility for further research.

**Gaining access to participants.** By virtue of the plan for identification, the two experts offered to help me gain access to each of the potential participants. I met many

potential participants at RCCA meetings. Once I had a list of recommended participants, I contacted selected potential participants by telephone call and email. The sample email is shown in Appendix D. This could be considered a standard communication method with this pool of participants. Contact information for the presidents and CEOs was available through the Rural Community College Alliance membership list and the college websites.

I arranged interviews which were conducted in person at the participants' offices or by telephone. As much as possible, restricted by time, convenience, and cost, I travelled to the participant's college campus. I conducted the first three interviews face to face. I visited with some potential participants at a national conference because it was convenient for me to introduce myself and let them know that they had been nominated for my research project. This provided the opportunity for the participant and me to put a face to the person before a later telephone interview. Following this conference, I conducted the remaining five interviews by telephone. I did not conduct any follow-up interviews.

**Participants.** The two experts nominated a total of 18 from the pool of 110 potential participants. One expert nominated 16 and the other nominated seven. The nomination lists overlapped with five people nominated by both experts. From the list of 18, eight presidents, five men and three women who led two tribal colleges in rural areas and six community colleges in rural areas, were interviewed for the study. Three of the five nominated by both experts were interviewed. Six reported to local boards, three elected and three appointed, while two reported to state boards. Three had enrollments

under 1,000, three with enrollments between 1,000 and 5,000, and two with enrollment over 5,000. The demographic data in Table 1 are provided for information only.

Table 1 *General Information for Participants in the Study*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years as President	Enrollment	Governance
Bob	M	>60	<10	1000 to 5000	Local elected board
J.D.	M	>60	10 to 20	> 5000	Local appointed board
Jack	M	>60	>20	< 1000	Local appointed board
Mary Ann	F	50 to 60	<10	> 5000	Local elected board
Mary Ellen	F	50 to 60	<10	1000 to 5000	State Board
Matilda	F	< 50	<10	< 1000	Local elected board
Russell	M	>60	<10	< 1000	Local appointed board
Troy	M	>60	>20	1000 to 5000	State Board

I did not analyze the data across all these parameters but did make some comparisons between tribal college and community college and between genders when there was a notable difference. Expert A reviewed the summary data in Table 1 and verified that he could not identify any individuals from the general classifications (personal correspondence, July 5, 2011).

**Data collection techniques**

I identified three types of data to be collected or created: interviews through face-to-face meetings, by telephone, and through email; observations where my role as researcher was known; and analysis of public documents (Clarke, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Potential participants were contacted by telephone with an email to invite them to participate (see Appendix D). Following their oral agreement to participate, locations

and schedule for interviews were established. Interviews were conducted in person or via telephone. During the meetings and prior to the interviews, I reviewed the consent to participate as outlined in the initial email invitation and asked for their concurrence with participating. I asked participants to create a pseudonym that was used during the digitally recorded interviews and data analysis. I placed two digital recorders in a convenient location and gained the participants' concurrence with recording the interviews. I let the participants know that I would take notes during the interview as a back-up to the digital recording and to document observations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I spent more time as participant than as observer, engaging the interviewees in the process (Creswell, 2007).

For the initial interview, I introduced the topic of the college's role in economic development and then conducted an unstructured, open-ended interview. For subsequent interviews, I listened for similar categories to those introduced by the first interviewees. If these concepts were not brought up by the participant, I introduced the categories in the form of open-ended questions. For instance, the first two participants were presidents of colleges in their home communities. They both referred to growing up poor. I added open-ended questions about growing up for the later interviews. This was consistent with the process of "little prior instrumentation" and supported validity based on construct, descriptive, interpretive, and natural (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Managing and recording data**

Participants' identities were masked to protect their confidentiality (Creswell, 2007, p. 143). A data collection matrix was used to keep track of all data files by

interviewee. All electronic documents were regularly backed up on external storage devices.

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder. The recordings were transferred to duplicate removable storage devices (jump drives), one kept by me and the other provided to the professional transcriptionist. The interviews were transcribed in Word. I listened to the recordings while reviewing the typed transcript and made corrections for accuracy. I kept notes about conversations with participants and their staff members regarding arrangements for the interviews. I recorded notes about the interview in this same notebook. I did not transcribe these notes. I printed hard copies of all documents that were analyzed and recorded the source. Hard copies of all documents were kept in three-ring binders for a low-tech back-up and ease of retrieving and reviewing.

### **Data analysis procedures**

Grounded theory has systematic steps: open coding (categories of information), axial coding (positioning one category in a theoretical model) and selective coding (creating or discovering a story) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In their third edition, Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain that axial coding and selective coding were not separate activities but interwoven in the analysis process. I created an initial list of possible codes from my literature review and common sense such as community, jobs, economic development, local economy, and mission. These were revised as the open coding began. I used a list of questions to start the process of reading inductively and analyzing the initial set of data. These questions are listed in Corbin and Strauss (2008) as sensitizing questions, theoretical questions, practical questions, and guiding questions (p. 72). Using

a predefined list of questions helped me look at the data from several different vantage points. I noted my responses to these questions in the margins of printed transcripts and then in memos associated with the data.

The qualitative researcher has many tools available to analyze the data and present the findings that help make sense of the research (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I tried several “tools” including mapping and matrices to discover methods that helped make sense of the data (Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I presented early diagrams and the supporting stories to colleagues. Creswell (2007) observed “how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research” (p. 179). I developed a metaphor so I could borrow from what I knew to analyze the study data and build a substantive theory. The metaphor was presented with the findings. I used a cross-case matrix for causal, core, and consequential categories to test whether the selected core category was supported by all eight interviews. The matrix was shown in Appendix F.

### **Methods for verification and trustworthiness**

There are several ways to check and verify quality, reliability, and validity (Charmaz 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study proposal was designed with quality in mind. The steps recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) were listed and discussed in the research design section earlier. To verify reliability the research process may include: checking transcripts for accuracy after they are professionally transcribed; creating and maintaining a codebook; asking an experienced researcher to code a segment of the data using the codebook, and verifying

similar coding or intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2007). I wrote extensive memos and created a lengthy list of concepts. I regrouped memos around concepts several times while analyzing the first three interviews.

Validity may be checked using: triangulation, a process of looking at the data from the interviews, documents, and observations, and ensuring that they are telling the same story; member checking by sending transcriptions of interviews to participants for their confirmation and allowing them the opportunity to identify sensitive segments; and checking my bias as the researcher through debriefing with the experts (reputational referral) and my advisers (Creswell, 2007). Following analysis of the fourth interview, I discussed the categories and relationships, specifically the contextual framework, with my methodologist and laid out the concept of an explanatory metaphor. I raised the level of the concepts to a more abstract level, identified the contextual framework categories, and started writing the theory based on these categories.

Thick descriptions were developed during analysis and included in the presentation to allow other researchers to better understand the data that were gathered, analyzed, and used to construct a theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process supports credibility of the research analysis if the reader reaches the same conclusion based on what was presented.

As an integral part of the quality construct, I checked back with participants. I emailed them each a transcription of the core of their interview and a draft copy of the study. I asked the participants to identify any portion of their interviews which I had misused or which they wanted omitted from the study because of sensitivity. I also asked

them to share any further thoughts that they would like me to consider as data. I heard back from three participants. They did not request any deletions or changes.

Checking the grounded theory research against the four criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness recommended by Charmaz (2006) was used to verify and document validity and trustworthiness. A sample of the questions included: “Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic? Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment-and *agree* with your claims?” (credibility); “Are your categories fresh? Do they offer new insights?” (originality); “Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience?” (resonance); and “How does your work contribute to knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?” (usefulness) (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182-183). I answered these questions at the conclusion of the research to self-check the research against the criteria. I also asked one of the participants to respond to these questions. The results are discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Summary**

My qualitative study was a limited study in a single situation, community and tribal colleges in rural settings. The topic was the role of the tribal and community colleges in affecting the rural community’s economy. I believed the literature indicated a gap in the research at this junction. The specific purpose was to understand how presidents of these colleges developed their understanding of the college’s role. I did not find any literature about how rural college presidents, in any geographic location, developed their perspective on economic development.

I followed the *constructivist* philosophy or worldview to conducting qualitative research and constructed a theory that could explain how rural community college presidents who have demonstrated a commitment to economic development developed and demonstrated that understanding. I used reputational referral to select the participants from a list of 110 potential participants. The 110 potential participants were presidents of community and tribal colleges that had been members of the Rural Community College Alliance, were categorized as “associates” or “tribal,” and were located in communities of less than 50,000 (personal correspondence, RCCA, February 3, 2010; Carnegie Classification; U.S. Census).

I constructed the substantive theory using grounded theory approaches presented by Corbin and Strauss (2008), Charmaz (2006), and Clarke (2005). In order to contain the study to what I could accomplish in a reasonable timeframe, I limited the focus on a few emerging concepts early in the data collection and analysis process and continued to interview participants to reach saturation in the selected concepts. Following in-depth analysis of four interviews and preliminary review of the remaining four, I selected a central concept and displayed relationships between the various categories to develop an overarching theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The theory was refined as I wrote and rewrote the theory using the data and my memos. The eight interviews provided sufficient rich text to saturate the categories.

## CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTION OF GROUNDED THEORY

Presidents who had collaborative and inclusive leadership styles, had a “commitment to long-term community development,” and were perceived to be more committed to the community than their personal legacy were more successful in implementing economic development missions according to the reviewers of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) (Eller et al., 2003, p. 59). The purpose of this study was to construct a substantive theory with a core category and related category that provided a plausible explanation for how presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas came to understand economic development and how they acted on that understanding. The study did not seek to verify the findings of the RCCI review conducted by Eller et al. (2003); however, the three characteristics noted by Eller were consistent with the participants in this study.

Regarding leadership J.D. joked about the extent of his collaboration with senior staff members and Bob explained his reliance on a trust relationship with senior staff. J.D. and Bob demonstrated collaborative and inclusive leadership styles.

I wouldn't go out and buy a pair of brown shoes unless it was on the agenda and we had discussed it, brought it to a high level of candor, and come to consensus on it. Everybody understands that decision making is a group process. No one is shy. There are no “yes” people in this group. We've all worked together for years; have lots of longevity but lots of trust with each other. There are times when the disagreement goes against me and I say, “Well, you know, this is what I wanted to do, but I'm going to defer to the group think because I think the group think in this case is better than the individual thought.” (J.D.)

As a District President you hire your staff to run the operation. You set the stage for that and the parameters but you have to develop a trust relationship with your staff and let them run. (Bob)

Troy commented about the unimportance of who gets credit and personal legacy. It did not matter to him if he got the credit and if he gained a personal legacy, but he admitted that he probably would have a legacy.

I've said probably a hundred times, it's not important who gets the credit as long as the job gets done. That has worked here. (Legacy is) not very important to me to be honest with you. I'm not looking to have a building named after me although I expect that probably will happen. (Troy)

Collaborative leadership and comfort with sharing credit were consistent with Eller's review of RCCI presidents.

The eight participant presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas were concerned about the long term future of their communities. Several were personally committed to staying in their position as president until all the pieces were in place for their colleges to carry their economic development role into the future. They saw those pieces as clear understanding of and commitment to a defined future, leadership capacity, and a commitment to work hard to achieve the desired future. Concern for their communities' futures long term was apparent in comments such as, "I started to think about . . . the role of our college here more so in terms of reducing poverty and creating jobs," "I knew I was going to stay here long enough to make it work," "before I leave to at least have in place the structure of economic development so that the next person that comes will have something to work with," and "it's almost like you have to be about three miles above your region on a clear day in a plane kind of looking down; then when you get that holistic insight as to what the mission is and what we're doing then attack it with religious zeal."

The grounded theory developed from the qualitative study and presented in this chapter was based on interviews with presidents and recommendations from two experts in this field and was grounded in their own words. For this study the eight presidents selected the pseudonyms of Bob, J.D., Jack, Mary Ann, Mary Ellen, Matilda, Russell, and Troy. The discussion of how these presidents “got it” about the economic development missions for their colleges was supported with their own words and stories. The recommendations from two experts referred to as Expert A and Expert B were based on their personal knowledge of these presidents and their colleges.

### **Organization of data and presentation of theory**

This chapter begins with a review of the initial research questions and questions added as a result of theoretical sampling. A description of the participants is presented with ranges for age, tenure, and enrollment sizes of their colleges. The theory is presented as an overview of the substantive theory for this single situation of presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas. The theory overview includes the contextual framework, core and axial categories, and their relationships. For greater understanding the theory is depicted in figures and illustrated with a metaphor about a religious calling.

The chapter continues with a more detailed description of each category and its concepts, if any, properties of each category, and dimensions or variations within each category. The data are excerpts from the interviews and nominations. A Biblical quotation and further development of the metaphor introduce each section. The categories and concepts are explained, supported with paraphrases based on the data and quotes from the interviews, and interpretations from my vantage point as the researcher.

I specifically provide interpretation for the more abstract meaning and the meanings that were unstated. The metaphor is further developed in the interpretation for each section. The chapter concludes with a recap of the metaphor and a summary of the grounded theory.

### **Research questions**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the general research question was “what is going on here” with presidents at the intersection of tribal and community colleges in rural areas in economic development. The following guiding questions were used in interviews to gain understanding:

1. What initiatives do presidents identify as part of their rural community college’s mission?
2. What experiences influence their understanding of economic development?
3. How emphatically do they embrace the economic development mission for the college?
4. What skills do they identify as needed to succeed at implementing an economic development strategy?
5. How have they developed those skills?
6. What leadership styles do they use to effectively implement an economic development strategy?

In the initial three interviews, each of the presidents mentioned that they were from the community in which they served as president or were from a similar community. They attributed their values and motivations to some aspect of their upbringing. Consistent

with theoretical sampling, in the remaining interviews I asked presidents about their hometowns, personal values, career plans, and strength of rural preference.

In addition to questions asked to gain understanding of their perspective about economic development and about them personally, I asked or observed demographic data about the participants and descriptive data about the colleges they led. Demographic questions included: age, gender, tenure at institution, and tenure in position of president. Descriptive information about the colleges included: enrollment, funding model, governance model, and comprehensiveness of programs. The presidents did not discuss their own reputation for implementing an economic development agenda so the nominations from experts were used to develop the category about reputation.

### **Theory overview**

*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

*Ephesians 4:1-2 (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1984)*

The theory grounded in data that explained presidents' perceptions of the economic development role for community colleges could be compared to a religious conversion. The categories were similar to the church environment, the role of pastor, religious formation, receiving a message or call, responding to a call, actions following a religious conversion, and serving in a mission field.

**Substantive theory.** The theory constructed to explain how presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas come to understand the economic development mission of their colleges was a substantive theory and cannot be generalized to other leadership roles or to other environments. The theory's core category was *embracing the*

*economic development role*. This was chosen as the core category because it appeared to be the step in the sequential process that immediately preceded the presidents taking actions in economic development that they would not have taken otherwise. Their understanding of the mission and behavior were different after *embracing the economic development role*.

After the categories were identified and data from each interview were sorted and placed in a category, the relationships between the categories could be explained as a process. The supporting or axial categories were linked to the core category with some linking between the axial categories as well. The core and axial categories were placed within a contextual frame which included four distinct categories as shown in Figure 1.

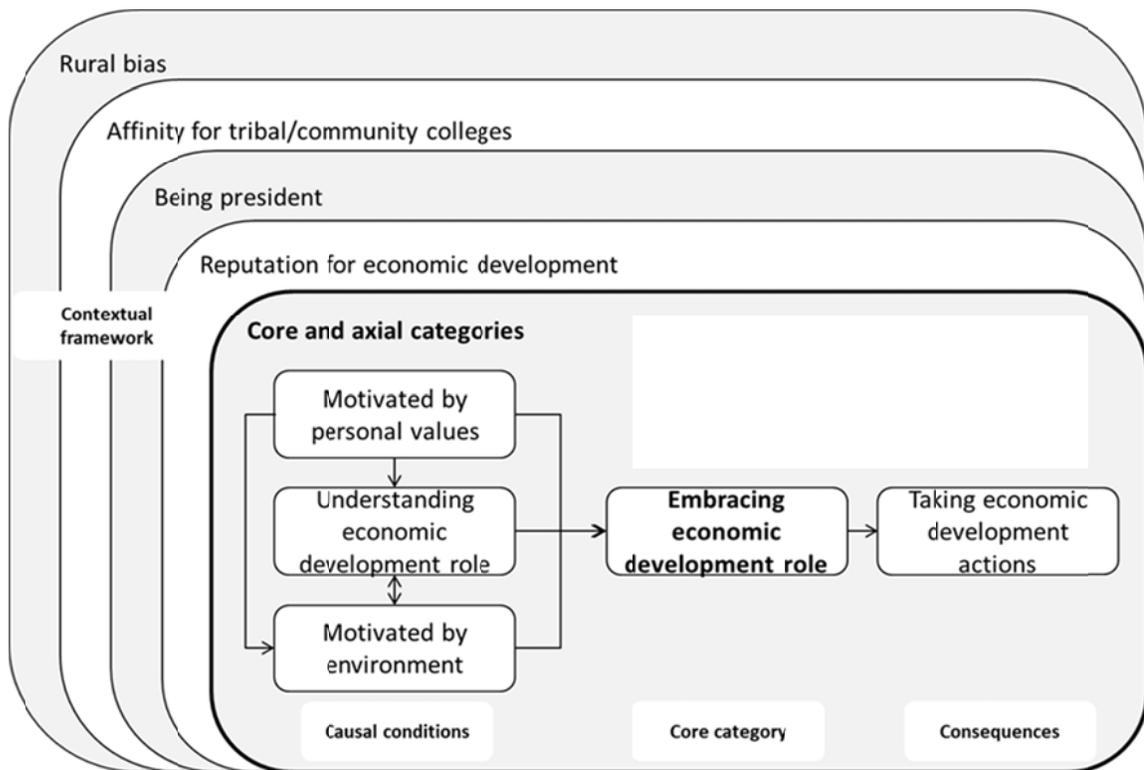


Figure 1. Contextual, core, and axial categories in relationship to each other.

**Contextual framework.** The contextual framework included community colleges in rural communities and tribal colleges on Native American reservations in sparsely populated areas. Additionally, the contextual framework included the participants serving in the role of president of one of these colleges. The contextual frame categories were nested with *reputation for economic development* as the innermost box. *Being president, affinity for tribal or community colleges,* and *rural bias* complete the nested contextual categories as shown in Figure 1. Rural bias was placed as the outside contextual category as it was the one which most defined this group of presidents, their fit, and bias for rural places. Some talked about the importance of “fit” between themselves and the local area. Most were from the place, from near the place, or from a place like the place where they lived and served. Their person was shaped by the same environment or an environment similar to the one in which they worked. They identified with the people they served both in the colleges and in the community; they were “of the community.” They became more aware of the environment by being out in the community or region and listening. The contextual framework provided the background to the core and axial categories and was the limiting parameter for the substantive theory. This framework was not just a casual set of parameters but a result of purposeful choices.

**Core and axial categories.** The core and axial categories that complete the grounded theory were situated within the contextual framework. The numerous categories developed during coding were regrouped and summarized into three causal categories and one consequence category which were all related to the core category as shown in Figure 1. Some of the categories also contained concepts which were not shown on the higher level diagrams.

**Core category.** The critical point in the process without which the economic development initiatives undertaken by these presidents probably would not have occurred was *embracing the economic development role* so this category was selected as the core category for the substantive theory. *Embracing* the role was adopting economic development as a guiding principle for their leadership decisions. The *economic development role* was different for each college; however, it was a role that traditionally the college had not filled or a role that other colleges were not filling. Jack, one of the presidents for both this study and for the initial RCCI project, defined economic development from the college's perspective as those things outside the traditional role for the college which were measurable by how they affected the economy. RCCI evaluators identified "to sustain change" as one of the project themes (Torres & Viterito, 2008, p. 7). Putting those ideas together means that *embracing the economic development role* was adopting as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy.

Some presidents embraced the economic development role sometime after becoming a president; others sought the position of president because they had already embraced the role and wanted the opportunity to implement their new perception of the economic development role. *Embracing the role of economic development* for the college was not a prerequisite or a requirement for serving as president. The axial category *taking economic development actions* was a consequence of the core category. Each president acted differently after making some decision or reaching a level of understanding of the economic development mission.

The participants' stories were evidence that they implemented the economic development role of the colleges differently because they had *embraced* the role. There was a change after the epiphany experience and decision to adopt this role. Although many presidents and their colleges had been involved in economic development actions prior to *embracing* this role, the *economic development actions* that resulted from *embracing* the role shaped the communities in a more significant and long term way. This indicated that the actions themselves were not evidence enough that presidents had *embraced the economic development role*. For some presidents doing economic development actions influenced their understanding and led to their *embracing* the role. It is because of these mission-field actions that the presidents who participated in this study were nominated by those who knew the leaders of tribal and community colleges in rural areas well.

**Axial categories: Causal conditions and consequences.** Three of the axial categories were causal conditions and process steps to the presidents *embracing an economic development role*. Presidents agreed that this is hard work so why do they do it? They appeared to be *motivated by their personal values*, many being traced back to and shaped by their childhood. Their values appeared to have had an impact on their *understanding*, being open to being *motivated by the environment* and their *embracing the economic development mission*. People, events, and organizations influenced their *understanding of the economic development mission*. The combination of their personal values and understanding of the potential role of colleges in making a difference to communities prepared these presidents to be *motivated by the environment*. They were

*motivated by their environment* which included the regional culture, demographics, economy, challenges, and opportunities.

The causal category of *understanding the economic development role* included the three concepts of *learning about economic development role*; *being influenced by person, people, event, or experience*; and *becoming aware of economic development role*.

*Becoming aware of the role* was similar to *learning about the economic development role*; both resulted from being influenced by an economic development professional, a visiting adviser or a peer, local business leaders, or a larger initiative. *Becoming aware of the role* was a less active process step than the very active step of purposeful *learning*.

*Becoming aware of the role* may have gradually happened over time. *Learning about the economic development role* started prior to *embracing the role* and influenced that decision for some of the presidents. Other presidents pursued the *learning about the economic development role* after the *influencing relationship, event, or experience*, and even after the decision to *embrace the role*. For all, the *learning* appeared to be iterative as they learned from the profession, learned from their communities, and learned from their own experiences.

These three causal categories led to the presidents having that epiphany experience and *embracing the economic development role*, the theory's core category. Several possible coding structures, codes, and complicated diagrams were developed before this core category was identified because the presidents did not talk about their conversion at length. After a passage from one interview was coded as "aha, I get it" other interviews were reviewed seeking similar experiences of conversion, "crystalizing," and "focus." These experiences varied in intensity but were found in each interview.

*Taking economic development actions* was a consequence of the core category. In one iteration of the theory, a relationship from *motivated by the environment* to *actions* was considered. This relationship was not supported without the core category of *embracing the economic development role* in the process. The actions chosen were influenced by the environment but whether to take actions was a consequence of *embracing the economic development role*.

The Biblical quotation from Ephesians, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received,” seemed to fit this overview of the theory well. As I interviewed these eight leaders and revisited them through analysis of their interviews, I was struck by the worthiness of their life’s work, by their commitment to what appeared to be a calling, and by their humility. As I interviewed them I sensed the patience and gentleness that are hallmarks of servant leadership. It takes patience to be collaborative in one’s leadership style. J.D. admitted that he could resort to being directive under stress but this was unusual behavior.

You let something go wrong out there on the campus, I walk out there, I point my finger and I say, “You do this and you do this.” But 99% of the time, I have a collaborative and participative management style.

The presidents *embraced the economic development role* because they had already embraced their colleges, their students, and their communities. Using the language in the letter to the early Christian church in Ephesus, the presidents were “bearing with one another in love.” They dealt with their communities and their leadership teams “in love.” Several presidents even used the word *love* in describing how they felt about community colleges and their comprehensive yet complex missions.

## **Contextual framework: Introduction**

*These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.”*

*Matthew 10:5-10*

The contextual framework categories could be likened to the context of a church led by an influential pastor having a reputation for a specific ministry. Both churches and the colleges were located within and were part of larger communities. Identifying with the college and its comprehensive role was similar to baptism. In both cases, the person became a member of the family and shared a value system. The leader of the college, the president, was similar to the ordained leader of the church, the pastor.

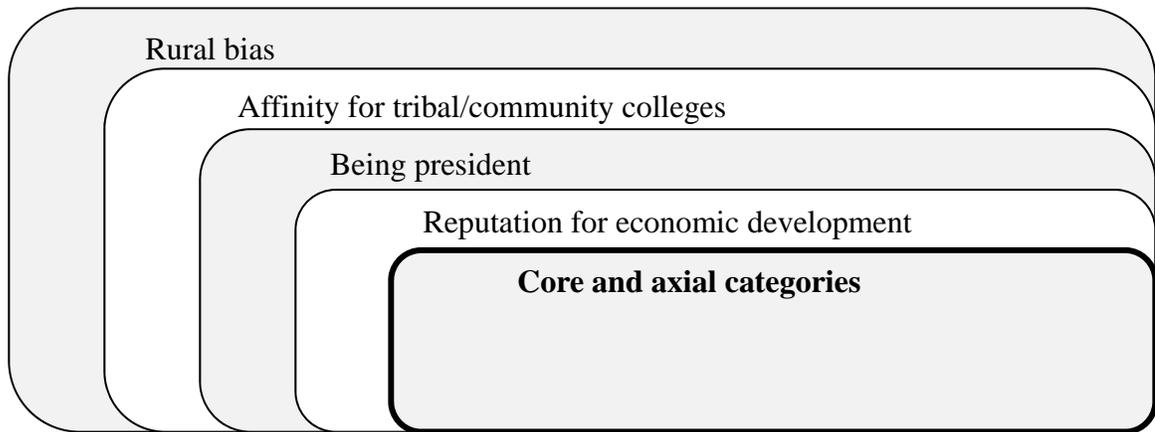
According to some traditions, the local church is “an autonomous local congregation” associated with other churches by “covenant” and “fellowship” (Baptist Faith and Message, 2000). Today’s community colleges with locally elected or appointed boards and statewide associations were like the Baptist churches. Other colleges were tightly associated in a hierarchical tradition of regional districts or statewide systems such as the Roman Catholic Churches around the globe were connected through a system of dioceses to Rome (United States Catholic Catechism, 2006).

Jesus instructed his disciples, Jews, to take his message and minister to the “lost sheep of Israel” who were fellow Jews. Likewise, presidents engaged in economic development ministered to their own communities. The community was similar to a mission field. It was outside the traditional boundaries for service and above the minimum expectations for the leadership. Expert A explained, “college building is a piece of cake compared to community building” for two reasons, the structure provided by government procedures and accrediting bodies and “when one is in charge, there is always the ‘make-it-so’ response rarely, but occasionally, spoken” (personal email, July 5, 2011). In community building or economic development the college president was not given the same level of structure and was not in charge. Similarly, church leaders stepping onto the mission field were leaving behind the comfortable structure of the church and its formalized liturgy.

Whether serving as the president of a local college or a regional district or serving as pastor of a local church or leader of a regional association of churches, the leader had a responsibility that was unique from those within the organization. The religious leader set the tone of the assembly and promoted one type of ministry over other choices. So, the college president within the context of a college influenced the college’s priorities. Churches became known for their services and ministries to the mission field and colleges became known for their programs and outreach to their communities.

The presidents in this study were leading tribal and community colleges in rural areas and had reputations for demonstrating the economic development role for their college or colleges. The categories of *rural bias*, *affinity for tribal/community colleges*, *being president*, and *reputation for economic development* established the contextual

framework as shown in Figure 2. This framework was a series of nested boxes with each additional category further refining the pool of potential participants. In addition to the research questions, the participants discussed their attitudes toward living and working in rural areas, their affinity and allegiance to tribal and community colleges, and thoughts about serving as presidents of their respective institutions. The category *reputation for economic development* was based on the nominations submitted by leaders engaged as experts for this study.



*Figure 2.* Position of core and axial categories within the contextual framework.

### **Contextual category: Rural bias**

Most of those who chose to serve in rural areas understood that this was a choice and was not a step to someplace bigger and better. Some had attended college, lived, and worked in urban areas, and all had attended conferences in urban settings. Their educations and accomplishments indicated that they had opportunities for work in non-rural places, but they chose to stay or return to rural places.

I'm flying back and it's sleeting and it's cold and I'm saying, "What the hell am I doing coming back here? Why aren't I living some other place?" But I choose to live here. (J.D.)

First of all, I choose to be here. There's no question about that. (Bob)

I've been home for a while. I was gone for quite a while, too. Then I decided to come home--and finish up my career here. (Russell)

Mary Ann was the only president who had spent any significant part of her career in a non-rural location. Sometime after she was interviewed and before this study was completed Mary Ann accepted a position at a suburban community college. The remaining presidents had chosen to live in specific places, regions, or states, and were planning to stay there or had stayed there for long careers although their education and connections had provided them mobility to other places. They did not have to stay where they were – but they stayed anyway. They were place-based but not place-bound. The following four concepts were developed from the data to describe different characteristics within rural bias.

**Proximity to home: My parents still live there.** The presidents expressed a similar bias for rural areas and indeed many were from here, a place near here, or a place like here. One expert referred to this as being place-bound but was more appropriately classified as place-based since they did not appear to be place-bound by anything other than their choice (personal correspondence, July 5, 2011). Many stayed near their home place or reservation and others left and came home again. The proximity of the colleges where these presidents served and their childhood homes ranged from the same place to neighboring states. The presidents demonstrated a preference for living and serving in their home area, near their home, or in a rural place like home. One striking note about this preference is that many of the presidents had experienced other locales serving in the

military, attending college, serving in earlier positions in their careers, consulting, and serving on national committees.

The strength of their bonds to their home or a rural setting varied. Jack and Russell were members of the tribe served by their respective college. Russell and Jack were educated away from the reservation and both had worked in other locations before becoming president of their college. Both came to their college as president. Bob, J.D., and Matilda were not in their hometowns, but distance from home was measured by miles, travel time, and similarity. Troy was home. Mary Ellen had been in her region for many years. Mary Ann had returned to a rural place similar to her childhood home. Several of the presidents mentioned siblings, parents, children, and grandchildren who lived in close proximity.

I was a road warrior for a while. I wanted to go out. I wanted them to see me, to understand me, to recognize that I had grown up (here). This was my home and I did not intend to do anything that would have hurt them or our region. I grew up in this region obviously. This is home. Other than having gone to the (service) and spending four years there, I've never left the area. (Troy)

We were poor but not so poor that we didn't have a job or didn't have a way to survive so I wasn't on the relocation program. But I've been out to live in different parts of the country. I went to (college) and then I went to (college) for a little bit. Then I went to (college) for a masters and doctorate. I went to (college) for some post-doctoral work and then came home. (Russell)

I'm a product of that dirt you're talking about. I am very much place based in my roots. (J.D.)

I've had the good pleasure to work in various aspects of the country and have enjoyed them all but I feel like I've come full circle back to (this area). There's something very special about (this area). (Mary Ann)

I expected the tribal college presidents to have close ties to their communities because their communities were tribal populations living on and near reservations. As tribal

members Jack and Russell were members of extended families with shared history, culture, and blood. Both tribal presidents discussed the tribal members who were dispersed during relocation efforts by the federal government and those who have left to find jobs. These tribal members are like the diaspora, Jewish people living away from their homeland of ancient or modern day Israel. Jack and Russell discussed the propensity of tribal members away from the reservations to help those who live on the reservation.

I did not expect the extremely close ties that J.D., Troy, and Bob had to their home places. They had stayed in their home area or very near their home place and had fashioned careers within education, primarily higher education, in those locales. At least two of these presidents were grandparents with children and grandchildren living close by. Since colleges engage in national searches for faculty, administrators, and presidents, I expected more presidents to have migrated to achieve career success, even if that migration was among rural places. I was not surprised to find that three rural community college presidents, Matilda, Mary Ann, and Mary Ellen, were raised in rural locations and served in rural communities, but not the same communities where they were raised. Their ties and preferences were for rural areas like where they were raised, but not necessarily their family's home place. Of this group Matilda had held various positions within a state, Mary Ellen within a regional district, and Mary Ann had a more varied career in multiple states, both in urban and rural locations. Mary Ann more likely resembled the majority of community college presidents; however, was unusual in this mix of eight presidents of tribal and community college presidents in rural areas and

before this study was completed had moved to a community college in a suburban location.

**Fit with community, culture, and values: Your values have to fit with their values.** For this concept, I identified distinctions that were on different continuums for the presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas. I found it important to separate the tribal college presidents and the community college presidents because of the nature of the communities they served and their relationships to those communities of people. Presidents of community colleges identified with their communities, their industries, their extended families, and their locales. Some presidents were very connected to their specific communities or regions and others simply valued rural living. The presidents of tribal colleges identified first with their tribal community both on and off the reservations and then with the other people who resided with the tribal people on the reservations.

As I was concluding what turned out to be the last interview, I shared my observation with J.D. that all the presidents had been from rural areas. His response was,

I guess the bottom line I'm saying is that one of the reasons I think you're finding that you have people in these jobs that are place based with rural basic roots and that sort of thing, we take pride in who we are and where we are and what we are. (J.D.)

The "fit" seemed to be very important to the effectiveness and the commitment of the presidents to the economic and community development mission; however, the communities were widely different. This was not a "one-size-fits-all" kind of fit. In order for the presidents to each fit with their community, they were different from each other. "Who we are, where we are, and what we are" varied. The presidents were good to excellent fits for their respective rural or tribal communities. They were not

necessarily interchangeable from one region to another or between tribal colleges. The presidents were not necessarily different, but the places with which they fit were distinctly different.

***Rural communities and reservations: Opportunities and oppression.*** The histories of Indian reservations and the establishment of communities in the western United States were two tales told from opposite vantage points. Several rural communities were established on lands that were formerly occupied by tribes that were forcibly relocated to other lands, always moving the tribal people westward. Rural communities created their culture from the many cultures represented by immigrant residents. Railroads, mining, and the westward movement contributed to economic opportunities for those emigrating from European countries. Recent accounts attempted to be sensitive to all populations but recognized that the indigenous population was displaced to make room for another expanding population that was for the most part oblivious to the peoples who were being displaced. One population's opportunities came at the price of the other population's oppression. Native tribes continued to migrate as their interactions with Europeans changed from a trading relationship to one of being in the way of western settlement (Homestead Act, 2006; Fowler, 2003).

***Community colleges in rural places.*** Many of the rural places represented in this study were towns settled in the 1800s during the westward movement of mostly European immigrants. Similar to its policies to assimilate Indians into a homogenous society, the federal government attempted to assimilate new immigrants by keeping them from establishing communities together but "many managed to preserve their native language, customs, and religion until World War I" (Homestead Act, 2006).

The rural places, many with remnants of their immigrant heritage, their people and issues, were near to the heart for these community college presidents. Presidents expressed that an understanding and fit with rural values were important to being effective in their positions. The presidents most adamant about fit identified nuances in culture from one region of their state to another region within the same state. They understood the importance of being authentic, of having integrity, and of really believing in rural life--not just “paying lip service to it” (Bob).

The presidents had an expanded worldview because of their travel experiences and connections to professionals from other areas. Presidents viewed their communities from other vantage points outside the community. This provided the community college presidents the ability to compare rural people to their urban counterparts and one region to another. In general the community college presidents believed rural people were more connected to other people, to their community as a place, to the seasons, and to self-reliance. Presidents added that they also bring ideas and values back to rural communities. When asked, Bob shared the following about whether an urban based president would fit in a rural community.

(New presidents from a metro area will) get an understanding of rural when they're in it. It's kind of like becoming a president. It's the same type of analogy. You think you understand what it's like to be a president until you get it, and you find out it's nothing like what you thought or at least it barely resembles what you thought. That same kind of thinking goes with this. Let's use the analogy of a person in the navy. They used to say that you can take the person out of the navy but you can't take the desire to be back on a ship... That's not well said but basically it's like taking a fish out of water and putting it on land and hoping that they're going to breathe and survive. So with that type of concept the issue is, Yes, you can take a metro person and move him into a rural environment but it's a different animal. (Bob)

Mary Ann, the president of a rural community college who appeared to have the least

commitment to living in a rural area, hinted at her ambiguity of commitment with the following commentary comparing urban and rural living.

So I'm not sure where my next step in my life is going to take me. I don't know. I've lived in the cities; I've loved them. Yeah, it's sort of sad when my husband and I vacation, we typically, and if we're in a big city we'll end up in a grocery store just to see what new products are out there. I've gotten down power shopping pretty good when I go to a city. I finally can buy clothes. You develop different talents. So there are advantages of the big cities. There's a peace of mind that can't be matched in the rural area. (Mary Ann)

Bob and Mary Ann were on different ends of the continuum for this concept. Bob did not see himself being a good fit for a metro-based position and he did not think a president with a metro perspective would be a good fit for a rural location. Mary Ann was more of a boundary spanner; she could see herself in both a rural setting and a city setting. Although Mary Ann had a rural upbringing she had experienced both rural and urban living. Especially because I knew that Mary Ann moved to a suburban setting subsequent to this research, I questioned the strength of her fit with the rural location. Rural life appeared to be sufficient for Bob. Mary Ann took advantage of trips to cities to find what she could not find in rural towns. Although she was from a rural area, enjoyed many of the attributes of a rural area, and was successful working in a rural-based position, rural may not have been Mary Ann's best fit.

*Tribal colleges in rural places.* Jack and Russell served tribal colleges. Both were members of tribes that were served by their colleges. These presidents also had a worldview that probably exceeded that of the majority of the tribal members living on and near the reservation. Their expanded worldview provided the tribal college presidents the ability to compare the tribal culture to the broader Euro-American culture and world cultures. Jack had been active in the national tribal college and tribal

education agenda including legislative advocacy away from the reservation. Russell spoke of tribal members who were living in major US cities whom he had visited. Jack described the unique aspect tribal members have with their tribe. Russell was connecting with tribal members whose families left during relocation efforts and who wanted to give back to help their tribal members on the reservation. Both Jack and Russell spoke with frustration about the relationship with the federal government and the destitute poverty evidenced on their reservations. They spoke of the important role the colleges had in preserving and teaching the cultures and languages of their peoples and maintaining a sense of tribalism even as the intermarrying between tribes and with non-tribal people continues.

In order to place the presidents' values in context to the values and histories of their tribes, I needed to review a little history of their tribes and other tribes in North America. Historically, the tribal people served by these two tribal colleges were migratory people engaged in hunting, gathering of food grown in the wild, and, starting in the mid-1600s, fur-trading with the French and English. The Northern Plains of the United States were occupied by nomadic and semi-sedentary tribes that engaged in trade with each other. Starting in the 1600s, the Spanish, French, and British interested in trade with these tribes entered the plains. Tribal relationships changed as they vied for positions in this evolving trade environment. Meanwhile, eastern based tribes like the Osage and Cherokee continue to be moved westward (Fowler, 2003).

Starting as early as the mid-1700s and continuing to the mid-1900s, by policies that pressured, forced, evicted, and cheated the Indian, these tribes lost access to most of their historical means of self-sufficiency. Federal policies that restricted Indians to

usually less desirable land and stopped migratory hunting, worked to assimilate the Native Americans into Euro-American ways of life such as farming, sedentary towns, English language, and Christian religions (Tischauser, 2003).

In 1803, two significant events changed the future of the Plains Indians; the United States purchased Louisiana from the French and simultaneously took over the fur trade. Many of the tribes had been decimated by smallpox and cholera epidemics and had already moved many times to escape attacks from enemy tribes. New cultural identities were formed as remnants of peoples combined to survive. Their plight was not over; White settlers not interested in trade with tribes moved westward and pushed the Indians aside. The boundaries of towns expanded as their populations grew and thrived. Reservation boundaries diminished while tribal people struggled to survive (Fowler, 2003). By the 1870s reservations were clearly not working for those restricted to them or for the federal government that had created the system (Tischauser, 2003).

After the turn of the next century, from 1903 to 1933, the U.S. Congress was heavily influenced by the Western members who wanted more of the Indian land available for development. Federal policies such as allocating tribal lands to enrolled members of the tribe at the Homesteading Act allowance of a pitiful 160 acres also had devastating and divisive results. Some tribes had less land than required for all recognized tribal members to receive their allotment, so tribal members were allocated lands that were not contiguous to the reservation that served their tribe. Other tribes lost significant portions of their reservation lands because they did not have enough enrolled members, as defined by the federal government, to claim all their reservation land as

theirs in the allocation process (Fowler, 2003; Miller, Smith, McGeshick, Shanley, & Shields, 2008; Tischauser, 2003). Fowler (2003) described this era as,

At the same time, federal appropriations for Indian education were reduced and the academic curriculum made less rigorous. Thus, the American West continued to develop economically at the expense of native communities, and Plains peoples were marginalized in American society and denied opportunities to compete with other Americans in the struggle to build economically successful communities in the West. As Joseph Jorgensen has written, they were assimilated into poverty (Fowler, 2003).

Federal policies in the 1950s to mid-1960s to terminate the federal responsibilities to tribes, assimilation efforts such as charging public education systems off the reservations with the responsibility to provide education for tribal members, and relocation away from reservations threatened the existence, culturally and economically, of many tribes.

But overall, it was *termination* that best described the movement, and the word came to be used not only of the government's responsibilities towards the Indians but of the Indians themselves. (Prucha as cited in Miller, et al., 2008)

Both presidents, born before the last mid-century, referred to the relocation efforts of the 1950s and the devastating effect on the tribal culture. The relocation efforts disseminated tribal members away from the reservations, away from their own people.

Relocation also was intended as a means of assimilation into the wider American society. Many of the relocatees were from Plains societies, but in urban areas they settled into an impoverished existence and after a short period of time many (from 30-75 percent) returned to their home communities. (Fowler, 2003)

The broader Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and President Johnson's War on Poverty started a new future for tribes. The American Civil Rights Act passed in 1968 and the age of self-determination started. Tribal cultures were nearly lost and oral histories were not consistent or accurate in many instances but tribes now had the authority to establish their own futures (Fowler, 2003).

Up until the late 1960s, this place was pretty much controlled by the federal government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service. It wasn't until Lyndon Johnson and the Great War on Poverty the tribes started to get any resources to do anything and that they started to gain control over the resources that they already had, which was their land, minerals, and things like that. (Jack)

This regaining of sovereignty for tribal governments and improvement of education for Indians that was not based on religious or public education void of any cultural context did not come easily.

We had people that thought that education was a solution and that we needed almost militant action to get good schools and access to higher education to break some of the locks that had been holding Indian people down for many, many years. In 1978 we were able to get federal legislation that supported tribal colleges and that was probably the first break in the system. Since then we've had the land grant institution, we've had the development of the American Indian College Fund and we have made inroads in probably eight or nine different, major pieces of legislation. (Jack)

The Native American tribes had an old history which pre-dates any European influence and oppression, a history of conflict and then struggle as an oppressed people, a new history of self-determination marked by self-governance and recapturing culture and language. The tribal colleges were a product of the new history. They were just out of infancy and were becoming mature institutions.

The tribal presidents expressed their view of tribal values in the following two excerpts about tribal members being family-oriented and wanting to give back to their tribal community.

First of all they're members of the community. Indian people are very family oriented. They're not only family oriented; they're clannish to the extent that it extends out to their extended families. In some places, there actually are clans and then it spins out. But everything revolves around your relatives, and your relatives supporting you and you supporting your relatives. So it's not surprising to see Indians driven... In fact, somebody described it to me as a blood culture where you find people that are of

Indian blood that have never lived on the reservation and something just drives them to go back and work with their people somehow. (Jack)

(During) the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the federal government had this program called relocation. It was sort of like involving forced assimilation, get you off the reservation, assimilate you to mainstream society and then we don't have to deal with reservations or Indian people any more. Well, a lot of our people took advantage of that and left because there was no work here. They went to Seattle; they went to Denver; they went to Minneapolis, St. Paul, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Los Angeles. They went all over. A lot of those people stayed. Many of those people are very successful and have done very well. When I went there to meet with them they said, "We never thought we'd see someone from (the reservation) coming to us and telling us about what's going on on the reservation, what's going on with the tribal college." They were very excited. They said, "It's a way for us to give back to our reservation, to our community." (Russell)

Even with decades of assimilation and relocation initiatives the bonds among tribal members have remained strong. Oral histories, languages, and cultures were threatened but tribal members continued to have strong attachments to other tribal members.

*Commitment to preserve, record, and pass on the culture.* Several of the presidents from both tribal and community colleges in rural areas were more than just a good "fit" with the local culture; they were actively preserving and passing on that culture to future generations. Presidents from tribal colleges and community colleges encouraged actions to help their communities' members to know and understand their own history, to value the lessons that had been learned previously, and to be advocates for their communities' futures. Some participated in research projects to ensure an accurate written historical account. Those presidents who were from the region where they served embodied much of the recent history of their communities.

The presidents' perspectives of time included the past, the present, and the future. While looking toward the long-term future the presidents wanted people to know their past history and learn from it. The presidents believed they had a better perspective on

the future because they knew and understood the past. This is part of the “fit” with a specific place and culture. The presidents who expressed the strongest sense of knowing the past and passing it on were those who served in their home communities, regions, or states. They knew their region’s history because it was intertwined with and reflected in their personal histories and the stories passed down by their own families.

If this personal history with the community was critical to being able to create the community’s future I questioned whether the presidents who were not from their specific area could adapt their own experiences to better connect to their current area’s history. Mary Ellen served in a region that was not her home. She had adopted this region where she had lived and worked for over half of her life. She had learned and embodied the history of the adopted region as if it were her own.

The other piece of it is history...history and culture. If you looked at any information about the (region), the history, we are predominantly of immigrant communities. In other words, our ancestors came over from Europe and other areas and landed here and grew the economy, played a big hand in growing the national economy. (Mary Ellen)

Two presidents, J.D. and Bob, served in their home states but in neighboring regions to their homes. They used contrasts between where they now serve and their home regions to better understand their area’s culture. Presidents could adopt their region’s history as if it were their own by identifying the similarities with their own histories. Similar to Jesus’ disciples, they served the people with whom they shared common heritage, history, values, and troubles.

**Familiarity with individuals: Because you know the people.** Several participants expressed their satisfaction with being in touch with the students and others, being with people, and knowing people individually. Troy spoke of a recent community wide event held on the campus on Veterans’ Day. The “entire community” attended the

event. He spoke of mutual embracing, the community of the college and the college of the community.

I know every single one of the students' stories when they walk across the stage at graduation. Well, there's nothing better than that. That's bigger and better to me because it's richer and it's more substantive. That's what rural areas do, I think. (Matilda)

When I go to the grocery store and I interact with people that have been students of our institution and they tell me how they've benefitted from that – to me, that's all the professional satisfaction you need in terms of being an educator, is to see how the impact that you have. All I can say is that there is great professional satisfaction in serving rural communities. (Mary Ellen)

Some of my favorite background articles for this study were about interactions between presidents and community members at grocery stores (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2007). Grocery stores were mentioned by three of the eight presidents and Mary Ellen specifically talked about meeting with people informally in the grocery aisle. The presidents were members of their communities and they enjoyed the level of familiarity that comes with being a member of the community. In addition to them knowing the students and community members, they were known as well. As Matilda described it, the presidents lived in fishbowls. Their lives were open to the public and public scrutiny. Unlike one president portrayed by Eddy (2007) in *Grocery Store Politics*, the presidents were okay with a lack of anonymity. Jesus instructed his disciples to minister to people in the condition and location in which they found them. He referred to the disciples as workers, not as teachers, or leaders, or some other elite status. Similarly, these presidents knew their students and community members in their daily environments and were on common grounds, as shoppers at the same grocery stores.

**Compassion for people: What they want is a decent job.** Presidents were aware that many rural people and their communities were struggling. Some communities

were doing well, but neighboring communities were not. Many rural people left reluctantly to find employment elsewhere or remained at the price of underemployed or unemployment. Out-migration was a real factor for many reservations and rural towns. Young people who wanted to stay were leaving. Some were getting educated and attempted to come home but there were no jobs for them. Some left, attempted to return home, and left again when the prospect of jobs did not materialize or the local economy experienced a downturn. J.D. talked about the migration from his rural agrarian area to an urban industrialized area several decades ago.

Several presidents expressed pride in their people and their rural work ethic and defended their right to choose where to live. The presidents' conversations about jobs were mostly about the people. They saw their local economy on the micro level, jobs for individuals. Their language provoked a sense of compassion for the people of their communities and their plight and pride in the people and their willingness to work. It is about the people and these were good hard working people who would work hard if there were jobs.

Unfortunately, lack of jobs in rural towns and reservations stifled people's ability to work. If there were jobs available, people would go to work, move from welfare to work, and maybe even return home. Presidents voiced their support for doing something to generate economic growth. Some hoped for economic shifts or changes in state or federal policies that would stimulate economic activity in their areas.

We have the poorest population in the country. We have the poorest county in the country. In our society, if we don't step up and do something, it isn't going to happen. (If an economic shift happens then) this place will boom. Nobody will have to do anything. The small businesses will start on their own because people will see an opportunity. People will find jobs on their own because the jobs will be there. People

start shifting their lifestyles from welfare to work. It will all happen if there is an economic climate that supports it. (Jack)

They're not looking for a handout and they don't want something for nothing. What they want is a decent job so they can make a living for their families and have pride in what they do. If I don't work, I don't eat. It is a rural work ethic that is part of what I think has made America great and what will keep America great. Strong work ethic, devotion to duty, pride in workmanship. The difference is these people come to work early. They give you a good eight hour. If you need (them) to work ten hours, they'll work ten hours and they'll be back the next day. (J.D.)

What I did not sense in these conversations was a culture of entitlement or laziness, or an expectation of lavish living or even "a new pickup in every garage" (Jack). The problem as framed by the presidents was not one of getting people to go to work. Instead, the problem was finding work for them to do or creating a healthy and thriving economic climate.

These rural economies were narrow economies which were more prone to being buffeted by economic shifts than larger diversified economies. The federal government's decision to end contracts for manufactured goods from the reservations and one state's lack of support for mineral extraction devastated or hampered rural economies. Rural areas, previously valued for cheap laborers who worked hard, suffered when companies found cheaper labor offshore. Learning from their histories meant those communities that were prospering needed to stay alert and be prepared for future economic shifts.

Returning to the quotation from Matthew, I considered the phrase "for the worker is worth his keep." Workers in these rural areas were willing to work, they had been working in better economic times, they were ready to work when good times came again, and if they were fortunate to live in a community that was prospering they were working, and working hard. J.D. explained the rural work ethic was based on understanding the consequential relationship between hunting and eating, gathering and eating, working and

eating. Community leaders and college presidents engaged in economic development were honoring the local peoples' willingness to work by encouraging an economic climate that offered the "keep" for worthy workers.

**Contextual category: Affinity for tribal/community colleges**

Presidents came to tribal and community colleges in rural areas through many routes including as students, as administrators of junior colleges prior to mergers with technical colleges, from four-year universities, and secondary school systems. They were at home in comprehensive community colleges and tribal colleges and were passionate about them. They were at home in a culture that some helped create and others inherited and nurtured. Many of the presidents helped shape not only their own colleges but entire systems of colleges. These presidents demonstrated bravery as they led their colleges into uncharted mission fields, as they connected the dots, figured out the right mix for each community, and orchestrated mergers. Each situation was unique, even within a college's region communities differed. Comprehensive community colleges have a short history and tribal colleges an even shorter history. Both models have continued to evolve, mature, and grow more stable, yet each institution in this study was different: different histories, different economies, different governance, and different visions for the future. The presidents believed in the broader missions of the comprehensive community colleges and tribal colleges and were fashioning how those missions applied in their unique settings.

The presidents were experienced with conflict and tension. Some had presided over major changes in their colleges such as mergers with technical schools and restructuring districts. The mergers were difficult for the administrators, the faculty, and

the communities. Others grew up with the tribal colleges where survival was difficult in the beginning. One president presided over desegregation of a public school system, and another talked about the history of inclusivity at his college.

Some presidents said they were community college students, were like community college students, or wish they had been a community college student. One president led the college where he completed an associate's degree. Another attended a community college in the same state. Several taught in the college classrooms or held a variety of administrative positions.

Colleges were described as being at the center of what was going on, playing a special role, providing opportunities for those who would not have them otherwise. Since these were descriptors provided by presidents, the presidents had the opportunity to place their colleges in these roles. Presidents were "at the table" and "connected the dots" as they led their colleges. The roles of the colleges as described by the presidents were complex, and it took presidents who could connect the dots to lead these colleges. The presidents' words support the category of "fit" with the community/tribal colleges and all eight presidents were represented in these data. Three especially rich quotes were:

We saw where those missions could be brought together, and we could in reality become a new institution, a comprehensive community college. (The merger) really has improved us significantly. So in reality, we were not truly comprehensive community colleges until such time as the (merger), and we merged with these other institutions. So it's been great for us to be honest with you. (Troy)

They have a special role in their communities to deliver community service, to be the history and cultural center for the community. So that deep-seatedness, that sense of connection early on, helps guide me because we are held in high regard. That's where the sense of duty, the sense of responsibility comes because (of) our given position, by virtue of how we are thought of in the community. (Mary Ellen)

We're serving a population of people that, whether you're on reservations or not...we're serving a population of people who normally would not attend higher education. They wouldn't travel a hundred miles to the nearest college or university. But since they're accessible, and I think a lot of times in our case, for sure, affordable, and provide quality education, you see an opportunity to participate, whether it's on a small scale initially and then eventually on scale that's a lot more than they ever dreamed of, they have those opportunities to do that. (Russell)

Most of these presidents were called to leadership from within the congregation, the community or tribal colleges, while a few were converts from public schools and four-year institutions. All found a home in the tribal college or the community college environments. Presidents added depth to the religious metaphor with their own language. For instance, J.D. included the community in public discourse to set the college vision and compared the college president to a "real good evangelist" who through emotional investment in the community could "get the people to walk the aisle" and believe in the vision. Then when leaders get "holistic insight as to what the mission is" they must "attack it with religious zeal" (J.D.).

### **Contextual category: Being president**

Several of the presidents were experienced community college administrators or administrators of other educational institutions before assuming the role of president. Jack was the only president who had served as president at another institution. Participants had served in their respective roles for less than 5 years and more than three decades. The magnitude of the job and the sense of responsibility for the colleges and the communities they served came through in their stories. The following six concepts were developed for the category of *being president*.

**Reality of being president: Nobody really understands.** Presidents fairly new to the job and those who had served for decades, whether at multi-college districts or small colleges, admitted that theirs was a difficult and challenging job, a job that required different skills than others in the college. Presidents struggled with the pull to serve the college in an internal manner and the need to represent the college and be visible externally. Reasons cited to serve in an external role were being visible, fundraising, state and federal advocacy for funding, “winning friends and influencing people.” But presidents “can’t be in all places” and they must have “results and you have to tell people about them.” The president had to be sure that the college’s positive message was getting out to the community, and the president was expected to be the chief message bearer.

Presidents recognized that the skills that made someone successful in academic leadership were not the same skills that made them successful as college presidents. Making the transition from the previous roles held by these presidents to the president’s chair was critical to being successful. Matilda commented on the need to be authentic because of the high visibility of living life in a fishbowl. J.D. recommended that presidents have “a heavy dose” of what he called “emotional maturity.” From this interchange with J.D. I believe he meant that presidents need to act like mature adults. That means not wanting all the power, all the glory, and all the praise. It may mean taking all the blame when something does not work like it was planned. That also means not getting your feelings easily hurt or holding grudges.

Both presidents with cabinets who had depth and longevity and presidents without depth in senior administrators recognized the need to have that senior staff in place for day to day operations of the college or district. The presidents were responsible for

“driving an entire organization forward” as they established the vision, sold the vision to the community, and then led the college in that direction. In this role they could not be restricted to running the day to day operations of the college. This caused conflicts as some thought the presidents should have a more internal focus.

The following four reflections on being the president represented the eight presidents’ understanding of the magnitude of their role in leading their institutions.

A community college presidency has a whole different set of skills than anything else in the organization. And you are out on a limb and you are trying to make the community and your college whole by following through on a major commitment. That was a vulnerable place to be. High stakes politics is what it was. (J.D.)

Nobody really understands unless you sat in this chair what it’s like. I know a lot of people can talk about it. They think they understand it, but they don’t. I thought I understood it until I sat in it. Things are not easy. These positions are very difficult. The issue of management and the way different people see this position is kind of curious at times. It’s not easy. (Bob)

So if I screw up, and we had a thing last summer that we knew was going to impact our enrollment. I made a difficult decision, and it might have resulted in me spending all of my political capital that I couldn’t stay, but it was the right thing morally and ethically for the college so I made that decision. (Matilda)

There are some things that only the president can do. The president, I think, in many instances is expected to be the spokesperson for the college. That can be a very difficult role literally and figuratively. I’m on the road a big part of the time and there are many times I wish I didn’t have to be. But I am, for better or worse, the face of the college. The community really expects to see me in most situations as the spokesperson for the college. (Troy)

“Nobody really understands” that the presidents’ roles were to *be present*. These presidents collectively saw their roles as being more externally present than internally present. Even those who were still engaged in running day to day operations felt the need to hire or mentor staff to lead the college internally, so they could focus more on external

relations. Presidents could not be everywhere, they were expected to be the “face of the college” yet there were physical limitations; they “can’t be in all places.” They were criticized externally for not being present and internally for not being present. They were criticized by one community for spending what was considered too much time in another community or on another campus.

Like the disciples they willingly gave themselves to the task of ministering to people, to the people of the community, to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus said in his instructions to his disciples, “freely you have received, freely give.” His instructions were to be generous although he had instructed them to take nothing tangible along. His instructions could be understood as being generous with their presence and with the gifts which they did bring, gifts of ministry. Presidents of the colleges were generous with their presence, their time, their attention, willingly making themselves available to the communities, and generous with applying their skills to benefit the communities.

**Role of ego: It’s never been about me.** Jack mentioned the need to not take oneself too seriously and was self-deprecating when asked about becoming president. Their senses of humor were evident in their interviews, yet they viewed their work seriously. Matilda recognized the need to have a healthy ego to even apply for the position. All the presidents spoke of the importance of the work and none spoke of having career plans. J.D. shared that at his institution, the leadership characteristics that are valued are the ability to pull people together and get results. The presidents and their colleges promoted people who personify these same leadership characteristics.

The presidents discussed working as a team, focusing on accomplishing results, liking to work with other people, getting along with others, and not claiming credit.

Over time, five years for some and thirty for others, these presidents have created, mentored, and led teams while acting as role models for them. They all exuded self-confidence balanced with wisdom. The following excerpts are examples of the depth of their self-awareness.

The Lord has blessed me. It's through His grace that I have served this institution these many years. I just consider myself to be the most fortunate of folks. I'm just glad to have been able to serve. It's never been about me. (Troy)

That term "emotional maturity" and checking egos – you're not worried about a personal legacy. What you're concerned about is the public agenda or what's good for the people you serve. (J.D.)

Actually, they change those ideas so much you'd never find that it was mine in the first place, and I mean that kindly. I don't care who gets credit. Just do it. (Bob)

Everybody is motivated differently and can you learn to check your ego at the door? You have to have a certain amount of ego to handle this job otherwise you wouldn't apply for it if you didn't have some. It's not a measure of not having ego, it's a measure of knowing when to use it or not. (Matilda)

Similar to Solomon, ruler after his father King David of the Israelites, these leaders demonstrated wisdom in their leadership. God granted Solomon wisdom because Solomon unselfishly responded to God's offer to grant anything with a request to "give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9). They also demonstrated servant leadership. Jesus cautioned his disciples who were arguing about who was greatest among them with, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). When two disciples blatantly asked Jesus to reserve positions to his right and left in his future kingdom, Jesus rebuked them. He contrasted the authoritarian style of the Gentile leadership with the style required to be his disciple.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man (Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:43-45)

The leaders did not give up their leadership role or ignore their leadership responsibility. Instead they willingly led from a position of servant to all. They also exercised wisdom as evidenced by their comments about “checking egos” and “knowing when to use” one’s ego.

**Day to day operations: Teamwork is a big part of that.** Most of the presidents relied heavily on their senior staff to run the day-to-day operations. One hoped the senior staff would learn to step up and make decisions. Teamwork was described as being a “true democracy” where everyone has input, where the leader is inclusive (J.D.). Four of the eight presidents used “team” or “teamwork” when referring to their cabinet or senior management. Team leadership for these presidents included empowering their employees to develop and use their skills and encouraged them to make decisions.

As a district president, you hire your staff. They take care of operations. You set the stage for that and the parameters but you have to develop a trust relationship with your staff and let them run. (Bob)

What I did was put in place a shared governance model and followed it to the T. I taught my leadership team essentially how to do it. (Matilda)

These presidents did not work alone. Instead, they developed teams that led the colleges. Presidents must be able to trust as trust and team worked hand-in-hand. Trust with the communities they served, trust in the leadership teams of the colleges. Just as Jesus taught his inner circle of twelve disciples, these leaders had inner circles of disciples who learned from the president. The teams had only one star, the president; however, these presidents had teams that had stayed with them for many years. J.D. claimed to have at least three senior staff members who were qualified to take over the leadership of the

college. What the presidents did not say but implied was that their senior teams were loyal to them as the leaders and were committed to the same cause of tribal and community colleges in rural areas.

**Long range vision: I see the big picture.** Presidents referred to the long range vision as getting some distance away from the current situation, gaining perspective and then working hard to make it work. Matilda engaged in a yearlong process of helping the community establish a collective vision. While leadership teams were leading day-to-day operations, presidents saw their role as viewing the entire region, looking out several years, anticipating and planning for future economic shifts.

When we were kids in the backs of the funny books there would be these Charles Atlas holding up this masculine body but out here in his left hand would be the world. You have to think about this. Charles Atlas had the perspective from being out there looking back at the earth he's holding in his hand, right. Rather than here we are sitting in the middle of it. I think that we have to, from time to time, get a holistic framework about who we are and where we are and what our mission is. It's almost like you have to be about three miles above your region on a clear day in a plane kind of looking down. Then when you get that holistic insight as to what the mission is and what we're doing then attack it with religious zeal. (J.D.)

I sensed that this was the most critical difference between serving a president and being the president. Although these presidents asked their teams and communities for input for both strategic and tactical decisions, the presidents were ultimately responsible for seeing the big picture and taking the organization and its relationship to its communities in a certain direction.

The presidents' roles were unique in that they were expected to have a long term vision and inspire others to work toward it. Pastors of modern churches and apostles who led early Christian churches selected deacons to take care of daily matters like distributing bread to the widows so the preachers could focus on the ministry of the word

and prayer and not be bogged down with mundane chores (Acts 6:1-5). Likewise, presidents of the colleges selected senior leaders so the presidents could be engaged in soul-searching, contemplative thought, preaching the good news about the future, and inspiring others to believe and work toward a brighter future. To do that, they must have a vision for the future to share. That vision is the big picture.

**Implementing their vision: This is the way I'd do it.** Presidents created their own agendas, but they did not appear to be personal agendas. Rather they were shaped by successful models, input from their region, and insight into the needs of the communities. They expressed commitment to successfully implementing their visions and some shared their visions for their colleges and communities. Presidents were committed to listening to input from many different constituents both internal to the colleges and external to the colleges. The presidents tucked away ideas and brought them out when they seemed to fit a situation and when they had the opportunity to implement them. The presidents saw opportunities to further develop programs that had already been started, to influence the college and community futures, and to honor relationships with regional businesses. More than that, the presidents planned for the future and committed to work those plans.

So we commissioned a comprehensive plan, a development of a comprehensive plan for higher education (in our region). (Mary Ellen)

I would say in ten years even that we could see more jobs coming off the reservation, more people of course being employed, more businesses on the reservation, a lifestyle amongst our families and people that is much, much better than we have now. I could see that and it's doable. (Russell)

The issue is that you observe presidents and various bosses for a long time and they did a great job and they were good mentors but there are certainly things that you kind of tuck away that you think, "Gosh, if I could do this job, this is the way I'd do it." So you have a chance to live it out. I'm

really pleased and blessed to be in a position like this where you can actually try to live it out. (Bob)

Matilda led the community's visioning process and positioned the college within the larger strategic plan.

Then it will form the community strategic plan. So if everybody is saying that the college needs to do more cultural kinds of events. We do pretty well for cultural events (here). But if the leaders of the focus groups are saying we need more of that and the college needs to be a big part of that then that goes into my strategic plan to make it happen. If the community says we need a new high school then that goes to the Superintendent's strategic plan for the high school. If the community says our streets and sewer systems are deteriorating. We need to improve our infrastructure. That goes to the city, to the Mayor's strategic plan. (Matilda)

They stayed committed to implementing plans that they had helped create.

I didn't know (how long I would stay here). I knew I was going to stay here long enough to make it work. (Jack)

Jesus painted a picture of the future for his disciples and asked them to spread that message with "the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 10:6). Their going forth and preaching the message helped those who heard the message believe in the vision. Similarly, the presidents preached their vision for the future with their words, actions, and inspiration and their actions helped others to believe and helped make the vision "doable."

These presidents spent time in strategic thinking, mulling over different ideas, mentally pulling the pieces together in a variety of patterns until the future came into focus for them. They involved school districts, cities, economic development organizations, and tribal governments in their planning processes. In terms of Covey's (1989/2004) time management matrix these presidents appeared to have spent much of their time, maybe time on the road, in quadrant two activities. These activities are important but not urgent, and they include: prevention, production capability activities,

relationship building, recognizing new opportunities, planning, and recreation (p. 151). Covey explained *importance* as having to “do with results” which “contributes to your mission, your values, your high priority goals” (p. 151). The college leaders were thinkers and strategists who enlisted teams to implement missions and reach visions which were led by but not owned by the presidents.

**Many roles: Cheerleader, mentor, educator, cynic, healer.** College presidents’ roles were varied and dependent on situational and servant leadership models. They helped their communities realize the futility of some ideas, hope for others, and excitement about their potential. Jack talked about the responsibility to be visionary and pragmatic at the same time. Bob spoke of being a healer of communities. J.D. compared the president’s role to evangelist; it takes a good evangelist to help people walk the aisle even before they internalize their own needs. He appealed to peoples’ emotions hoping to get them excited about the communities’ futures enough to participate in building those futures.

The list of roles the presidents mentioned was long and varied requiring different skill sets. They needed to adapt to each and every situation. Matilda consciously varied her speech cadence and vocabulary based on the other party, recognizing that using an expanded vocabulary complemented one person and insulted another. They educated their teams and the communities in a gentle fashion by encouraging them and being present with them. These presidents treated others with respect—even when they thought their suggestions were without merit. They were “willing to do whatever it takes to make it work” (Matilda).

I think that's primarily a leadership role to listen, to be informed, to constantly read, professionally develop, and then to throw out ideas that people can grab a hold of. (Bob)

People have the best intentions but some of them have absolutely no sense when it comes to doing something. For example, we have some people here that right now want to . . . I said, "Don't you guys read the paper?" I said, "You know, check it out." Well they checked it out. But they just had this idea. It's economic development among rural people and local people and oftentimes among educators it becomes a field of dreams. (Jack)

In recounting the conversation Jack had with a group of community people who had what they thought was a grand economic development idea, he showed that his mannerisms with people were non-directive and encouraging, yet he was honest with them and helped them come to understand the futility of their idea given the economic climate without dashing their enthusiasm. He achieved a very delicate balance.

These presidents demonstrated leadership and they also developed leaders both at the colleges and within the communities. The presidents had invested themselves in the long term viability and sustainability of their colleges and communities. Succession planning was a serious matter for them. Several presidents spoke of involving their team members, those whom they were mentoring, in Rotary clubs; local, regional, and state leadership development programs; meetings with county and state elected officials; and service on community boards. Exposing, engaging, and encouraging others in the leadership process helped these colleges and communities be prepared for their future. Jack and J.D. shared their evaluations of how prepared they were for the future. They gave themselves good grades.

I think that it's stabilized now to the point that the resources that are needed to run this college and the primary staff are trained to the point that I could walk away and this thing would go on and on without me. I think that if people can't carry on after you're gone, there's no point in doing it. (Jack)

We think that the succession plan services the college exceptionally well. That is, if someone aspires to be in leadership at the college we would like to expose them to those principles of leadership into what we think has made the college successful. Of course when it comes to the presidency, the board can hire anyone they want to. But, it just so happens that, right now that, there is a minimum of at least three people inside this organization that either one of them, in my opinion, would be a great president for this organization. (J.D.)

What was most striking about the many roles the presidents played was what was not on the list. They molded their leadership style to others' needs and did not expect others to conform to their personal style. Yet they maintained their own identities and sense of themselves. They engaged both situational and servant leadership in very effective ways.

Several presidents felt they had achieved the goal of having the pieces and leaders in place so that the work they had dedicated themselves to could and would continue without them. Is this how Jesus felt as he prepared to leave the disciples? He had sent them out on missions to practice the ministry he would later entrust to them. Were they ready to carry on without him? Troy, J.D., and Jack believed they had achieved that goal. Russell hoped he would before he was ready for retirement.

### **Contextual category: Reputation for economic development**

Two experts, Expert A and Expert B, were asked to nominate several presidents from the pool of tribal and community colleges in rural places which had been a member of the Rural Community College Alliance. The experts nominated individuals whom they personally knew and about whose work they knew. The experts were familiar with specific initiatives and respective challenges faced by their nominees. Their nominations were based on what the presidents had accomplished given each president's unique

situation. Expert A provided additional support for the participants after the interviews were concluded. Their rationale was used as data for this concept. Three of the participants were nominated by both experts independently.

To be nominated by Expert A college presidents had to have demonstrated that they were good at what the expert called community building, what I called the college adopting an economic development mission. The presidents had explained that being president of their college or district was hard work. Expert A maintained that community building was even harder. Expert A provided the thought process behind the nomination process.

My nominations (whom) you interviewed are wonderful community builders. They also happen to be good "college builders." As you probably know I think college building is a piece of cake compared to community building. Why? Between governmental auditing procedures/policies and our labyrinth of accrediting agencies including regional and professional organizations (i.e.--health care) it is hard not to be a college builder. After all, enrollments drive the growth essential to maintaining and advancing these institutions. Plus when one is in charge, there is always the "make it so" response rarely, but occasionally, spoken. Communities are different. (Expert A)

In addition to recognizing the multitude of challenges faced by all the presidents in their sparsely populated and geographically expansive regions, Expert A recognized the additional challenges faced by tribal college presidents.

"Community building" in Native American communities requires deep connections to those communities. (His) ability to collaborate with other community colleges and attend to cultural heritage is among the reasons I nominated him to be interviewed. I believe the "career bound" among us can learn much from our place bound colleagues. (Expert A)

Expert A reinforced that those who were place-based, place-connected were not place-bound. Of one nominee, he stated, she is "deeply rooted in the (regional) culture"—

place-based — “and, if she opts to, she could be a career-bound mega-system executive”—definitely, not place-bound.

Both experts knew most of the presidents in the potential pool. They considered many of them personal friends and many had been colleagues. They respected the work the presidents had done and admired their leadership skills. Most often they mentioned their sense of place, their collaborative natures, and the partnerships they formed.

All of these folks are personal friends, and I think very highly of each of them. They have accomplished much in their presidencies and are some of the most talented and knowledgeable folks I know. (Expert B)

Expert B nominated one president because of his active enthusiasm for learning as much as possible and garnering assistance with introducing the economic development role and significant progress during his relatively short tenure as president.

These presidents were nominated for what they did and also how they went about doing it. Their leadership styles mattered to their peers, the two experts, one who had worked with this population of leaders and one who had served as one of them for over three decades. I sensed a close-knit community of leaders as the experts wrote about their nominees, from comments from the participants about both the RCCI and RCCA experiences, and by meeting with the RCCA membership at three separate national meetings. This is a community that likes each other, respects each other, and is honest with each other. In that manner, they also give others in their circle permission to ask for help. They are collaborative among the community of presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural places. The experts mentioned several national boards on which some of the nominees served. Some of the participants mentioned service on national boards and committees. The participants were collaborative across many spectrums and in many venues.

Although the experts expressed high praise for their nominees, they also readily told me that these were only some of the presidents who deserved to be included in the study. Expert A praised the six participants from his list of nominees for the work they did in community building. About the other two participants who he did not know personally he added, “Both evidence strong community connections and continuing development and growth. Like the leaders I nominated they represent unique institutions with challenging local dynamics.”

Expert B recommended ten who he believed would be great participants (five who were participants) and then added, “There are many more I could recommend.” This meant to me that the qualities embodied in these presidents and their reputations for *embracing economic development* as a mission for their colleges were part of the culture of the Rural Community College Alliance and its membership.

Returning to the metaphor the participants with reputations for adopting an economic development mission for their colleges were members of a larger group of leaders with similar beliefs similar to the clergy of a denomination. In this situation tribal and community colleges in rural places were like a denomination within the larger community of churches. Each college was unique; however, the leaders had identified their colleges with other colleges that held some similar beliefs, some similar understandings of rural challenges, similar commitments to help alleviate poverty among rural people, similar commitments to economic development. Likewise, churches band together based on similar if not identical beliefs and traditions.

Further, if the leadership of the college was like the ordained leaders of the church, as proposed in the introduction to this section, then the Rural Community College

Alliance was similar to a seminary and my two experts were similar to bishops of regional or national churches. In seminaries learned clergy and religious teachers pass on their lessons to those eager to learn and follow in their footsteps. Just as seminaries prepare church leaders for ministry, RCCA prepared leaders for tribal and community colleges in rural places in the area of economic development and provided a support network for leaders. The initial members of the Rural Community College Initiative formed the RCCA in order to broaden the network of colleges who would benefit from shared learning and apply those lessons to their local communities. The RCCI participants were eager to share their lessons and also eager to pass their learning and culture on to others. Just as bishops know those who were seeking ordination and those already ordained, the experts chosen for this study knew the presidents whom they recommended and knew the church's teachings.

**Core category: Embracing economic development role.**

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

*Isaiah 6:8*

*Embracing the economic development role* was defined earlier as adopting as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. This concept was selected as the core category as shown in Figure 3. This mission was about connecting the college to the community and its economy. Presidents who embraced economic development as a mission made a commitment to this act of connecting.

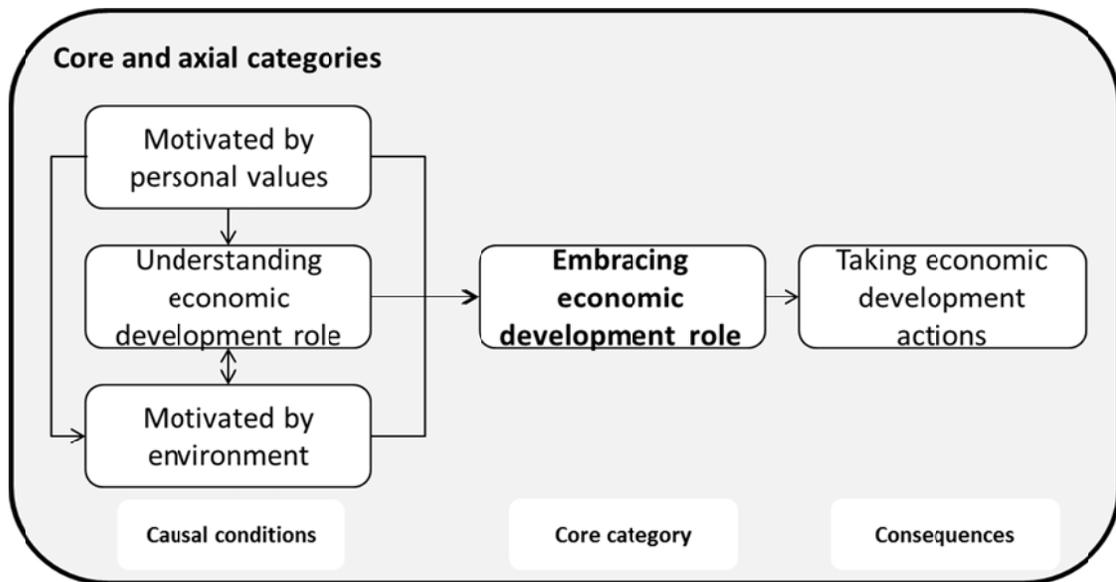


Figure 3. Grounded theory causal conditions, core category, and consequences.

*Embracing economic development* as a mission of the college was similar to responding to a religious call to a mission outside of the traditional role of the church. Matilda commented, “The role and the mission of a community college is my passion, and I feel like it’s my calling.” This comment prompted the development of the religious call metaphor. The Latin word for *call* is *vocare* which is the root word for vocation. The Webster’s dictionary’s first definition of vocation is “a call, summons, or impulsion to perform a certain function or enter a certain career, esp. a religious one” (Agnes, 2005). This call to *embrace the economic development mission* was similar to the call to a religious vocation.

The presidents, because of some event, information, or discussion, made a personal decision and chose a different path than the one they had been following. They were converts to this new mission or service. They felt an impulse to accept this call. It

took faith to follow this path with the conviction needed to accomplish the task. Belief and conviction as one president added,

It takes work to do that because there are some people that think that will never happen. But again, you have to believe strongly enough that it is going to work and it can happen. (Russell)

Russell's comment about believing strongly suggests the idea of adopting the mission as a guiding principle. Russell wants others to believe as strongly as he does. He acknowledged that there were disbelievers. He did not find fault with them but returned to his own guiding principle, his own strong belief. Embracing, adopting, hugging had varying degrees of intensity. For these presidents their range for how emphatically they embraced the economic development role was tightly clustered around very emphatically. I believed as I read and analyzed their stories that whether these presidents served at the same institutions in the future or moved to other colleges in other communities, their commitment to the economic development role for tribal and community colleges would not falter or fade. Troy's conviction about economic development was a guiding principle for him.

You look at the rural colleges that have grown and prospered and you have a leadership core that would be made up of risk takers. You might say, each and every day, we get up asking ourselves, "What can we do to broaden this economy?" (Troy)

Each and every day was a strong phrase for Troy to use about his conviction to impact his community's economy long-term.

Torres and Viterito (2008) noted in their analysis of the initial Rural Community College Initiative that the eight colleges they studied had consistently "embraced" the role of change agent (p. 7). One of my guiding research questions was: How emphatically did they embrace the economic development mission for the college?

Presidents *embraced the economic development role* eagerly, mentally perceiving the role and hugging their communities with affection. Several presidents used the word *embrace* during their interviews.

I was not able to attend a Veterans' (Day) celebration that was held on the campus but the entire community came – the entire community came. They embraced what we were doing and of course we, in turn, were embracing them. (Troy)

As a matter of fact, they are so embracing the college that it's amazing in those communities. (Bob)

I think if I can at least get people to understand and embrace this thing about the tribal college's role and do some things to promote that, to get people to understand that then I guess that would be good enough for me. (Russell)

Webster's dictionary defined embrace as: to clasp in the arms, usually as an expression of affection or desire; hug; to accept readily; avail oneself of; to take up or adopt, especially eagerly or seriously; to encircle; surround; enclose; and to take in mentally; perceive (Agnes, 2005). The definitions of embrace implied wholeheartedness and passion.

I would just say that I'm passionate about rural communities. I'm passionate about economic development and I'm passionate about serving the people of this region. (Mary Ellen)

Matilda responded to the question about rating how emphatic with,

Obviously, it's emphatic; as we look at the five or six pieces of the mission, I think it is the most important and it intersects all of the others.

Passion and conviction are evidence of the presidents' commitment to the economic development mission.

I'm passionate about economic development and I'm passionate about serving the people of this region. It's what helps me get out of bed in the morning and do the work that I do because it is about public service. (Mary Ellen)

It's very simple. In my mind, we're the community's college and as such as we're very much about rural vitality. We play a very key part in that. As a community college, we not only trained the workforce but today and the future so, we're very much tied to the very existence of these towns.  
(Mary Ann)

Several presidents served in the presidency for some time before making a decision to include economic development in their college's mission in a robust fashion or reaching clarity about the mission. For all, their actions after embracing this mission were different than they had been before.

Understanding the selection and positioning of the core category was critical to developing the substantive grounded theory. Everything else was positioned around the core concept. In the absence of the core category, the categories and their underlying concepts were disconnected, and the theory could not be constructed. *Embracing the economic development role* is a sequential step in the process. It happens before the extreme commitment to robust economic development actions, a calling to connectedness to the communities beyond the traditional role of the college. This commitment was a commitment of love, a commitment of the heart, not just the head. It was what made these presidents get out of bed in the morning, get on the road before daybreak, travel mountainous roads or deserted prairies in questionable weather, and show up with a smile to be present with communities that were hurting, who needed inspiration and encouragement. The presidents embraced the role with passion, commitment, and conviction. Their commitment was a guiding principle for how they decided what to do and how to go about doing it. This commitment of the heart opened the eyes of the presidents to the poverty of the people and echoing Isaiah's response to God, they cried out in response to their communities, "Here am I. Send me!"

**Cross case analysis.** During analysis, the first indicator that *embracing the economic development role* should be the core category was Matilda's comment about the college being the "key to making this happen." Using the concept of theoretical sampling, earlier interviews and those that had not been coded yet were reviewed for similar "aha" events or epiphanies with causal concepts and consequences. The cross case analysis table which is shown in Appendix F lists data from each of the eight interviews and shows the cross case relationships. The selection of the core concept was supported by all interviews.

Data that supported the core category of *embracing the economic development role* was identified for all eight presidents. In some interviews the data that supported this category was minimal but was still a hinge between the causal category data and the consequences. Russell questioned whether the college was making a difference, whether the college was "reducing poverty and creating jobs." He asked "what have we done to try to create economic and social success?" The response was, "Well, we're really not into that. We're into training people to get jobs." The "aha" happened when the president questioned "if we're training people to get jobs why do we have such a high unemployment rate?" What was happening was not getting the sought after result. Russell realized that something else was called for. He started seeking experts and training so he would be equipped to implement an economic development role. Matilda's realization about the potential of the community college engaged in economic development resulted in a decision to prepare for and seek a college presidency. A new economic development director had been hired in the community where she was leading a community college outreach campus. The economic development director involved her

as a college leader in the economic development activities. Through that involvement she experienced an epiphany about the college's role in the community development and economic development process.

So, that's when I got it. I went, "Aha, we're key to making this happen. I love this."

During Bob's interview he recounted a discussion he had with a professional colleague while on a driving tour of his expansive district. The colleague asked about the district's role in economic development. Bob replied that the district was involved. The colleague's response was the causal category,

He said, "You really have to be a leader. You have to actually lead economic development and sustainment and growth in this area." (Bob)

Bob's reaction to that discussion was to *embrace the economic development role* as defined earlier. He adopted as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the communities and their economies. He verbalized this change in attitude with,

I think it's a little different twist but it really means something because I've taken off since that discussion and have been really forcing the regional picture concept. (Bob)

Bob admitted that taking a regional approach was something different than what he had been doing and that the decision was in response to the discussion he had with a colleague. The consequence was more than just an attitude shift; it included changes in actions, too.

It continues to make me press forward and actually engage with communities in a different way. (Bob)

Bob was an experienced president who had worked in his state for many years and yet he changed how he worked with the communities and the role the college played *after* the

discussion with a colleague and his decision to take a regional approach and be in the lead. Similar relationships and analysis for all eight presidents confirmed that the core category for the grounded theory was *embracing the economic development role*.

**Relationship to contextual framework.** Embracing economic development as a mission of their college sat within the framework of *rural bias, community or tribal college affinity, and being the president*. When the leaders chose to embrace “the different things that each of the colleges were doing to try to impact the economy around them,” they did so as presidents of community and tribal colleges located in rural areas. Since the participants for this study were chosen from those who were currently serving as presidents of community and tribal colleges in rural areas, the contextual framework should be an assumption, a known set of parameters for the study. However, it was interesting that the participants had strong bonds to each of these contextual elements. This framework was not just a casual set of parameters but a result of purposeful choices.

The presidents’ strongest attachments appeared to be to the rural locations. Even before becoming president of their colleges, they chose to live in rural areas. Some of the presidents served a stint in more urban areas but returned to their rural roots. One left for only four years in military service while others stayed home or near home throughout their lives. Their second strongest attachment appeared to be to the community and tribal colleges. All the presidents recognized the role community and tribal colleges had to connect with their communities.

The weakest attachments were to serving as presidents. Several worked in many different positions within the community college environment. Some moved from secondary to postsecondary, some from universities to postsecondary. Others decided to

seek the presidency in order to implement an expanded mission. Although several had changed positions within the community college or education system, many did so at the college or within the district that they now serve as president or within the same state. When asked to comment on the career path that led to them serving as presidents, only one president appeared to have had a substantial career outside of their states. Three had some experience outside their current state. Four stayed close to home their entire career. Earning a reputation for economic development was a consequence of their decision to *embrace economic development* and subsequent actions, not an intentional goal.

**Axial category: Motivated by personal values**

*Love your neighbor as yourself.*

*Leviticus 19:18*

*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

*Luke 10:36-37*

Personal values that are influenced by family and rural communities are similar to teachings of an organized church. They are the standard beliefs or catechism of the church. To be a good fit within an organized religion, members' beliefs are similar or consistent with the teachings of the church. To be a good fit with rural communities, the president's values had to be consistent with the local norms. The topic of personal values was at the base of this theory. Before Isaiah responded to God's call, he believed in God. His belief positioned him to be able to hear God's call and prepared him to respond. Likewise, the presidents' personal values were their belief systems which enabled them

to hear the calls to act in mercy toward their communities and to respond to those calls with action. Values of personal freedom, family ties, working hard, and being authentic emanated from their rural roots, from their upbringing in smaller communities. The relationship between the presidents' personal values to their rural upbringings could be explained by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work on the relationships between habitus, embodied behaviors and values, and field, the environment (Hinde & Dixon, 2007). That discussion was beyond the scope of this work and as the researcher I was underprepared to engage in that analysis. However, I would be remiss if I had not mentioned that there appeared to be a strong connection between the presidents' personal values and their having grown up in rural places. Jack, Russell, Matilda, Bob, Troy, J.D., Mary Ann, and Mary Ellen had what it took to be successful presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas.

**Caring and sharing.** God's teaching of loving one's neighbor was expressed in the Old Testament, the passage from Leviticus, and repeated again in the New Testament. In a culture that was divided along ethnic and religious lines, Jesus told the familiar story of the Samaritan, a man from an ethnic group despised by the Jews, who was the only one of three travelers who stopped to help the Jewish man who had been robbed and beaten. The Samaritan was portrayed as being the good neighbor. The personal value personified by the Samaritan man was mercy. Mercy and love for one's neighbors were two personal values that Jesus implored His followers adopt. Caring for each other, showing mercy, was a value expressed by presidents in this study.

It's really the basis of American Indian society and philosophy. We believe that we can't survive without each other, that we live in a society that should be caring and sharing, and not competitive. That doesn't mean

that we can't be engaged in competitive activities. We can be but we don't do it to the harm of anybody else. (Jack)

You become a part of the tapestry of the college and so you're not just involved in the organizations because of what it can do for the college or what it can do for you professionally for your career. You're involved because you care about the community. (Matilda)

The familial ties were strong and extended beyond the presidents' families into the work environment. Multi-generations of family were critical to forming the presidents' values. Family feelings toward colleagues and family bonds tied the presidents to their rural roots.

There's a feeling of family here and, as I said, that did not start with me, but it's a part of who we are. (Troy)

Family is very important to me. We have four children, six grandchildren. Three of the grandchildren live within about ten miles of us. Two of the other grandchildren live about 150 miles from us. (Bob)

My sons are very tied to our family roots, to our geographic location. They make sure the fences and the grass are cut and things look good. They look after their aunts and uncles and that sort of thing. So now I have children and grandchildren. How far away do I want to get away from those little, blue-eyed, blond-haired girls? (J.D.)

At the end of the day, taking care of your family was really, really important. Working hard to be able to do that was all part of it. (Matilda)

The presidents described communities that were deeply connected to the extent that many who were not family felt and acted like family. Their ties to their own families were even stronger. Several lived in close proximity to their parents, their children, and their grandchildren and they were not considering leaving. They were tied to their rural roots by relationships and the strength of those relationships, the ties that made the community into neighbors, friends, and family who cared and shared for each other.

**Freedom to choose.** The value of personal freedom, personal dignity, and the freedom to choose where and how to live was heard in the presidents' voices. They each

chose to live and work in a rural place, and they valued helping others be able to remain in rural areas and still be able to provide for themselves and their families. More basic than economic freedom, presidents saw freedom as freedom from historic oppression, whether oppression of Native Americans, African Americans, or women and helping others gain that freedom from oppression was valued by these presidents. The following quote from Jack was representative of their comments.

Education I think essentially can give a person freedom . . . not necessarily economic freedom. But if you can secure some level of the other type of freedom, which is for American Indians almost freedom from oppression, breaking of bonds that have done strange things to their society for over 100 years, if you can break those things, see them through, and allow yourself to function as an individual or as a member of a true society with society and its relationships intact then you have a possibility of living a life. I mean the freedom to determine who you are and to live the way you want to without other people dictating what your particular perspective on life or the world should be. (Jack)

The presidents valued the freedom to choose without penalty. The presidents did not view what many saw as disadvantages of rural life as penalties but did view as an unwarranted penalty not being able to provide for one's family and not being able to make life choices freely. Jack saw the value of education as freeing the bonds of oppression and providing freedom of choice first and foremost. The work related skills provided by an education were secondary for Jack but still important.

**Making a difference.** Making a difference was not a just a cliché for these presidents. They believed they could make a difference and set about doing that. Troy commented on how his spouse makes a difference, "On many occasions, when I can't go, she does. So I really think you ought to stress the importance of one's spouse. They can absolutely make a difference." Jack used "making a difference" as a yardstick for whether an economic development project had been successful and Bob reported that a

change to thinking regionally was making a difference. Matilda, Mary Ann, and Mary Ellen used the phrase “make a difference” during their interviews.

If you can get the right people together, meaning people that really have a higher purpose than just what is in it for me, you can achieve big things. I've seen that in a small town just through the church that I was a member of to my community to just how I grew up, even JFK, you just grew up knowing you can make a difference. Any job you are in you have to be honest with yourself. Are you really making a difference or are you a placeholder. I'm not a good placeholder. (Mary Ann)

As I look at rural areas and to be able to make a difference, it has to be the right fit. Your values have to fit with their values. (Matilda)

When I look back on my career, I want to say that I played a role in making a difference in the lives of the people that I serve and I mean that. It is embedded in my being that I know our region and I'm doing all I can from a higher ed perspective to help serve the citizens. (Mary Ellen)

The presidents were willing to put it on the line for something they valued. They were advocates for what they believed was right. Jack had been very active in gaining ground in Federal legislation for tribes and tribal colleges. Others advocated for their colleges and communities to state legislatures, governors, tribal councils, county and city elected officials. They took unpopular and difficult positions and held firm. They put themselves, their reputations, and, sometimes, their jobs on the line to speak for those they represented. They made a difference even when it was difficult to do.

I made a difficult decision and it might have resulted in me spending all of my political capital that I couldn't stay but it was the right thing morally and ethically for the college so I made that decision. (Matilda)

It is my hand that is extended and it is my eye contact that is being made. I full well intended for the state to fulfill its commitment no matter what it took so that's when you grit your teeth and clench your jaw and lean forward and, if necessary, use a little profanity to make sure that the people stick behind you. They don't run out there and then cause you to be a person that can't fulfill your word. (J.D.)

A lot of times the people that worked at the (tribal) colleges held them together almost by a sheer force of will. So there wasn't any fear of risk

taking, none at all because we were already at risk so we didn't have anything to lose. (Jack)

I'm an old warhorse. I've desegregated my home town schools. I've challenged. I've been a change agent. I've been a stabilizing force in all of those things. I've done it through collaboration, participation, being honest, ethical and fair and doing what's right when you know what right is. (J.D.)

Making a difference implied not going along with the status quo. Making a difference meant taking risks. For presidents who were so tied to their place emotionally these risks were even greater. They did not want to take up residence and start over in a new place and even so they risked their potential to continue to serve in their positions, in their locales, to do what they believed was right.

**Belief in value of work.** Strong work ethic was one of the shared personal values. Russell explained that his passion for economic development came from “growing up from my mom and dad, their work ethic.” Working in family businesses, being involved in taking care of the family finances as a child, and working in church alongside one's parents helped shape the presidents' work ethics. Several presidents commented about connections to agriculture, an industry which does not produce an automatic paycheck, but whose rewards were a direct but not guaranteed result of work invested.

Because the presidents had instilled work ethics they knew both the personal satisfaction and economic benefits derived from work. They expected others to work hard but were not autocratic leaders. They understood the satisfaction and dignity their communities would derive from work and economic vitality, individually and collectively. They wanted others in their communities to benefit from the satisfaction of work. Jack commented that when there was work people went to work. J.D. said when

the employer needs people to work extra they did and came back to work more the next day.

**Relaxed in rural community.** I interviewed several presidents on their campuses during summer months. The presidents were dressed casually, and I found both male and female wearing sandals. These presidents were at home in their communities. They were not out-of-towners visiting for a stint in their careers. In my personal experience, living in more urban areas allows people to be more anonymous and lead compartmentalized lives, but these presidents realized that their communities knew them because of the familiarity that is part of rural living. Encounters at grocery stores, soccer fields, county fairs, churches, bars and the ubiquitous Wal Marts were intimate and not controlled by the presidents or supported by the trappings of the presidency. Whether the presidents were wearing blue jeans and boots or sandals and shorts, the presidents were always the president, but they were also grandpa, dad, mom, neighbor, coach, and friend.

You have to put your boots on and your jeans and just talk to them. You have to be able to sit at the bar stool and have those conversations just like a normal person. (Matilda)

Matilda touched on an aspect of rural living that some who were from the area where they served may not have contemplated. She arrived in her community as the president of the college. While she was always the president of the college, she was also just Matilda, mom, wife, and community member. Acting “like a normal person” was how Matilda described being the president away from the trappings of the presidency, away from the suit, office, and formal environment. These presidents lived in the informal and everyday environments of their communities. What this means was that being the president was not like putting on a suit that could be taken off when one wanted to visit

the bar or shop at the grocery store. Instead, the role of president had to fit with both the suit in the formal places and boots and blue jeans in informal places like the local bar.

**Perspective of poverty and wealth.** Several of the presidents grew up poor but they stated this as a fact and not in an attempt to solicit sympathy. Having grown up poor and recognizing the ups and downs of agricultural living was their reality. Their statements about growing up poor helped explain who they were. Both Jack and Matilda recognized the poverty of their youth only from the vantage point of looking back on their own life or from someone else's perspective.

In looking back, I didn't really know we were poor. We had a garden. I didn't really know that we didn't have money because I always ate and was always warm and those kinds of things. (Matilda)

When I was growing up here, some people thought that we were poor. We never thought that we were poor. Nobody ever told us that we were poor. We were too stupid to be poor. So we were happy. We got to swim in the creek and we got to fish, hunt, and do a few things and we were plumb happy with the way we were living. Then somebody came along and said, "Look, you guys are really poor." (Jack)

Gaining personal wealth and career planning were not on the personal values lists for several presidents. When asked by a colleague if she was ready to move on to "bigger and better" for "more money" Matilda responded, "I don't care about that." Others reflected on the unimportance of financial wealth. For several of these presidents, the cost of gaining personal wealth would be at the expense of personal values that mattered to them – like making a difference and staying near family. None of the presidents laid out a clear career path that had guided their journey to the presidency of a college. Matilda joked about how her salary ranked low in a national salary survey for presidents. Bob listed several assignments, many began with "the president asked me" and "then I

was asked” and “then they asked me.” None of these position changes appeared to be purposeful career progressions. In contrast career plans seemed unimportant to them.

I’ve had some offers, but I have always looked carefully at what we have here and considered the work that needs to be done and have always made the decision to stay exactly where I am. (Troy)

I recall many years ago somebody asked me how my career path was going and I almost died laughing. I’ve never had a career path. I don’t understand that concept where by the age (of) 40 you’re going to be X and by the age (of) 45 you’re going to be X. I just don’t think about life in that sense. (Jack)

In an environment where salaries were compared instead of contributions to their communities, the presidents’ personal commitment to the work over the financial rewards was remarkable. When the suburban college announced that Mary Ann had accepted their offer to be their next president, they also announced her salary as if the salary was an indicator of her worth. These presidents measured their work’s worth by the results of the work and the benefits to the communities – not by their personal paychecks.

**Relationship to core category.** Having *personal values* that were consistent with a commitment to the community’s health was a pre-requisite to *embracing the economic development role*. Matilda commented that the economic development mission “just fit right in with my values for community and being a part of a community.” Another worked for her parents in their business and believes that may have influenced her perspective of economic development.

**Relationship to other axial categories.** *Personal values* contributed to *understanding the economic development role* category as shown in Figure 4. *Personal values* which included valuing the community led presidents to be *motivated by the environment*.

One reason is I am from here. I see the big picture. I see the poverty not getting any better. It's getting worse in a lot of ways. So somebody has to step up. (Russell)

These presidents took some action because they saw the big picture. Their personal values helped them see the environment for what it was.

It is absolutely my values growing up and seeing how everything depended on . . . it's this web that we've woven and it's a fine, delicate balance to make it all work. (Matilda)

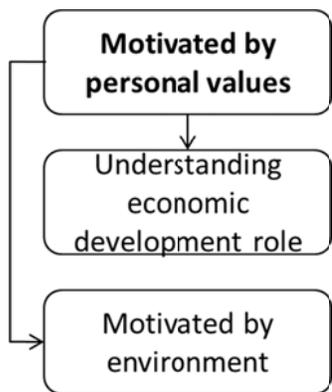


Figure 4. Personal values relationship to other axial categories.

**Axial category: Understanding economic development role**

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.*

*Acts 2:37, 3:41*

Coming to *understand the economic development role* through others' influence, events, or experiences was similar to formation toward baptism, confirmation, or

ordination. An unmet need in the world such as poverty, homelessness, or despair motivated a broader mission for the church. Environmental factors that motivated the community college presidents to reach beyond the traditional role of the community colleges included social and economic needs of their communities. As a former economic development practitioner, I believed there were at least as many definitions of economic development as there were candidates for elected office. Everyone believed in it and gladly supported it, even if they did not understand it. Instead of endorsing economic development because it was popular, these presidents came to an understanding at a basic level, then embraced rather than endorsed an economic development agenda. Economic development to them was helping to improve peoples' lives. The people who concerned the presidents were the people in their communities and regions. The communities and the people in them helped define what "improve" was to them and the colleges responded. Under this large yet focused umbrella many initiatives that may not have been viewed as economic development actually qualified because their intent or result was to improve peoples' lives.

Just as those who heard Peter's message asked "what shall we do," these presidents asked what they should do to help their communities. They listened to the communities, their leaders, and peoples of all ages. They allowed their values and their communities to inform and influence their understanding of economic development. This category included three concepts. The three concepts of *becoming aware*, *being influenced*, and *learning* were similar to receiving a religious message. They heard the message and came to understand. The economic development message could be delivered in person or in writing, in a personal encounter or as part of a large assembly.

The presidents *became aware, were influenced, and learned about the economic development role* in many ways as presented in the discussion about each concept.

**Becoming aware of economic development role.** Mary Ann learned about the potential of expanded roles for community colleges when switching from a four-year institution to a two-year institution. Some became aware of the economic development mission through national organizations and projects such as the American Association of Community Colleges, the Rural Community College Initiative and Alliance, and the Rural Policy Research Institute. Others sought these organizations as resources after becoming aware of the economic development role. Awareness and understanding were iterative sequences in the process of learning.

I realized the mission of a community college is very complex. It's not just of the mind, but it's also a very accepted thing to do training and to partner very directly with the community that you serve. That's what is so exciting about that. So, that started it. (Mary Ann)

Educational roles such as career technical, transfer education, developmental education, and community education were traditional roles for tribal and community colleges. The description of comprehensive has been used to describe this traditional mission (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Comprehensive implied complete. Yet, the presidents who became aware of the potential of this additional mission saw their colleges and their job in an entirely different light. They discovered that what they had been doing was incomplete. The role of national organizations and their work to highlight trends, encourage best practices, and help leaders learn from each other was critical to the process of awareness.

**Being influenced by person/people/event or experience.** Presidents were influenced by economic development professionals, business and community leaders, professional colleagues, and other college leaders. Matilda and Mary Ann credited

colleagues from communities where they had previously lived and worked with influencing their understanding of economic development and the college's role. Troy and Jack credited the RCCI project and interaction with other participants and technical support staffs with helping them better understand the economic development role. J.D. credited past local community leadership with setting the stage where the college was expected to be engaged in economic development while Russell sought resources after realizing that the unemployment rate was worse than it was thirty years prior. A colleague from an accrediting agency influenced Bob with a heart-to-heart discussion while on a road trip tour of the rural district. Industry leaders through their comments made in interviews convinced Mary Ellen that responding to their needs as the industry drivers would be beneficial to the entire region. She agreed. These experiences were the beginning of what became epiphanies for the presidents. The following comments were representative of the respective messages they received about the economic development role.

In our region, it goes back to the newspaper owner and publisher, George and the nucleus of people that he had developed. He passed it on to Harry and then Harry passed it on. What we have here is a culture of iconic leadership. (J.D.)

He said, "You really have to be a leader. You have to actually lead economic development and sustainment and growth of this area." (Bob)

At one point we'd meet in Kentucky; another point we might meet in Mississippi or we might meet in New Mexico or Montana. But it was in areas of rural poverty, and we got to see all of the different things that each of the colleges were doing to try to impact the economy around them other than offer a traditional course of study. (Jack)

Participating in the Rural Community College Initiative brought the economic development mission more into focus for Jack and Troy who participated in the initial project.

Essentially what it did is it brought together rural community colleges from the poorest areas of the country and examined their role in economic development. So, I have been involved in economic development more or less, not necessarily by choice, because that's the nature of this creature, since before RCCI. But RCCI seemed to crystallize some of the things we were doing. (Jack)

Well, in the early years, I really don't think that we were nearly as attached to the community as we are now. I don't know that we understood the importance of our role in economic development. That has evolved over time, no question about that. It really took shape I think when the Rural Community College Initiative was introduced. We started looking for ways that we could engage the community in economic development. (Troy)

*Being influenced* happened in the context of conversations when the presidents were open to hearing different perspectives that challenged their way of thinking. Leaders in J.D.'s community passed the conversations on through generations. Bob's conversation took place on a rural highway and Jack's occurred on colleague's campuses in other rural places. In all circumstances two things happened. Someone who already believed in the economic development role was willing to share their story and a college president was willing to listen. By sharing their stories and experiences with me these presidents showed their willingness to share their insights and commitment with others from different regions and generations.

**Learning about economic development role.** Asking and listening were two critical components of learning about the economic development role that the college could play in the economy. Actively learning from others was an iterative process. Learning also included self-directed study. Some presidents created a portfolio of possibilities from learning on-the-job. The Rural Community College Initiative provided learning opportunities for the initial cohort of colleges. The Rural Community College Alliance continued to provide those opportunities, and the study participants availed

themselves of these opportunities through networking with other members, attending conferences, and inviting RCCA staff members to work with them at their campuses.

The tribal and community college presidents were eager learners. They were committed to learning. They felt a commitment to being informed so they read a lot, participated in professional development, and brought back ideas to their teams and their communities. The following two testimonies were examples of the presidents learning from others and bringing back ideas to see if they fit. Once again I saw examples of the presidents being place-based but not place-bound as they brought ideas from other places back to their places. They were not place-bound physically or intellectually.

For three years, I absorbed everything I could from them to take back to say, “Hey, have we tried this? Have we tried that? How does that fit into our organization?” (Mary Ann)

(Ideas) don’t all come from me by a long stretch but I’ve consulted with colleges and universities worldwide. So what happens is you just get more ideas than you can ever implement. Being involved in the larger broader level means I’ve really been able to take the college to new levels of development. (Bob)

They were not place-bound intellectually. They were willing to learn from others outside their region and brought back ideas to be tried out locally. Jack and Troy who participated in the RCCI project and Mary Ann and Bob who are quoted above actively learned from others. By not being place-bound I mean that they were more than willing to go outside their own place, region, state, or culture and find new ideas that might work in their own place.

**Relationship to core category.** *Understanding the economic development role* led presidents to *embrace economic development*. *Understanding* was like formation; it took time for the presidents to grasp and understand the role; however, once they understood the role, they were ready to move to the next step which was *embracing the*

*economic development role.* When the crowds heard Peter's message as recorded in the Book of Acts, they asked what they should do. They responded. When the college presidents heard and understood the message of colleges adopting an economic development mission, they asked themselves and others what they should do. Those who accepted the message of redemption from Peter followed their acceptance with baptism into the Christian community. The presidents who accepted the message of adopting an economic development mission *embraced the economic development mission.* From that day forward, they were converts to this new idea. From the following quote from Matilda, it was apparent that she "got it."

Whether it's based on values or a sense of place, sense of home, the rural survival in the United States for the next 40-50 years, I think, is dependent upon community colleges being catalysts for development, whether it's just regular community development, beautification, those kinds of things, or for economic development. (Matilda)

Communities in rural America were depending on the community colleges to be the catalysts, to be the movers and shakers in community or economic development. This embodied Matilda's understanding of the role for the colleges. Based on that *understanding* and because of that *understanding*, she was compelled to *embrace the economic development role.* Excerpts from the other presidents' interviews showed the same relationship between this causal category and the core category. Data that demonstrated the relationships between at least one of the causal categories and the core category are shown in Appendix F.

**Relationship to other axial categories.** The presidents' *personal values* were the paradigm through which they viewed their communities. The relationship between *personal values* and *understanding* was shown with a one way arrow (Figure 5) since their values were established prior to these experiences and epiphanies. Nothing in the

interviews led me to believe that the presidents modified their values based on their experiences leading the colleges. The following quote showed how values of wholesome lives led Jack to understand the economic development role by the possible end result.

I try to think of (economic development) in terms of how does it do better things for the communities. How can the communities live wholesome, healthy, wealthy lives? And by wealthy, I don't mean a new pickup in every garage. Although I'm not opposed to that, I don't think it is necessarily essential. (Jack)

The factors in their own environment formed a paradigm through which they *understood the economic development role*. Alternatively, *understanding the economic development role* led the presidents to view their communities through different lenses, to identify needs that the colleges could meet, to be sensitive to issues that may not have caught their attention earlier. For instance, the colleges could deliver education to outlying communities using distance education; however, having a physical college presence in the communities created a sense of pride, a sense of hope, a community gathering place, and a business recruitment tool. Presidents viewed college facilities differently because they *understood the economic development role*. The relationship between *understanding economic development role* and *motivated by environment* was shown with a two-way arrow. They affect each other in a complementary manner.

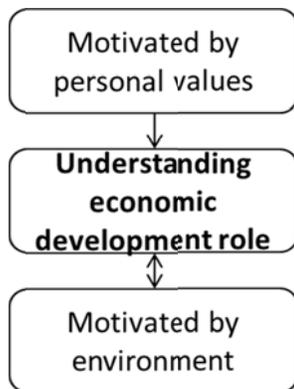


Figure 5. Understanding economic development role relationships to other axial categories.

**Axial category: Motivated by environment**

*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*

*Matthew 25:35-36*

Christ encouraged his disciples to recognize those in need and minister to them, providing for each what they needed: food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothes for the naked. Churches, non-profits, and governments have continued that tradition of reaching out to the poor and providing direct assistance to them. Soup kitchens, shelters for the homeless, sliding scale tuition for the low-income, Federal grants for low-income students, food stamp programs, and many other programs were created to serve those in poverty. The Roman Catholic Church’s teachings on social justice formalized that denomination’s interpretation of how the church, a local parish, and church members should help those who have been marginalized in society. One foundational theme of

Catholic Social Teaching was human dignity which was linked closely to basic human rights. Pope John Paul II provided a list of the most important human rights which included:

the right to life, liberty and security of the person; the right to food, clothing, housing, sufficient health care, rest, and leisure; the right to freedom of expression, education and culture; the right to choose a state of life, to found a family and to enjoy all conditions necessary for family life; the right to property and work, to adequate working conditions and a just wage (Pacem in Terris, #13, as cited in Himes, 2001)

The similarities between the teachings on social justice, as constructed by the Roman Catholic Church, and the basic beliefs expressed by the presidents about what people in their communities needed were striking. I believed they were both based in the natural law about how people should treat each other. The needs listed by Christ were real physical needs of hunger, thirst, nakedness, and isolation. He did not implore his disciples to go to the ruling class and advocate for policy changes although, there is a time to do that. Instead, he directed them to physically minister to those in need. Before the presidents could be motivated by the needs of their communities, they needed to know their communities and understand their needs. The rich quotes in this section helped reveal the sensitive hearts the presidents had toward their communities and their plights. It also helped give voice to the intense pride the presidents felt toward the people of their communities, the spirits which the communities embodied. The presidents were not stand-offish toward their communities; they were engaged and had opened their hearts as well as their heads to understanding their needs.

**Matching actions to needs.** College presidents who were motivated by their environment recognized the unique needs of their communities and matched their actions to that complement of needs. The tribal and community college presidents were

informed by their communities and “cut to the heart” by what they saw. They understood with their hearts and heads that poverty in some places was ingrained, that their state’s policies were detrimental to future development of available natural resources, that their locations were too remote to arrange competitive shipping rates for manufactured goods, and that their people were still proud of who they were and where they lived. They took action to ensure that the dignity of their citizens was upheld so people could take pride in who they were. Presidents expressed concern for the human dignity and basic human rights of their community members.

If they found some mechanism to redistribute (wealth) in equitable ways, we would have no hunger. We would have no lack of housing. We would have no lack of medical care. We would have no lack of education. We would have more than enough resources to make everybody in this country to really have a decent life and be decent human beings. (Jack)

**Belonging to the community.** Presidents who *embraced the economic development role* became “of” the community and the college became the community’s college. The boundary between college and community became porous and communities took ownership of the colleges (Figure 6). Matilda talked about the difference between being “in” the community and being “of” the community. She explained that “it’s a different philosophy.” J.D. claimed his community changed their view of the college; “instead of ‘that college’ it’s ‘our college.’” When the president and the college became part of the community and the community owned the college, the two worked together as one toward a common vision. Several presidents noted that their role was not in the visible leadership position, but behind the scenes developing partnerships, developing community leaders, providing the neutral place for contentious community discussions, and facilitating the economic development agenda.

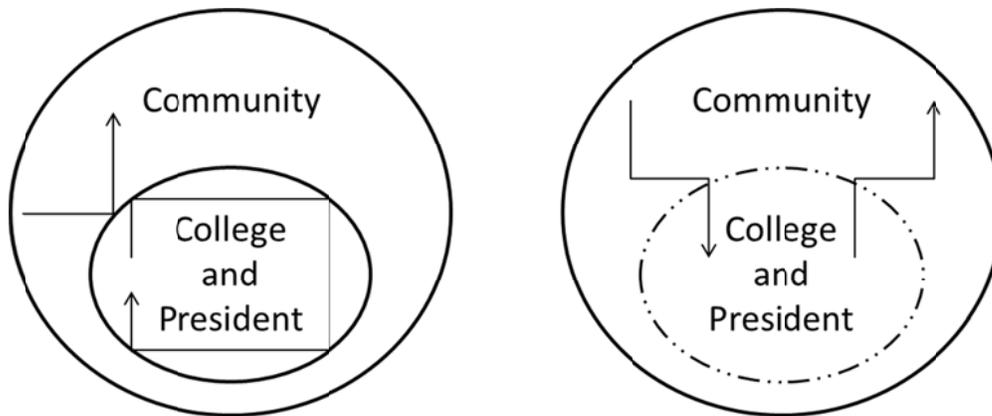


Figure 6. College is "of" the community versus community "owns" the college

**Seeing with critical eyes.** Rural communities and reservations in rural areas continued to decline or struggle to stay ahead of the next economic wave. Rural America has been changing—losing the Mayberry RFD feel and replacing it with isolation and hardship.

It's rural American economy, which means that it's declining. If you drive around this state, any of our neighboring states, and hit these small towns, you'll see where they used to be thriving little places. They'd each have a bank and a car dealership, grocery store, a clothing store, two or three gas stations, and two or three bars. Now it's down to one bar that's a combination convenience store and gas station. Those are the small towns all over these states. That's been the decline of the last 20 to 30 years.  
(Jack)

Looking at the environment with a critical eye, presidents found that their communities were not competitive with urban hubs, regional centers, or overseas low-cost labor countries. Because their economies were small they were also narrow, depending on one major industry. Over the years, that one major industry shifted in several locations. Other economies stayed in one economic sector such as mining, agriculture, or semi-skilled manufacturing; however, for many, their one economic sector was dealt blows

from changes to environmental regulations, subsidy programs, weather, and customer preferences. Some found themselves chasing the last big thing. By the time many rural areas finally got on the fiber optic communication networks, call center operations were moving to off-shore countries. Empty call center buildings, which provided jobs for a time, dotted rural America. Rural locations and especially rurally located reservations could not “compete with people making ten cents an hour” overseas (Jack).

At one time our tribes had the largest manufacturing plant in (the state) in terms of employment. We employed between five and six hundred people. We ran three shifts and we did mostly government manufacturing. And then, basically, we were abandoned by the federal government. Our customer went away. That was the problem. We tried our best to expand and look at the business from a private sector model and to develop different kinds of things that we could build or sell. But we had a lot of deficiencies. We’re in a rural remote location so shipping, trucking and buying raw materials to work on and shipping them just knocked us out of the price range. (Jack)

Although we have a lot of small, entrepreneurship businesses on the reservation, you can only provide so many jobs with using that approach. Let’s just use a call center as an example. Those used to be popular. You could create maybe 300 to 400 jobs. That’s not been the case here. Or you could bring manufacturing which we had at one time. Federal grants and the college was involved in the training part of it. But that has since come and gone. (Russell)

**Responding to adversity.** Rural communities reacted to adversity differently.

Some lost hope. Some rolled with the punches. Some turned adversity into opportunity. Some communities turned to their colleges to help save them, to help them roll with the punches, and to help generate hope for a brighter future. Communities asked colleges to establish physical presences in their small towns to generate hope and support business recruitment.

They keep thinking the trains are going to come back. Trying to get them to move and to organize and to believe in themselves as opposed to feeling sorry for themselves is a real challenge. (Mary Ann)

You have to have the climate to have successful economic development. If the climate is wrong, it hardly matters what you do. (Jack)

The first wave was destitute poverty with a gray mule and a gee whiz and a shovel stalk trying to grow . . . that caused a great migration. So here we've gone from destitute farming to cut and sew . . . to furniture . . . and now guess what - automobile manufacturing. (J.D.)

We're looking at a building that was a call center that was ten years old. It's fairly new and it's right on the Interstate. It looks like we've worked out an arrangement where the owner will sell the building to us. [With assistance from the city, county, banks] we'll be into that free and clear including renovations and having it ready to go with academic and technical course. (Bob)

Some communities were fortunate to have leaders who generated hope and instilled in the citizens an expectation to work together for the common good. Working together did not mean that the colleges or local government should take over and run businesses, but they should be supportive of the local economy. Many of these college presidents had themselves become those sage voices in their own communities.

In these rural communities, you have iconic leaders who are old men and women who are looked upon and revered and who stand up with broken voices and say, "You can't sink half a boat. You can't sink half a ship. We're all in this together." (J.D.)

Determination and hard work were two factors required to improve the economic environment. I got the sense that these presidents as a group did not shirk the responsibilities of their positions. They stood their ground with a smile and a handshake but they stood it firmly. They worked hard, with common sense and determination.

We do not have a choice but to educate and train and have people who look up at the skyline rather than down at the dirt. So what we're doing here is that we are constantly reducing barriers and increasing access and trying to motivate people to get more education and more training to hedge your bets on the new economy. (J.D.)

**Creating jobs and stopping out-migration.** Rural communities and reservations have been searching for jobs, jobs, jobs. Colleges partnered with towns and tribes to help

recruit businesses. They partnered with businesses to help them survive and thrive. They also partnered with entrepreneurs providing monetary and technical assistance to help them launch and sustain small businesses. The goal for all of these endeavors was job creation and retention in their communities, jobs for people who already lived in their towns and on their reservations. Russell contrasted those who left to get an education and those who would not seek an education if they had to go elsewhere to get it.

Our region came out of the depths of poverty in the 1930s and 1940s and started on a deliberate plan to create jobs and improve infrastructure. We cannot purchase as much at Wal Mart with unemployment checks as we can with payroll checks. We're going to have to keep some jobs in America. (J.D.)

I've tried to continue those conversations because they're very, very important. I talked to small companies, large companies, and the advice I was given was just amazing. From the first visit that I had (with industry leaders), I knew that this was valuable for a new president to understand the regional economy. One of the takeaways on this is that I need to know what their environment is like. (Mary Ellen)

**Having a voice at the table.** Quite often the educated youth left rural places to find work. Others left to get their education and never came back. Some came back but without work opportunities left again. Out-migration continued to threaten rural economies. The most educated were the least bound to the rural place. Education provided the opportunity to leave. Education also provided some, including these presidents, the ability to make a difference in their rural place of choice.

Back 30-40 years ago, very few people (from this tribe) had four-year degrees. Now they're all over the country. But they don't come home and for obvious reasons. The jobs are not here. They don't come home to stay to use those degrees to help people. They'll come home for a while and then leave. (Russell)

We're serving a population of people that, whether you're on reservations or not, we're serving a population of people who normally would not attend higher education. They wouldn't travel a hundred miles to the nearest college or university. (Russell)

Whether working on college curriculum, recruiting a new industry or collaborating on training programs, several college presidents talked about the importance of “being at the table.” There were many types of tables and many roles at the tables. For instance, some meetings were held at the humble tables of the local coffee shops, some at the board room tables, and many at kitchen tables as colleagues became friends. In some situations, the colleges were at the table as the leaders or hosts. At least one board of trustees supported the college being the lead at the economic development table. In business recruitment, the colleges were invited but regular guests at the negotiations tables. At other tables, the colleges sat across from business employers as equal partners, like family. Sometimes the tables were banquet tables with an old-fashioned church potluck picnic as citizens from all walks of life engaged with the college to discuss how to make life better in their community. Everyone brought their favorite dish to the table and the resulting banquet combined everyone’s best. Being at the table mattered according to all of the presidents; “we’re just sitting at tables elbow to elbow and you get lots of wayside conversations going” (J.D.).

You have to talk with each other. You have to sit down across the table from each other and just share. Again trust is engendered as a result of our actually meeting face to face and talking with each other...not assuming anything. (Troy)

We’re always at the table. It makes a tremendous amount of difference because of that old adage of: “If you’re not in on it and up on it, you’re down on it.” They came because of the workforce. The first meeting had the economic developers. It had the regional leader in it and it had the community college president. The last meeting had that group on the stage as the announcement was being made. (J.D.)

**Relationship to core category.** Presidents who recognized the needs of their communities and the colleges’ capacity to meet those needs were *motivated by their environment* and in combination with their *personal values* and their *understanding of the*

*economic development role* led them to *embrace the economic development role*. This causal category was a critical component to the core category. Having values that fit with the rural communities and understanding the economic development role generically were not sufficient to lead to the core category. Recognizing the needs, seeing the hungry, the naked, those in prison, led presidents to “feel a responsibility to be at the table.”

**Relationship to other axial categories.** Personal values such as altruism led presidents to be sensitive to their environment.

You have to get people excited about things. People have to really believe... Somebody has to raise a question to them as to whether they're really altruistic, whether they really want to help other people. If you can force them to ask themselves that question, you go a long ways towards helping people lead themselves because altruism is kind of the basis of education. (Jack)

*Understanding the economic development role* in a generic sense and being *motivated by the environment* reinforced each other (Figure 7). For one president, recognizing the high unemployment rate in the community led to gaining understanding of the economic development role. For another, understanding the role led to seeking a presidency at a rural college in order to respond to a community's needs.

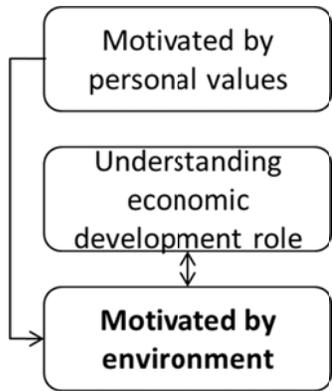


Figure 7. Motivated by environment relationships to other axial categories.

**Consequence: Taking economic development actions**

*Thus, by their fruit you shall know them.*

*Matthew 7:20*

*If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

*James 2:16-17*

The economic development actions carried out by the presidents and their colleges were similar to the fruits that resulted from carrying out the mission of the church. By what Christians did and achieved, people knew them. Faith in God was demonstrated through deeds and good works. Similarly, presidents who believed in the economic development mission demonstrated their belief through positive actions (deeds) with beneficial results (fruits) for those whose needs they met.

In the book of James the author compared faith without action being as futile as taking care of spiritual needs without taking care of physical needs. Tribal and

community colleges in rural places who engaged in economic development were taking care of the educational needs of their communities and addressing their physical, cultural, and capacity building needs as well. The presidents viewed those needs as related and interdependent. Taking care of the educational needs was not enough.

The colleges were prime candidates for taking on leadership roles in community and economic development because the colleges had the leadership capacity for that role. The colleges led by these presidents also were motivated to take on the leadership role for the good of the communities. Several presidents supported these reasons in their interviews.

Rural survival in the United States for the next 40-50 years, I think, is dependent on community colleges being catalysts for development, whether it's just regular community development, beautification, those kinds of things, or for economic development. (Matilda)

We can go in and take a challenge, accomplish something for the betterment of everybody involved, taxpayers, the community, and the people. The local community college is an instrument that makes things happen good for people. (J.D.)

We didn't go into this thing saying, "What's in it for us?" We didn't. But here's the thing. If you do the right thing for the right reason, usually it's going to pay off for everybody. (Troy)

After listing many successes for the college, J.D. continued with, "But I think the biggest thing is this: That we have increased the profile of the college to the point that it is recognized as a go-to place." Many of the initiatives implemented by these presidents and their colleges made a difference in their communities. However, not all efforts were successful.

I've seen a lot of things come; a lot of things fail; a lot of things disappear and some remain. And sometimes success and a whole series of things. (Jack)

The presidents and their colleges took on initiatives which were not guaranteed to succeed, and many did not. They took on projects that might not benefit the college, they did them anyway. They took on projects for which they were not the apparent leader, but they had the required leadership capacity so they led. The colleges engaged in economic development actions because they had the potential to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. Without this guiding principle it would be difficult to justify some of the colleges' economic development initiatives in a two-year college program. Their guiding principles helped clarify what was right to do – and then they did it.

Theologians have debated for centuries whether Paul's writings which appear to support faith as enough for salvation or James' writing about faith and works both being required for salvation were the right interpretation (Ephesians 2:8-9; James 2:17). I would compare the relationship between *embracing the role* and *taking economic development actions* as being connected in much the same way as James portrays the relationship between faith and works. A profession of belief in economic development was not the proof; the actions themselves were the demonstration that the president and the college had *embraced the economic development role*.

I identified six high level groups of economic development actions from the interviews: developing leaders and leadership capacity; thinking and acting regionally; coordinating closely with industry in workforce development; being present throughout the service area; welcoming the community to the college facilities; and promoting healthy communities.

Although many of the unique projects fit within these concepts not all projects fit in one of these six concepts. Furthermore, the projects within each concept were varied based on the college, its geography, the community's makeup, the president's style, and other local factors. I chose to highlight these six concepts in the findings because they were representative of more than one college and appeared to be transferrable to other colleges and locales.

I was surprised by how basic the six groups of economic development actions were when summarized by their common themes. These six concepts were not new ideas; however, they all qualified as "outside the traditional course of study" (Jack). I found the inventive variations within the initiatives interesting as presidents adapted basic concepts to their situations. The colleges were engaged in the economic development actions but the presidents led the way. They were intimate in the planning and the implementation. They were present with the communities, and their personal presence made the difference in overall impact to their communities.

**Developing leaders and leadership capacity.** Several of the colleges were engaged in leadership development within the college and in the community. Leadership development efforts included hosting a graduate program in business administration, offering an internal college leadership academy, requiring that those who participate in external leadership development programs share their training with those who could not attend, enrolling college leaders in local leadership programs, and encouraging college leaders to be involved in the community. College presidents developed leadership capacity within the colleges.

But it just so happens that right now that there is a minimum of at least three people inside this organization that either one of them, in my opinion, would be a great president for this organization. (J.D.)

Jack believed that creating leadership capacity in the community had more impact than focusing on programs that assisted individual businesses directly. I was wrapping up the interview with Jack when, almost as an afterthought, he talked about a program that built leadership capacity in the community. Internal leadership development was not enough. Building leadership capacity at the college and within the community was needed.

“Being prepared should the climate change” was critical to the presidents.

One of the things that we’ve done here that I think probably is going to have much more long-term impact than almost anything else is that we got involved with some MBA programs. In the last eight years or so we’ve produced 35 MBAs and these are primarily people that are not going to leave this area. We’ve produced probably about 35 people with Masters in Business Administration. So, in a place this size and an economy this size, that has to have an impact. In other words, no matter what happens in terms of running things here more efficiently or being prepared should the climate change, that is going to make a difference as to what happens here in the future in terms of economic development. There’s hardly anywhere that that kind of expertise can’t be useful. I have more faith that that’s going to have more impact than any of the economic stuff we did. (Jack)

Local or tribal culture and history were important elements of college and community leadership development for some. This was somewhat related to the contextual category of rural bias and the concept of “fit” with the respective rural place. The presidents believed that developing local leadership capacity included helping potential local leaders really understand the culture and history of their respective area and people. The presidents interviewed for this study knew the history of their areas and had developed leadership abilities. They were engaged in passing on both to potential future leaders.

The best thing we can do is to continue to stress for people to understand and get the big picture and to grow leadership, to grow visionaries, to continue to do a large leadership training academy here. Then we move them into the expanded community leadership program, which kind of gives them the historical viewpoint of the region, how it has evolved and how it has developed and what it is based on. (J.D.)

It's education, it's not about politics, it's not about individual agendas. It's about training people to become leaders. (I hope to) design a two-year associate degree program that provides the kind of knowledge and training to those individuals so that when they want to become a politician or leader, tribal council member, or even a program director that they have that understanding that the culture and language be a part of it as well. (Russell)

I listed this concept first because I think it is the most important economic development action taken by the colleges. Jack thought the MBA program at his tribal college was going to have the most impact long term. It was apparent that the presidents greatly influenced the directions their colleges took in relation to their respective communities and regions. Expert A commented on how the traditional college building roles were guided by accreditation and other norms and the community building did not have those same step-by-step instructions. Leaders were more critical to making something happen in the community building roles. The presidents had both leadership skills and deep understandings of their area's culture and history. They believed both were required to build a better future, to be prepared should the climate change, to make a lasting and measurable impact on their communities and their economies. Presidents took an active role in the leadership development initiatives, taught leadership courses, mentored future leaders, introduced future leaders to a broader experience, and designed leadership programs. They also nurtured local people to take their places. I think this was notable. I have observed colleges overlook internal candidates for leadership positions and the president's position in favor of seeking a qualified pool of candidates

from a national search. Similar practices have been used to fill openings for city administrators, economic development directors, and college presidents. Bob commented on the changing practices in serving as a college president, specifically about shorter time in the position.

Presidencies of today are different than they used to be. The average president's stay is, I think in my research, about four to five years. Nobody ever thought seven years would be a long time holding a position but it is in today's world. You're going to end up with less and less years of service by more and more presidents. (Bob)

The substantive theory emphasized the importance of rural bias, values fitting with the local area, and understanding the local history and culture. Identifying potential leaders within the community and the college, mentoring them in both leadership skills and local understanding ensured that local candidates would be qualified for leadership positions. J.D. acknowledged the board's authority to hire the next president, but was working to ensure that there were qualified internal candidates.

But those that wind up moving on up the ladder are the ones that create the positive results. Then, of course when it comes to the presidency, the board can hire anyone they want to. But it just so happens that right now that there is a minimum of at least three people inside this organization that either one of them, in my opinion, would be a great president for this organization. (J.D.)

These presidents saw that those they were mentoring were receiving leadership development in their local area and were participating in national training programs. For instance, Russell encouraged those sent from his tribal college to bring back what they learned and share with others.

Seven of eight of the colleges had hired their president from internal or regional candidates. Matilda and J.D. were hired from in-state. Russell was hired from the tribe and local area. Jack was hired from another tribal college and was a member of the tribe.

Troy, Mary Ellen, and Bob were promoted from within their organizations. Only Mary Ann was hired from outside both the state and the college district or system. Seven of the eight presidents interviewed in 2010 remained in their positions throughout the research. Only Mary Ann had left her position to accept a position in another state. Services offered by search firms include background and reference checks. Candidates from the region, from within the system, were already known by the hiring board or system directors. Internal and local candidates knew and fit with their respective rural places and the local people knew them without background and reference checks.

**Thinking and acting regionally.** Presidents led the way, “connecting the dots” on a regional basis. Some of the colleges had large service regions which included many smaller communities. In some instances, the main campuses were not located in the largest community. Inter-community rivalries and forced mergers of separate schools caused some underlying resentments against acting regionally. Presidents saw the benefits of thinking and acting regionally in at least some aspect of their colleges’ services. Mary Ellen realized that industry in the multi-campus district operated on a regional basis and had similar workforce needs. She brought industry within the multi-college district together for regular discussions. In addition to sharing workforce needs, industry used this venue to learn about each other’s industries. Matilda’s college had only one campus but she recognized the need to reach out to smaller communities on the periphery of the service region. Bob’s district created centers for business and industry or customized training, testing and certification services, and other services that could be centralized and coordinated under one vice president for the entire the district.

I've taken off since that discussion and have been really forcing the regional picture concept--working with a lot of communities to think regionally rather than locally. (Bob)

What they have discovered is that what they feel they need for their industry, others need it as well. So then we begin to have conversation about core curriculum, core skills that meet more than one industry because we know that workers are very transient in our regional economy; that they tend to pull from each other in terms of workforce. (Mary Ellen)

We have small, agriculturally-based communities but their demographics are really, really changing and their school districts are seeing lower enrollment. But still, these farm communities need to survive and that adds to the economic prosperity of our community. (Matilda)

I drove from my home in Wyoming to three colleges to interview presidents and had initially planned to drive to the other colleges as well so I looked at the map to get to these colleges and at their regional area maps. But the maps did not tell the full story of what a regional perspective meant for these presidents. Expert A commented on the locations with "one of the most beautiful and coldest places in the U.S.;" "huge district, low population density;" "very small enrollment and serves a large area;" and "the towns may look nearby on the map but on the ground the combination of weather and mountains makes travel times very unpredictable." These were not easy areas to serve on a regional basis. Cold climates, rough terrain, and expansive areas provided obstacles to regional approaches but these presidents overcame those obstacles to take broader approaches to economic development and meet the needs of all their communities. They embraced what J.D.'s iconic leaders believed, "We're all in this together." While those who reported to the president were responsible for individual dots or functions, the presidents' role was to connect the dots across the functions and the region. This took understanding the underlying economic drivers and political environment; knowing industry, community, and educational leaders; gathering all the disjointed pieces and

putting them together creatively and strategically. Thinking and acting regionally took creative problem solving and bold ideas – and lots of travel time.

**Coordinating closely with industry in workforce training.** Presidents led efforts to invite industry to the table in different and more substantial ways. College leaders did their homework and ensured that their programs were relevant and provided quality for local industry and their students. These efforts to more closely engage with industry created success for the students and for the colleges.

One hallmark of this discussion was that workforce development was a broad engagement with the community. It reached beyond non-credit programming, beyond traditional career technical programs, and beyond the two year programs usually offered by tribal and community colleges. One a reservation where the most significant employment was in the education sector, the tribal college offered at least two four-year programs for K-12 teachers. One community college introduced new programs directed to assist industry for both the non-credit and for-credit delivery simultaneously. Other colleges partnered with four-year universities so they could host four-year programs, re-designed and delivered to meet local industry needs. In more than one situation, communities partnered with colleges to create an environment, build a facility, attract a workforce that met industry's needs. Collaboration happened below the CEO level, with faculty and industry representatives developing and delivering programs in partnership.

We've created a whole new academic program designing process where now it is required that we actually do in five program areas that came from this comprehensive plan. Clearly we are seeing now graduates from that program being employed and having very successful interviews for employment based upon the fact that we had (corporate) professionals helping us in terms of delivering this program, obviously structuring it and creating it. We think that alignment is really paying off for students in terms of the skills that they have walking out of these programs and the

opportunities that they have through internships and apprenticeships to be able to access employment opportunities at these same organizations.  
(Mary Ellen)

The most educated and highest skilled residents in rural areas were also the most mobile and most likely to leave to get an education or obtain employment. Local industries needed skilled and educated workers to be viable and competitive. Providing training that was relevant to local employment opportunities both helped the regional economy and local people. This was a win-win-win strategy for industry, the community's economy, and individual students. I believed Mary Ellen identified the biggest challenge for implementing this initiative, aligning the "academic program design process" so that industry input was sought and mattered. This process started with the district CEO, the president, meeting with industry CEOs but was successfully implemented when faculty bought into the new process. Cumbersome academic language, slow response times, unfriendly class schedules, and limitations of a two-year college provided additional hurdles that these teams overcame. Successful implementation of this strategy required cultural changes within the college.

**Partnering with agencies and institutions.** Presidents who were leading their colleges in an economic development role looked outside the traditional partnerships and found new partners and found different ways to partner with traditional partners. Presidents and their colleges were at the economic development table providing access to resources, working with economic development groups and communities. Others sought philanthropic support for local initiatives partnering with those with the capacity to donate and the affinity to donate to the college cause. Presidents ensured that their community colleges were involved in business recruitment, always at the table. They also partnered with four-year institutions to bring relevant programs to the local

workforce. Community college and tribal college presidents saw the value of working with government entities at all levels and actively cultivated those partnerships.

One of the first things that people said is, “Well, I know so many folks with good ideas but they don’t have any resources. They don’t have any funding to move forward with those ideas, with implementation.” We actually brought together five banks and we said, “Look, if we’re going to broaden this economy, which will be good for you, good for the college, good for everybody, we have to give these folks access to capital, access to money.” They agreed. Now we have several million dollars that are available to people in our area. (Troy)

(The economic drivers of our region) identified bachelor’s and master’s degree gaps, particularly in engineering. It has spawned a bachelor’s degree in engineering which is being delivered in a way so different from other engineering programs throughout the nation. Projects emanate from business and industry. Laboratories are held at business and industry sites. The bachelor’s is in partnership with (university) and the master’s is in partnership with (a different university). We believe that we are creating career ladders. Start (here), get your two-year engineering degree, ladder into the bachelor’s degree program, and then have a master’s level and perhaps beyond over time. (Mary Ellen)

The other is a lot of collaboration with state agencies. We have quite a reputation for partnerships and again back to that integrity. State agencies like to work with us because they can trust us. So they’re willing to come to the table on things. We’ve done a number of joint grants with them. (Mary Ann)

(Tribal colleges) have a central organization that does that in DC. We own our own building out there and we have a staff of 15 people that work at it constantly. We’ve become naturally very sophisticated in the way we approach the federal government, as sophisticated as any group in higher education I would think. As a matter of fact we probably have more impact than any other group if you looked at it on a per capita basis for the numbers of students that we serve. (Jack)

Learning to work as partners was learning to play well with others. Partnering with others who had influence and affluence paid off for these colleges. Sometimes just joining with peers as the colleges in J.D.’s state did for state lobbying and the tribal colleges Jack spoke about did for federal lobbying paid off. According to Expert A, in J.D.’s state, the presidents “learned to sing off the same song sheet and share the

appropriated rewards even as (the presidents) compete for students and athletic victories.” Mary Ann may have identified the key ingredient in building beneficial partnerships, trust, trust built on a foundation of integrity. Both Jack and Mary Ellen met the need for four-year and graduate degree programs by acting as the facilitator with four year institutions and bring tailored programs to their areas. They set aside their own egos and admitted that the solutions available to the tribal or community college were insufficient to meet the needs without a four-year partner. The presidents partnered with others to create a lasting and measurable impact on the communities and their economies.

**Being present throughout the service area.** The presidents spent a lot of time out in their communities, listening, being visible, and representing the college. They were boundary spanners, representing the college to the community and the community’s needs to the college. The presidents became intimately familiar with the communities. One president held early morning coffees in several communities throughout the year introducing herself as the person who was fortunate to be leading the college at this time, inviting their questions, and discussing topics that interested them. Although trustees or some other appointed body governed the colleges and cabinets made up of vice presidents ran the day to day operations, presidents were the face of the college to the community. They were expected to be present, physically with ears open, to their communities. These presidents recognized that reality and willingly made themselves available.

So each town takes on a different character, they’re very unique. As the president, you have to be out and about and get to know those towns and see what’s happening in those towns and build trust with them. I attend those (events) throughout the district to just again be visible and to hear things that are going on and be attuned to those communities. (Mary Ann)

The president, I think, in many instances is expected to be the spokesperson for the college. That can be a very difficult role literally and figuratively. I'm on the road a big part of the time and there are many times I wish I didn't have to be. But I am, for better or worse, the face of the college. The community really expects to see me in most situations as the spokesperson for the college. (Troy)

The presidents' role with their communities went beyond being figureheads. They really showed up. Their comments reminded me of a principle in Scott's (2002/2004) book about fierce conversations. These presidents showed up "prepared to be nowhere else" (pg. 92). I believed these presidents showed up early and stayed late, they asked questions to get others to share what was on their minds, and then kept their mouths shut and their ears open. They lived out Covey's (1989/2004) habit about emphatic listening, "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (p. 255). Mary Ellen took someone with her to take notes so she could give her full attention to business leaders. This was more than showing up it was being present physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They were not looking at their watches, checking their telephones, or tapping their toes impatiently. I experienced having these presidents present for me while doing my research. They were timely and helpful in setting up appointments. They removed distractions and gave me their full attention whether in person or over the telephone. They did not rush through our interviews and gave thoughtful responses. Several asked if I had everything I needed and all agreed that I could contact them again. They were present for me and for my purposes and sought to understand my needs. These were the considerations they provided to their communities even while filling the difficult and demanding role of president.

**Welcoming the community to the college facilities.** One aspect of the communities owning the colleges was the communities also have open or near open

access to the colleges' facilities. College facilities were assets in their communities and the colleges made use of their facilities for the communities' good. While colleges offer education in borrowed classrooms in high schools, over the Internet, and in regional hubs, having a college facility in the community proved that there was a college there. The facility became an icon and motivated students to attend, industry to partner for training, and prospective businesses to consider relocating. College facilities were also seen as neutral territory for candidates' forums and contentious community discussions.

Facilities in the more remote communities drew those communities into the college and made the college a true partner with the communities.

We went to a distributive center. The two campuses are two hours apart. Its three hours across our district total. Here are those centers around the borders. What they represent to the communities is that they're much more than credit classes. They're much more than non-credit. They're community buildings also for those communities. (Mary Ann)

We are just immersed. I run out of how many activities we have on these campuses. It's just mind boggling. That also presents a maintenance issue for us, trying to keep up with the deferred maintenance on facilities that have a tendency to age quicker than they should largely due to use, which is good. When you're talking about the degree of use, if anything, we use it too much. But that won't be the case; we'll continue to do that. We have just tons of different things at the various campuses. Lack of use is not one of them to say the least. (Bob)

When the presidents listened to their communities they met the communities' needs first and then fulfilled their own. The presidents considered non-tangible and non-financial benefits to their communities in their college budget decisions and considered those returns worth the financial cost. Providing centralized services, locating all facilities for the region on one campus, and restricting facility use for official college activities would have been more cost efficient from an operating standpoint. But those approaches would not have met the communities' needs. Really welcoming the communities to the

colleges' facilities meant having facilities in towns and locations that were not operationally optimum, accepting increased wear and tear, increased labor costs, and travel time for administrators. The presidents saw these added costs as investments in their communities and meeting the community needs to have neutral spaces, accessible academic programs, and visible college presence came first. The presidents were generous with themselves in the last concept. In this one they were generous with the physical assets they controlled.

**Promoting healthy communities.** Expert A described economic development as community building. Community building denotes a more holistic approach to working with community. J.D. referred to this as getting “a holistic framework about who we are and where we are and what our mission is.” Others talked about providing hope and improving morale. Jack thought about economic development as answering the question about how the college could help the community live “more wholesome, healthy, and wealthy lives.” Another was working on overcoming racial biases in the community. Colleges modeled and promoted healthy living with a variety of programs and policies including recycling, pooling water for irrigation, and providing cultural activities.

On the community services side, we run a diabetes education program. In addition, we have a wellness center here and a wellness center (there). We built the first one with volunteers. We support most of it with grants but we do some of it with service learning, Americorp and a whole number of other things. It's a place for exercise, group exercise, and yoga. We do cardiovascular; we do obesity; we do nutrition programs. We've done family violence programs there. (Jack)

This past summer we declared our college a tobacco free campus. I don't know about where you live, but community college students are the smokingest people I have ever come across in my life. So we're not going to shoot them. We're not going to hit them on the kneecaps with a baseball bat but we are, as a public policy with the signage and tobacco cessation programs and all of these things. That was a major decision because if we're the only community college that's tobacco free will they go where

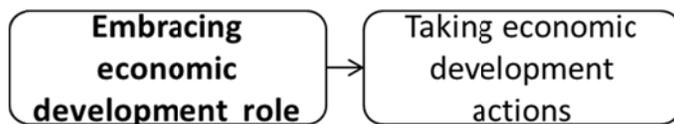
they can smoke? We made the decision that it was in the public health and theirs and other people's best interests to go this route and see if we can help people do better than that. (J.D.)

We also had a murder about thirty years ago and our community talks about it as if it was last week. When I first came, I thought, "That must have been a couple months ago." Two or three Native American young men killed a very popular high school boy in our community. This community lives that legend. You are your stories. Our community lives that. It's not been a very welcoming place for Native Americans. We're trying to bridge that with some of the partnerships we have. We have two tribal colleges very close to us. (Matilda)

J.D.'s college made the decision to become smoke free because "it was in the public health and theirs and other peoples' best interests." These presidents understood that there were links between intellectual, economic, and physical well-being. They were willing to confront the reality of how people were living and do something about it. The first step in this process was being aware of the community health and wellness issues, their biases and habits, and acknowledging their negative impact on individuals and the community. Acknowledging obesity, diabetes, family violence, racial discrimination, and unhealthy behaviors was facing reality with the community. As a college administrator, I realize that when we limit our associations to our professional and socio-economic peers we isolate ourselves from these harsh realities. When we do not know about them, we do not have to acknowledge them, and we do not have to do anything to fight against their negative impacts. These presidents looked closer at their communities and faced the harsh realities with potential solutions.

**Relationship to core category.** *Taking economic development actions* were a consequence of the core category as shown in Figure 8. The presidents who participated in the initial RCCI project got to know each other by their fruits, by what they did other than the "traditional course of study" (Jack). Just as "by their fruits, you will know them"

applied to Christians so by their economic development actions, the communities and colleagues acknowledged presidents who embraced an economic development role for their colleges. The two experts nominated participants for this study based on what they had accomplished, not what they had espoused at national meetings. The presidents admitted that they became involved in various projects after gaining new perspectives of economic development and the college's role in it.



*Figure 8.* Taking economic development actions in relation to the core category.

### **Review of metaphor**

I compared the theory grounded in the data that explained the presidents' perceptions of the economic development role for tribal and community colleges in rural areas to a religious conversion. The idea of the metaphor emerged from Matilda's comment about believing that she was "called" to lead a college in this role. I introduced the metaphor at the beginning of the chapter and further developed it throughout the chapter. I used passages from the Bible and other writings by religious authors and leaders to provide context. Using the metaphor helped me explore and analyze the data by placing it in different contexts which were familiar to me, that of the early and modern Christian church environments. The colleges like churches resided within communities and were led by leaders who were set aside from their congregations or employees and students. Many of the college leaders were selected from within their system or state

much like pastors who were called from within the body of believers or the congregation. Sage leaders mentored prospective leaders in both rural colleges and churches. Those sage leaders may be found at seminaries in the persons of theologians and bishops for prospective pastors and the Rural Community College Alliance in the persons of seasoned college leaders for prospective leaders of tribal and community colleges in rural areas. Like Solomon, the college presidents required and sought wisdom in carrying out their responsibilities. Like Christians, they were known for their beliefs by the fruit of their works. Other relationships within the metaphor were shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Relationships between Grounded Theory and Metaphor*

<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Metaphor Relationship</b>
Substantive theory	Religious conversion
Contextual framework	Church reputation
College	Church
Identifying with the college	Baptized into membership
President of college	Pastor of church
Districts/systems	Church associations/Dioceses
One's own community	Fellow Jews (ancient times)
Community	Mission field
College programs and outreach	Church services and ministries
Tribal members who left to find work	Diaspora (Jews away from Israel)
Presidents giving themselves to their community	Disciples ministering to people in need
Senior leaders who run day-to-day operations	Deacons who assist pastors (and apostles)
Rural Community College Alliance	Seminary for the formation of church leaders
Understanding economic development	Formation for ministry
Core category	Epiphany experience of conversion
Basic beliefs held by college presidents	Teachings on social justice
Positive actions with beneficial results	Good works with fruits

## Summary

Presidents and their leadership were key factors to tribal and community colleges in rural areas adopting an economic development mission for their colleges. Presidents understood that they were the face of the college to the community and dedicated themselves to this external role while mentoring those who managed the operations of the college. They acknowledged that their actions after *embracing the economic development role* were different than they were before their individual epiphanies. The substantive theory was constructed from interviews with eight presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas who were nominated based on their reputation for adopting the economic development mission and from the nominations provided by two experts. The substantive theory was not transferrable to other situations, but was limited to the specific context of tribal and community colleges in rural areas. The substantive theory had one core category, consistent with grounded theory, several axial categories which were related to the core category, and a contextual framework.

The core category, *embracing the economic development role*, was adopting as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. Other categories were grouped in relationship to this core category. Characteristics of the categories and variations of characteristics or dimensions were described in the story using the presidents' own words. Rural bias, affinity for tribal and community colleges, fit with rural communities, and proximity to home were strong messages woven throughout the interviews and the analysis. The presidents were more interested in their community's welfare than they were in their own legacies.

Categories were defined in more detail with the addition of concepts (Figure 9). The contextual framework included being a president of a tribal or community college in a rural environment with a reputation for economic development. Critical to these categories was the pronounced rural bias, affinity for tribal or community colleges, and personal humility of the presidents. The causal categories of *motivated by personal values, understanding the economic development role, and motivated by the environment* worked together in a process and led to *embracing the economic development role*. After *embracing this role*, the presidents acknowledged *taking economic development actions* or taking them on more robustly.

This theory may be useful to presidents who are asked to take on an economic development role, those who wish to hire a president who embraces this role, and professional associations that hope to mentor current and future presidents for tribal and community colleges in rural areas. The discussion and implications are presented in the next chapter.

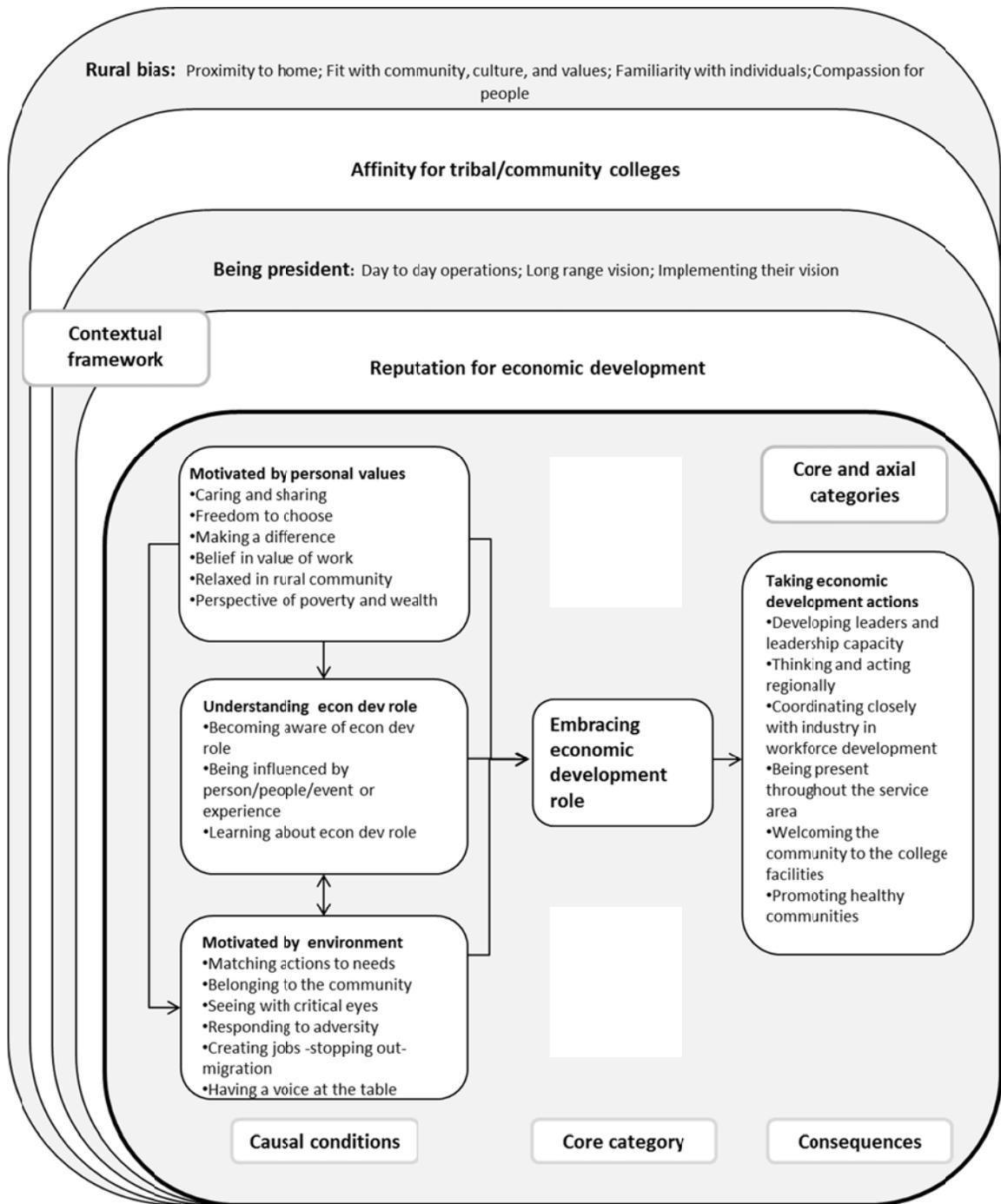


Figure 9. Grounded theory categories and concepts.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“Size of community makes a difference;” even when trends are similar smaller and rural communities are different than their urban and suburban counterparts (Putnam, 2000, p. 119). Putnam observes that “people who have active and trusting connections to others – whether family members, friends, or fellow bowlers – develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society” (p. 288). I believe that the character traits held by the presidents in this study are “good for the rest of society,” traits such as humility, humor, work ethic, commitment, and perseverance make a difference as presidents act as visionaries, mentors, and overall leaders in America’s rural areas.

The purpose of this study was to construct a substantive theory with a core category and related categories that provides a plausible explanation for how presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas come to understand economic development and how they act on that understanding. The general research question was “what is going on here” with presidents at the intersection of community colleges and their rural communities in the area of economic development.

The concept of social capital, defined as “networks of social connection,” and social fabric are woven into the storyline (Putnam, 2000, p. 116-117; Block, 2008/2009). The presidents are connected to their communities, tribes and regions professionally and socially, whether in the dunking tank at county fair, the grocery store, or the local Rotary meeting. In Putnam’s (2000) discussion of the apparent decline in social connectedness and civic engagement since the 1970s, he claims that smaller is better when seeking

“formal volunteering, working on community projects, informal helping behavior and charitable giving” and that these behaviors are more prevalent in “small towns than in big cities” (p. 119). Putnam (2000) observes that “residents of small towns and rural areas are more altruistic, honest, and trusting than other Americans” (p. 205). Several presidents of these rural community colleges expressed similar views, that rural values are different and that their personal values were a good fit for rural places. Block (2008/2009) encourages communities to focus on possibilities and encourages all who will to bring their gifts together for the community’s benefit. These presidents did focus on possibilities and dedicated their gifts for the public good of their communities.

This final chapter is presented in seven sections: summary of research results; evaluation and interpretation; comparisons to other studies; limitations of the study; implications; conclusions; and suggestions for further research. As the researcher, I became very familiar with the data and constructed the substantive theory. I engaged community college colleagues in discussion about the theory and had others review my findings and provide feedback to gain different perspectives on the constructed theory and interpretation.

## **Research results**

The substantive theory constructed from the interviews and nominations from experts includes one core category which is related to several axial categories. The core category for the constructed theory is *embracing the economic development role* which is explained as adopting as a guiding principle doing what is required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. The core category, axial categories, and contextual framework are shown in Figure 10. Some of the axial

categories are related to each other and those relationships are supported by the data. The core and axial categories reside within a contextual framework. The axial categories have embedded concepts that were described in the findings. The categories and concepts are described in terms of dimensions and properties which are supported by data from the interviews and nominations.

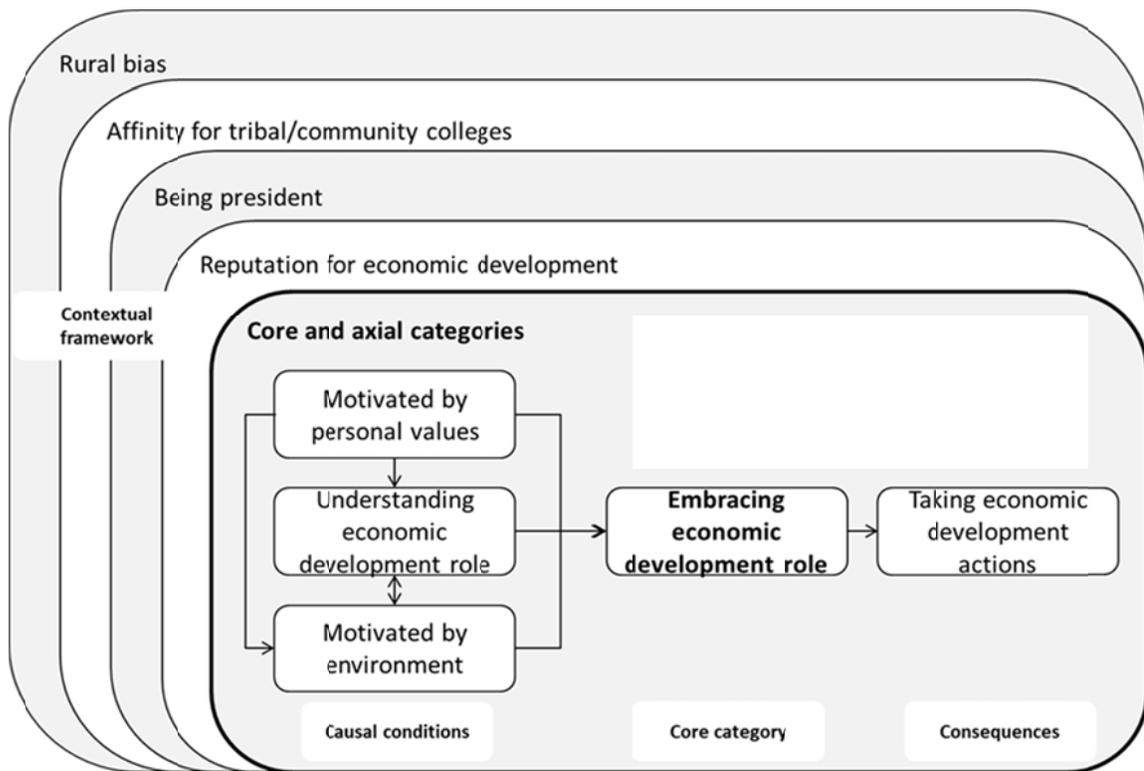


Figure 10. Contextual, core, and axial categories in relationship to each other.

### Evaluation and interpretation

Several evaluation methods are used in this section. First, I revisit and summarize the interpretations that were provided in the discussion and analysis of the grounded theory, Chapter 4. Next, I validate the results against the criteria of credibility,

originality, resonance, and usefulness. I incorporate feedback that I received on these questions from one of the participants. Then, I return to my expectations as a researcher prior to beginning the research and state whether my expectations were exceeded, met, or not met and why. My expectations were first listed in the methodology discussion in Chapter 3.

**Interpretation.** I provided interpretation of the results within each section of the findings, category by category, and concept by concept. For this discussion, I return to my general research question: “what is going on here” with presidents at the intersection of community colleges and their rural communities in the area of economic development. The voices of the presidents are the basis for this study so I include some data from the interviews in my discussion. The presidents use their personal charisma to influence others to join them in the mission of the college being engaged in economic development. J.D. compared the college president’s role to a “real good evangelist” who through emotional investment in the community could “get the people to walk the aisle” and believe in the vision. I believe these presidents are good evangelists. They understand the message of the college being engaged in economic development, they have honed that message by delivering it many times to different audiences, and they continue to preach the message. They not only preach the message, but they call others to respond.

For this study, I purposefully included only those presidents who already “got it” about adopting an economic development mission for the college because I was interested in learning how those presidents came to this perception. J.D. commented that when leaders get “holistic insight as to what the mission is” they must “attack it with religious zeal.” The presidents had a rural bias, but more than that they had a heart for

rural people and places, and a compassion for their rural areas that compelled them to want to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy. This mission went beyond making an impact on the college and its future. They saw themselves as part of their communities and saw their colleges as integral to the communities as well.

I believe the presidents' passion for this mission was somewhat correlated to their connection to their rural place and the people in it. Not surprisingly, presidents who were either members of the tribe served by their tribal college or were from the community where they now served appeared to be the most connected to their communities. However, other presidents from nearby places that were also rural in nature and who had served in rural places for extended times were also very committed to the mission of making a lasting impact on their communities. Bob commented that presidency tenures were getting shorter; however, this study indicates that commitment to rural areas increases over time, either over a lifetime or a long career in a rural area. Mary Ellen is the example from the participants who adopted a region over a lengthy career. She talked about her region as if it were her adopted home using the phrase "our ancestors."

What about presidents who are not from a rural area but are now serving or want to serve as presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas? How can they reach the level of understanding and commitment demonstrated by the presidents in this study? The presidents having similar values to the people of their specific rural area, the concept of "fit," was key to whether the presidents were successful. Some of the presidents in this study were not from the place where they were serving, but they were from rural places. I would like to believe that presidents whose values are similar to the

values prevalent in their rural area and who are willing to invest in doing the homework and becoming a part of their communities as individuals will be able to adapt to rural areas; however, since none of the presidents in this study were from a non-rural place, I cannot extend the analysis to include that situation.

The presidents mentioned specific steps that helped them reach their level of understanding: participating in professional networking with other tribal and community colleges engaged in rural economic development; spending time in their communities really listening to the community needs; getting to know people in the community personally and individually; learning the history and culture of the region; seeing the economy, infrastructure, demographics with a critical eye; reading a lot; interviewing business leaders; and “doing what’s right when you know what right is” (J.D.). This sounds like a long laundry list of what a president must do to really understand their region, but it conveys the depth of understanding that the presidents in this study had for their rural areas.

**Validation of the results.** I checked the grounded theory research against the four criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness recommended by Charmaz (2006) to verify and document validity and trustworthiness. Matilda, one of the study participants used a grounded theory methodology for a research project, and as a president of a rural community college she is familiar with the topic, so I asked for her evaluation of the study’s validity. Her comments are included following my own for the four aspects of validity.

**Credibility.** I am intimately familiar with the topics of economic development and community colleges in rural places because I have worked in these arenas for nearly

two decades. I became very familiar with the intersection of tribal and community colleges in rural areas and their efforts in economic development. I became familiar with the presidents in this study through casual conversations at national meetings, interviews, and in-depth analysis of the interview data. Before embarking on the study I reviewed literature about the different aspects of this study including economic development, community colleges and the mission of economic development, rural and rural economic development. I also reviewed literature about community colleges and tribal colleges. I reviewed literature about the Rural Community College Initiative and evaluations of the project. During the analysis I reviewed additional literature about tribal histories, U.S. Census data for the various locations, and information about the communities available on community websites.

I provided sufficient data in the findings to support the selection of concepts and categories and for the dimensions and properties for each concept and category. Some data were paraphrased and rich quotes were provided for depth of understanding of the concepts and categories. My dissertation adviser and methodologist, Expert A, Bob, Mary Ann, and Matilda reviewed drafts of the findings and provided feedback. Bob, Mary Ann, and Matilda were fine with the way their interviews were used in the theory construction. Matilda shared the following thoughts on the study's credibility,

I think you have done a good job with intimate familiarity with the topic. Of course this is a topic near and dear to my heart, but I was really into it and wanted more and more information. Everything you wrote was so right on. I was concerned at first with the religion metaphor and wondered if you had brought too much (of) your personal beliefs into the study, but as the metaphor developed the parallels kept getting stronger and stronger. It was almost meant to be that this study would go there. The metaphor also gave me a different perspective on my job that I think will help with future burn out issues. (Matilda)

**Originality.** I examined several studies about rural community colleges; however, did not find a study which addressed the topic which I was interested in pursuing, the president's role in the college adopting the economic development mission. Rankin's (2008) quantitative study addressed what rural colleges were doing but did not go into the why. Several articles discussed classification systems for rural colleges (Hardy & Katsinas, 2006; Hardy & Katsinas, 2007) and others discussed the unique aspects of serving as the leader of a rural college (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2007). Torres and Viterito's (2008) evaluation of the Rural Community College Initiative revealed that the colleges which were most successful at the initiative had presidents with certain characteristics, but they did not delve into how the presidents acquired those characteristics. I developed my questions based on my own curiosity in this topic, my understanding which was informed by the literature, and my experiences in economic development and community college administration. The initial questions were supplemented with questions that helped me pursue areas introduced by the first few participants. My initial coding was influenced by the literature; however, these codes were abandoned as I continued to write memos for the concepts. Using the metaphor helped me organize the concepts into categories. The categories and substantive theory are based on the data from this study.

Matilda commented,

I think that your categories are fresh and show new insights into the topic. The extent of your research is evident. Also, it is clear you didn't replicate any other study. Your interview questions were original and took you down a path that offered good insight into the topic. (Matilda)

**Resonance.** Several of the presidents brought personal experiences into the interview and commented about the quality of the questions. Immediately following the initial interviews, I was struck by some of the comments made by presidents about

growing up poor, being home, and wanting to make a difference in lieu of career advancement. These stories resonated with me. I examined the eight interviews in more depth and made connections among the interviews to develop concepts and categories; the resonance of their stories increased. Matilda, one of the participants, understands the similarities among tribal and community colleges in rural areas more because she read the study findings. The findings and the metaphor resonated with her.

It was amazing to me how similar all of our comments were. Talk about resonance! I was particularly struck by the whole sense of home concept and the fact that it isn't about career advancement, it is about a desire for rural development. I have better resonance of the topic after reading the chapter. The fullness of the studied experience is well done if one of your subjects (me) feels as if she has a better understanding of what rural community and tribal college presidents experience. It was affirming that others feel as strongly or more than me about the importance of rural development over career advancement. The metaphor of president as minister was powerful! (Matilda)

*Usefulness.* If tribal and community colleges in rural areas are the lynchpin of their communities, as some of the participants believed, then helping those colleges choose leaders who fit with their culture and have the passion and skills to lead their colleges in adopting economic development as missions then this study may benefit many rural communities. This study supports other studies which identify “fit” as important to hiring for rural community college positions (Cejda, 2010; Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2007; Twombly, 2005). The substantive theory examines elements of fit including values, proximity to home, and rural bias. Applying the substantive theory and the elements about fit to search and selection processes for senior administrators and presidents may be useful. The economic development actions pursued by these eight colleges and the six concepts within this category should be useful for tribal and community colleges in rural areas as potential initiatives for their colleges. Matilda recognized similarities between

challenges in her community and those portrayed by presidents from tribal colleges on reservations. Understanding this similarity may help presidents learn from other colleges about potential initiatives for their own areas.

I was fascinated at the similarities of the tribal schools with rural community colleges. Although I know we are both dealing with rural issues, I somehow thought the economic development challenges would be different on the reservation. Although the individual issues are about place the reasons are the same and the college president plays the same role because it is all about home. (Matilda)

**Researcher's expectations.** Consistent with the grounded theory methodology, the study did not begin with a central hypothesis or a set of hypotheses. As the researcher, I brought my own expectations from working in rural economic development and for a rural community college. I also brought expectations based on literature about the Rural Community College Initiative and from meeting several of the tribal and community college presidents who are members of the Rural Community College Alliance. After completing the analysis and construction of the theory, I returned to my expectations and evaluated whether they had been exceeded, met, or not met. I discuss my expectations and conclusions in the following paragraphs.

At the beginning of the study, I believed I would find that the presidents in this study, selected on the basis of their reputation for support and success at implementing economic development initiatives, would have an extraordinary commitment to both community colleges and either rural or tribal communities. I believed their commitment to rural places would be demonstrated by them having passed up opportunities to “move up” a career ladder that would have required them to leave a rural or tribal setting. Data from the interviews that expressed the presidents' attitudes toward rural affirm that the presidents have an extraordinary commitment to rural areas and most to the rural area

where they grew up. The only president who left a rural area to pursue a career felt a sense of “coming full circle” upon accepting the presidency of a rural community college. Although I anticipated this finding, the intensity of their commitment to the land of their childhood exceeded my expectations.

Although the presidents’ commitment to tribal and community colleges was strong, the range of intensity was more varied than the commitment to rural so I would say that my expectation was met but not exceeded. None appeared interested in leaving education or moving to a different type of institution; however, some found their way to community colleges from careers in other educational environments. The majority started their professional careers at tribal or community colleges and remained with this type of institution throughout their career. Several mentioned that they look at the presidential search announcements they receive through email, but only briefly, because they are not interested in moving to another place and even if they were, they would not consider a location that was not rural because of “fit”.

I anticipated that the presidents would tell stories about their personal epiphanies regarding their colleges’ responsibility or opportunity to support their local economies through educational leadership. This expectation was only marginally met. I describe three of the presidents’ stories about embracing the economic development role as epiphanies. The rest recounted experiences that were a more evolutionary process of the role coming into focus, becoming clearer, and making more sense. Their commitment to the economic development role was strong, but the process of gaining this perspective was more gradual for most of the presidents than I expected.

I expected to find that the presidents would be collaborative in their leadership styles. Their leadership styles overall exceeded my expectations for level of collaboration. Presidents lived the experience of shared governance and collaborative cabinets.

### **Comparison to other studies**

Rural bias, affinity for tribal and community colleges, fit with rural communities, and proximity to home were strong messages woven throughout the interviews and the analysis. The presidents had strong connections to rural places and saw their own values fitting with the communities where they lived. The presidents were more interested in their community's welfare than their own careers and they were collaborative leaders. The presidents led their colleges beyond traditional roles as they engaged in economic development.

**Economic development role.** Cross (1985) contended that community colleges that reach out to meet the local needs “would become a major force for the improvement of the local community through education” (p. 40). The presidents in this study agreed that their colleges could make a difference and were making a difference in their communities; however, they went beyond Cross' role of education to a broader role for their colleges. Their passion for the economic development mission was because they could benefit their communities and economies long term.

**Importance of fit with rural places.** My findings are consistent with those who found that fit with the rural area and culture is important for filling leadership positions, and finding those faculty members who may aspire to leadership positions, and especially for rural colleges (Cejda, 2010; Leist, 2007; Twombly, 2005). Strategies to identify

potential leaders from students, faculty and mid-level managers and help them develop into qualified candidates for leadership positions are consistent with my study (Ebbbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Faulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Luna, 2010; Robison, Sugar, & Miller, 2010; Wallin, 2010; Worley, 2010). Finding that rural community colleges prefer hiring future leaders from other rural places or the region over hiring non-rural applicants is consistent with my study (Twombly, 2005). What is not consistent with my study is the concept that framing rural job openings in a positive light, socializing applicants for rural positions during the search process, and modifying the search process to be more informative about the reality of rural settings and the diversity of the rural jobs would be successful strategies for rural community colleges (Cejda, 2010; Leist, 2007).

Most of the presidents in the study were from rural places, many from the place where they were serving as president or very near that place. The study participants were selected based on reputation for economic development actions, not because of their own route to serving as president of a tribal or community college in a rural place. I found strong connections between the presidents and their rural places. Many of the presidents were promoted internally or were working in the region when selected as president of their college. This was consistent with several studies and articles about rural colleges, both tribal and community colleges. Several articles regarding tribal colleges and their leadership feature presidents who are leading tribal colleges that serve their tribe or where they began their own education (Pember, 2007; Worley, 2010). One non-native president led the tribal college where he began his education; however, did not plan on staying because he “believes a tribal member should ultimately lead the school” (Pember,

2007, para. 16). The Little Big Horn College, a tribal college in Montana, strives to grow their own future leaders by encouraging their students to complete additional degrees at four-year colleges and then return to the Crow community (Worley, 2010). Identifying and mentoring potential leaders for the CEO position who already work for the college is one strategy recommended for community colleges that are facing a shortage of qualified candidates for presidential openings (Faulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Luna, 2010). Several studies pointed out the importance of community colleges growing leaders through internal leadership programs, partnerships with universities, and sending potential leaders to professional leadership programs (Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Luna, 2010; Robison, Sugar, & Miller, 2010; Wallin, 2010). These strategies ensure that qualified applicants are available who have connections to the rural places and are consistent with my findings.

The importance of “fit” was discussed in several studies and articles about tribal, rural, and other community colleges (Cejda, 2010; Leist, 2007; Twombly, 2005). Cejda (2010) observed “unique aspects of living and working in a rural environment illustrate the importance of fit” (p. 35). Twombly’s (2005) study of hiring practices for community college faculty at rural, suburban, and urban locations found the importance of “fit” with the college and community was most pronounced for the rural location. Factors for fit included “understanding the community college mission, familiarity with or being from the region, and being collegial or willing to do one’s part” (p. 436). In addition to fitting with the understanding of the role of teaching and being sensitive to student needs, “geographic fit was also important” for the rural community college (p. 436). The observations of the importance of fit with the region and being from the region are

consistent with the prominence of rural bias and fit in the substantive theory regarding presidents at tribal and community colleges in rural areas. One president of a rural community college admitted that the college was suspicious of applicants for faculty positions who did not have connections to rural places (Twombly, 2005). Although they dismissed applications from those without rural connections, they considered applicants from other rural places positively. This strategy matches the study participants who were from places like here who over time adopted the place as if it were home. Rural places are not all alike, but they are more similar than rural is to suburban and urban places.

Rural community colleges were encouraged to modify their searches for presidents and faculty to attract qualified applicants to their open positions (Cejda, 2010; Leist, 2007). Some of the perceived shortcomings of rural areas were “lack of cultural, social, shopping, and recreational amenities” and lower pay compared to non-rural locations (Cejda, 2010). Colleges were encouraged to be forthcoming about the reality of presidential and faculty positions at rural colleges, provide place-specific positive attributes in job announcements, and promote lower cost of living and shorter commutes as an offset to lower pay (Cejda, 2010; Leist, 2007). Cejda (2010) suggested that faculty be “socialized” to their new rural home because “the relationship between socialization and retention emphasizes the need to begin socialization into the rural community college with the search, not after hiring” (p. 37). In contrast to the idea that non-rural applicants may come to accept a rural position based on better advertising and socialization, my constructed theory indicates that the rural bias and fit with the culture and values happens during childhood. Since the rural bias and fit with the rural values and culture are so important in the constructed theory, the recommendations about hiring from non-rural

places are not consistent with the study's findings and may not be an effective long-term solution to addressing faculty and leadership shortages.

**Leadership styles.** An analysis of the RCCI project indicated that presidential leadership styles were integral to the success of each college's initiative. Leadership styles exhibited by the presidents in this study included being a servant leader, using situational leadership, reliance on a strong moral compass, taking responsibility for the right things happenings, engaging in work that fuels the leaders passion and empowering others to find their voices. These leadership traits and styles are consistent with Greenleaf's servant leadership, situational leadership, Covey's moral compassing and eighth habit, and Collins' level 5 leadership.

Greenleaf's servant leadership is "likened to turning the hierarchical pyramid upside down" (Spears, 2004). Spears summarizes this leadership style as "increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making" (p. 12). Spears distilled Greenleaf's work to ten critical characteristics of servant-leadership: (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to the growth of people, and (j) building community. One of the concepts in the substantive theory is "being present" in the communities. This is similar to the listening, empathy, and building community aspects of servant leadership. The presidents discussed getting others excited, helping others to understand, and being a "real good evangelist" as they persuaded others to *embrace the economic development role* with them.

Situational leadership describes leaders who are flexible and adaptable and move along the leadership style continuum depending on the situation and the skills and capacities of the employees or followers. The model developed by Blanchard and Zigarmi (as cited in Northouse, 2003, p. 88) shows the relationship between leadership styles and the development level of followers. Highly developed followers operate well with low supportive and low directive behavior in their leader – basically an absent supervisor. This would reflect the adult-adult relationship in Berne’s transactional analysis (as cited in Northouse, 2003). The presidents used different leadership styles based on the situation, recognizing that their communities were different, their audiences different. They also encouraged highly developed followers who ran the college operations. I believe the presidents were low directive with their senior staff but highly supportive.

Covey (1990, 1991) called being grounded in ethical and moral principles moral compassing; the leaders have an internal compass to an external set of principles. He observed that the “six major world religions all teach the same basic core beliefs” (p. 94). He likened a map to a management tool and the compass to a leadership tool. The compass, according to Covey (1989/2004), signifies “the power to choose our direction and purpose and obey the natural laws or principles that never change and that are universal, timeless, and self-evident. The categories *fit with community, culture and values* and *motivated by personal values* work together to create the internal compass for the presidents.

Level 5 leaders, as described by Collins (2005) are passionately competitive for the mission of the organization and not for their own ego. This leadership style is “not

about being “soft” or “nice” or purely “inclusive” or “consensus-building.” It is to “make sure the right decisions happen no matter how difficult or painful” (p. 11). It is not about the CEO making all the decisions but making sure the right decisions happen. The substantive theory’s category *making a difference* describes the presidents as being passionately committed to succeeding for their community and college. The presidents had staying power but were not seeking a legacy. It was not about their egos. These traits are consistent with level 5 leaders.

Covey (1989/2004) explained that “voice” is part of the spiritual aspect of a person, he continued “when you engage in work that taps your talent and fuels your passion – that rises out of a great need in the world that you feel drawn by conscience to meet – therein lies your voice, your calling, your soul’s code” (p. 5). We are moving from a culture where employees are told what to do to one where employees are being asked and challenged to be part of the solution. It is leadership’s responsibility to provide an environment in which employees are prepared to make choices, in which they are empowered and can express their own voice. The substantive theory that explains how presidents developed their perspective of economic development also explains that the presidents helped their communities find their own voices. Presidents asked the communities about their dreams and hopes and then helped them move there.

### **Limitations of the study**

As I noted in the introduction chapter, I believed the study of how successful economic development presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas develop their commitment and perspective of this college mission represented a gap in the research. The substantive theory constructed from interviews and referrals applies to this

single situation and should not be construed to apply to more general situations or other single situations. Dimensions, correlations, and strengths of relationships are my interpretations of qualitative data and should not be interpreted as being statistical results.

## **Implications**

The presidents in this study were visionary but they were also practical and pragmatic in practice. The implications of this study are practical strategies that colleges and professional associations can adopt or strengthen in order to help sitting presidents strengthen their understanding and practice of economic development from the college's perspective and help colleges fill future vacancies with qualified candidates who will *embrace the economic development role* for their rural college.

- Develop internal candidates. A successful strategy for finding leaders for our tribal and community colleges in rural areas may be to seek those who already have the rural bias and fit with the rural places and help them prepare for those positions. Some colleges identify potential future leaders from their student body. Others from mid-level managers and faculty. Early identification, ongoing mentoring, counseling and support for candidates to complete appropriate educations will help fill the pipeline for openings with qualified candidates with the rural bias and fit.
- Hire from similar rural areas. Advertisements for openings in regional newspapers may result in qualified applicants from outside the world of community and tribal colleges. Referrals and recommendations from a network of rural college leaders may also result in pools of applicants that have a rural bias and appropriate qualifications.

- Help non-rural new hires succeed in understanding rural. Identify and employ factors that help non-rural candidates fit with rural culture and values. A better understanding of how and why those without a rural upbringing come to adopt a rural setting as home may help colleges attract and retain qualified applicants who are not from rural areas.
- Create networks with other rural-based peers. Ensure leaders and mid-level managers with potential for advancement have networking opportunities with peers at other tribal and rural community colleges. Professional isolation is higher at rural colleges (Cejda, 2010). The time and costs to travel to other locations is higher from rural places (Kennamer & Katsinas, 2011). Finding networking opportunities that are also cost effective and not time consuming is a challenge, but should be pursued.
- Provide substantive learning opportunities. Professional associations for tribal and community colleges in rural areas should provide learning opportunities which include field visits to other rural colleges, peer presentations, and case studies of projects. The Rural Community College Alliance provides these opportunities and several participants mentioned the positive impact RCCA had on their understanding of economic development.
- Select an initiative and get started Leaders who want to learn more about economic development are encouraged to choose a project that will help them learn the economic development role by doing it. For example, interviewing business leaders will help college leaders be more informed about the community and workforce development needs and will help college leaders understand the economic development role for the college. This study provided a template of economic

development initiatives. RCCA members are willing to share their experiences and project recommendations.

## **Conclusion**

Although not viewed as core to the community college's curricular mission, some colleges have embraced an economic development role in order to benefit the economy in the community and the region both directly and indirectly. The Rural Community College Initiative is one example of colleges that have adopted this mission. Rural economies may never be as strong as their suburban and urban counterparts, but an educated population and dedicated leadership may help rural communities thrive. Many presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas lead initiatives that make a difference in their communities' economies.

Using grounded theory methodology to construct a substantive theory helped explain how presidents reached a perspective of the college adopting an economic development agenda. The presidents and their leadership were key factors to tribal and community colleges in rural areas adopting an economic development mission for their colleges. Presidents who participated in this study were nominated for their reputations of adopting economic development. They demonstrated strong rural bias and exhibited good fit with rural communities, their cultures, and values. The contextual and axial categories also described the presidents as people: they enjoyed being with people, knowing people, and working with people; they were influential without being directive.; they were humble and giving, caring about others; they liked to laugh and they worked hard. Their core values influenced them to *embrace the economic development mission*

and adopt as a guiding principle doing what was required to make a lasting and measurable impact on the community and its economy.

**Why the problem is important.** The problem of understanding the process by which at least some rural presidents reach a high level of commitment to the economic development role is important because several studies indicate that a high percentage of the presidents and other senior leaders at community colleges in all locations will be retiring in the near-term, leaving vacancies without enough qualified applicants (Boggs, 2003). Rural communities will be negatively impacted if there is a shortage of qualified candidates to replace those who will be retiring who understand and *embrace the economic development role* for tribal and community colleges in rural areas.

The impact tribal and community colleges in rural areas can provide for their economies is significant; however, adopting strategies that specifically benefit the local economy is not a core curricular mission for community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Cross, 1985). In order for rural communities to benefit from the community college in a significant way, the college leadership must adopt an economic development agenda. The problem is that leadership may not view enhancing the local economy or meeting the needs of the local workforce as critical missions of the college. College presidents must lead the effort for rural community colleges to adopt and effectively implement an economic development mission (Eddy, 2007; Torres & Viterito, 2008). The presidents of tribal and community colleges in rural areas are critical to the colleges engaging in economic development and rural openings may be the hardest to fill. This study resulted in a theory that explains how presidents of these rural colleges develop their perception that economic development is a critical mission for their colleges.

**Importance of the findings.** The close tie between being raised in rural settings and having a commitment to rural development indicates that colleges should emphasize growing their own future leaders. Presidents and leadership development programs for presidents may adopt ideas from the causal conditions for personal development and formal development programs. Presidents and colleges may use the consequence category and its concepts as a template for an economic development agenda. Although the actions are specific for each situation, the concepts have been generalized and can be applied to other settings. The understanding that other college presidents face similar situations and have made similar personal commitments to their rural communities may encourage presidents in their personal quests.

**Larger applications of the findings.** The primary audience for my findings is educational leaders, specifically of tribal and community colleges in rural places. Eller et al. (2003) identified leadership styles as making a difference in how effectively presidents of rural community colleges implemented strategies developed by the Rural Community College Initiative. Findings from my research may contribute to the field of leadership development for community colleges specifically in rural communities. The results of this study also should be beneficial to the economic development profession, legislators, and other funding agencies as they engage community colleges in a joint economic development agenda, develop a common language, and share a mission. It also should be useful to those who lead community colleges in rural settings, adapting to what may be a different political, geographic, and cultural landscape (Leist, 2007). The findings may help those who are hiring presidents and other leaders for rural and tribal colleges to adapt the job descriptions to recognize the skills that are needed (Bowman,

2009; Leist, 2007). Organizations that provide professional development for those aspiring to community college leadership and those already in positions of leadership at rural community colleges may find this research helpful in developing presentation content and format (Boggs, 2003).

### **Suggestions for further research**

In my opinion as the researcher, the substantive theory does not have any apparent gaps; however, the theory indicates possible follow-on research opportunities to be able to apply the theory to more situations and construct a more general theory. Also, I am interested in quantitative studies which could include more participants and whose results may lead to additional study areas. Examining community college presidents in other situations such as larger rural, suburban, and urban community colleges (different geography) will allow other researchers to formalize a more general theory across situations. Suggested follow on studies staying with the rural focus include both a qualitative and quantitative study.

One potential follow-on qualitative study could help answer the question about whether leaders who are not from rural places develop the rural bias and fit with rural places, culture, and values. All the participants in this study were from rural places. I am suggesting identifying a pool of potential participants from Rural Community College Alliance presidents who are not from rural places but are serving in rural places. The same experts or others familiar with this pool could recommend participants who have a reputation for economic development. The grounded theory study could be expanded to include the situation of presidents from non-rural places.

A quantitative study could use data from a survey of all Rural Community

College Alliance presidents in rural communities could be helpful to determine possible correlations between rural upbringing and satisfaction with working in a rural area, proximity to home and tenure in position, and other relationships indicated by this study. Factors related to satisfaction and self-evaluation of success in implementing an economic development mission may be helpful to those considering a rural position and those hiring for rural leadership positions.

## References

- AACC. (n.d.). *AACC affiliated councils*. Retrieved from American Association of Community Colleges: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/About/Pages/affiliatecouncil.aspx>
- Agnes, M. [Ed]. (2005). Vocation. In *Webster's new world college dictionary* (4th ed., p. 1600). Cleveland, OH: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
- Amey, M. J., & VanDerLinden, K. E. (2004). The institutional context of community college administration. In *Leadership Series No. 4* (AACC-RB-02-3, pp. 1-12). Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Briefs/Documents/08032004institutionalcontext.pdf>
- Bailey, T. R., & Averianova, I. E. (1999, May). *Multiple missions of community colleges: Conflicting or complementary?* (Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, pp. 1-5). Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/>
- Bailey, T. R., & Morest, V. S. (2004). *The organizational efficiency of multiple missions for community colleges* (Teachers College, Columbia University). Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>
- Baptist Faith and Message (2000). Retrieved from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp>
- Block, P. (2009). *Community: The structure of belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. (Original work published 2008)
- Boggs, G. R. (2003). Leadership context for the twenty-first century. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 123(Fall), 15-25.
- Bowman, N. (2009). Dreamweavers: Tribal college presidents build institutions bridging two worlds. *Tribal College Journal*, 20(4), 12-18. Retrieved from <http://www.tribalcollegejournal.org>
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (n.d.). In Carnegie Foundation (Ed.), *Basic Classification Technical Details*. Retrieved from <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp?key=798>
- Cejda, B. D. (2007). Connecting to the larger world: Distance education in rural community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 137(Spring), 87-98. Doi:10.1002/cc.273
- Cejda, B. D. (2010). Faculty issues in rural community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 152(Winter), 33-40, Doi: 10.1002/cc.425.

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (Original work published 2006)
- Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: complimentary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cohen, A., & Brawer, F. (2003). *The American community college* (4th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Collins, J. (2005). *Good to great and the social sectors: A monograph to accompany good to great*. Boulder, CO: Jim Collins.
- Corbin J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Council on Competitiveness/U.S. Department of Labor. (2008, March). *Cooperate: A practioner's guide for effective alignment of regional development and higher education*. Washington, DC: Council on Competitiveness
- Covey, S. (1991). *Principle-centered leadership*. New York: Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. (Original work published 1990)
- Covey, S. R. (2004). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. New York: Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. (Original work published 1989)
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cromartie, J. (2008). Defining the "rural" in rural America. *Amber Waves*, 6(3), 28-33. Retrieved from [www.ers.usda.gov/amberwaves](http://www.ers.usda.gov/amberwaves)
- Cross, K. P. (1985). Determining missions and priorities for the fifth generation. In W. L. Deegan & D. Tillery (Eds.), *Renewing the American community college* (pp. 34-50). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Deschenie, T. (2007). Accelerating Native prosperity takes all of us. *Tribal College Journal*, 18(3), 9-10. Retrieved from <http://tribalcollegejournal.org/themag/backissues/spring07/spring07desch.htm>
- Dougherty, K. J. (1994). *The contradictory college: The conflicting origins, impacts, and futures of the community college*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Dougherty, K. J., & Bakia, M. F. (1999). *The new economic development role of the community college* (Report No. JC000264). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED439750)
- Dougherty, K., & Bakia, M. (2000). Community colleges and contract training: Content, origins, and impact. *Teachers College Record*, *102*, 197-243.
- Dougherty, K. J., & Townsend, B. K. (2006). Community college missions: A theoretical and historical perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *136*(Winter), 5-13. Retrieved from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011359/home>
- Dougherty, K. J., & Townsend, B. K. (2006). Community college missions: A theoretical and historical perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *136*(Winter), 5-13. Retrieved from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011359/home>
- Ebbers, L., Conover, K. S., & Samuels, A. (2010). Leading from the middle: Preparing leaders for new roles. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *149*(Spring), 59-64. doi:10.1002/cc.396
- Eddy, P. (2007). Grocery store politics: Leading the rural community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *31*(4), 271-290. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/10668926.asp>
- Faulton-Calkins, P., & Milling, C. (2005). Community-college leadership: An art to be practiced: 2010 and beyond. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *29*, 233-250. doi:10.1080/1066892-590901176
- Fluharty, C., & Scaggs, B. (2007). The rural differential: Bridging the resource gap. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *137*(Spring), 19-26. Doi:10.1002/cc.266
- Fowler, L. (2003). *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Great Plains*. New York: Columbia University Press. Gale Virtual Reference Library
- Gibbs, R. (2005). Education as a rural development strategy. *Amber Waves*, November. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November05/Features/Education.htm>
- Giloth, R. P. (2000). Learning from the field: Economic growth and workforce development in the 1990s. *Economic Development Quarterly*, *14*(4), 340-359. Doi:10.1177/089124240001400402
- Goetz, S. J., & Rupasingha, A. (2005). How the returns to education in rural areas vary across the nation. In L. J. Beaulieu & R. Gibbs (Eds.), *The role of education: Promoting the economic and social vitality of rural America* (pp. 6-9). Retrieved from [http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/spec\\_reports.html](http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/spec_reports.html)

- Gracie, L. W. (1998). Measurable outcomes of workforce development and the economic impact of attending a North Carolina community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 104, 53-60. Retrieved from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011359/home>
- Grubb, W. N., Badway, N., Bell, D., Bragg, D., & Russman, M. (1997). *Workforce, economic, and community development: The changing landscape of the "entrepreneurial" community college* (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, the University of California at Berkeley). Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>
- Hardy, D. E., & Katsinas, S. G. (2006). Using community college classifications in research: From conceptual model to useful tool. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 30, 339-358. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/10668926.asp>
- Hardy, D. E., & Katsinas, S. G. (2007). Classifying community colleges: How rural community colleges fit. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 137, 5-17. Doi:10.1002/cc.265
- Harper-Anderson, E. (2008). Measuring the connection between workforce development and economic development: Examining the role of sectors for local outcomes. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 22(2), 119-135. Retrieved from <http://edq.sagepub.com>
- Himes, K. R. (2001). Responses to 101 questions on Catholic social teaching. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Hinde, S., & Dixon, J. (2007). Reinstating Pierre Bourdieu's contribution to cultural economy theorizing. *Journal of Sociology*, 43(4), 401-420. Doi:10.1177/1440783307083233
- Homestead Act. *Encyclopedia of Immigration and Migration in the American West*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006. *Credo Reference*. 15 Jan. 2010. Retrieved from [http://www.credoreference.com.web.devproxy.sheridan.edu:2048/entry/sageimaw/homestead\\_act](http://www.credoreference.com.web.devproxy.sheridan.edu:2048/entry/sageimaw/homestead_act).
- IEDC. (n.d.). *International Economic Development Council*. Retrieved from [http://www.iedconline.org/?p=About\\_IEDC](http://www.iedconline.org/?p=About_IEDC)
- Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2007, February). *The path of many journeys: The benefits of higher education for Native People and communities*. Retrieved from <http://www.aihec.org/resources/documents/ThePathOfManyJourneys.pdf>
- Katsinas, S. G. (1994). A review of the literature related to economic development and community colleges. *Community College Review*, 21(4). Retrieved from <http://crw.sagepub.com/>

- Katsinas, S. G. (2003). Two-year college classifications based on institutional control, geography, governance, and size. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 122*, 17-28.
- Kennamer, M., & Katsinas, S. G. (2011). An early history of the Rural Community College Initiative: Reflections on the past and implications for the future. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 35*, 234-251. doi:10.1080/10668926.2011.526056
- Kim, K. A. (2003). Leadership development programs. *New Directions for Community Colleges, Fall(123)*, 101-110.
- Krugman, P. (1990, March). *Increasing returns and economic geography* [Working Paper]. Retrieved from National Bureau of Economic Research: <http://www.nber.org>
- Kwitek, B. J. (2005). Driving economic development: How community colleges and high-tech businesses work together. *Dissertation Abstracts*. Retrieved from ProQuest Information and Learning Company. (UMI No. 3173037)
- Leist, J. (2007). "Ruralizing" presidential job advertisements. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 137*(Spring), 35-46. Doi:10.1002/cc.268
- Levin, J. S. (2000). The revised institution: The community college mission at the end of the twentieth century. *Community College Review, 28*(1), 1-25. Doi:1177/009155210002800201
- Luna, G. (2010). Succession planning: A doctoral program partnership for emerging community college leaders. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 34*, 977-990. doi:10.1080/10668921003723144
- McPhail, C. J., & McPhail, I. P. (2006). Prioritizing community college missions: A directional effort. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 136*(Winter), 91-99. Retrieved from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011359/home>
- MDC, Inc. (2001, September). *Expanding economic and educational opportunity in distressed rural areas*. Chapel Hill, NC: MDC, Inc
- MDC, Inc. (2003). *Revitalizing rural communities: Lessons from the Rural Community College Initiative*. Chapel Hill, NC: MDC, Inc
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Miller, D. R., Smith, D. J., McGeshick, J. R., Shanley, J., & Shields, C. (2008). *The history of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, 1800-2000*. Fort Peck Community College and Montana Historical Society Press.

- Miller, M. T., & Kissinger, D. B. (2007). Connecting rural community colleges to their communities. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 137(Spring), 27-34. Doi:10.1002/cc.267
- Murray, J. P. (2007). Recruiting and retaining rural community college faculty. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 137(Spring), 57-64. Doi:10.1002/cc.270
- Northouse, P. (2003). *Leadership theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Paulsen, M. B. (2001). The Economics of human capital and investment in higher education. In M. B. Paulsen & J. C. Smart (Eds.), *The finance of higher education: Theory, research, policy, and practice* (p. 75). New York: Agathon Press, a division of Algora Publishing.
- Pember, M. (2007). Humility, persistence, deducation. *Tribal College Journal*, 19(1), 24-27. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Pember, M. A. (2008). A steward of American Indian education. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, 25(21). Retrieved from <http://diverseeducation.com/>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Rankin, K. R. (2008). *Perceptions of institutional chief executive officers and chief academic officers of community colleges regarding issues, problems, and challenges related to economic and community development*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.
- RCCA. (n.d.). *Rural Community College Alliance*. Retrieved from <http://www.ruralccalliance.org/>
- Robison, G., Sugar, W., & Miller, B. (2010). Fostering community college leaders: An examination of leadership development programs. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 34, 605-623. doi:10.1080/10668920701831605
- Scott, S. (2004). *Fierce conversations: Achieving success at work and in life one conversation at a time*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group. (Original work published 2002)
- Shields, M., & Snyder, A. (2007). Building a 21st century rural workforce. *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy*, 37(1), 40-43. Retrieved from <http://www.jrap-journal.org/>
- Spears, L. (2004). The understanding and practice of servant-leadership. In L. Spears & M. Lawrence (Eds.), *Practicing servant leadership* (pp. 9-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Tischauser, L. V. (2003). Reservation system of the United States. In C. A. Barrett (Ed.), *American Indian History* (pp. 478-484). Pasadena, CA: Salem Press.
- Torres, V., & Viterito, A. (2008). *Keeping opportunities in place: The influence of the rural community college initiative*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Twombly, S. B. (2005). Values, policies, and practices affecting the hiring process for full-time arts and sciences faculty in community colleges. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(4), 423-447.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *State and County QuickFacts*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (n.d.). *WIRED: Talent driving prosperity*. Retrieved <http://www.doleta.gov/wired/>
- United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 2006. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.
- Wallin, D. L. (2010). Looking to the future: Change leaders for tomorrow's community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 149(Spring), 5-12. doi:10.1002/cc.390
- Worley, J. (2010). Caring, sharing in the big sky. *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, 22(2), 14-22. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Young, J. W. (1997). Community economic development through community colleges. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 97(Spring), 74-83. Retrieved from <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-HE.html>
- Zigarmi, D., Fowler, S., & Lyles, D. (2007). *Achieve Leadership genius: How you lead depends on who, what, where and when you lead*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press.

### Appendix A: Rural Community College Initiative Colleges

Colleges	Enrollment (2003-04)	Community Population (2000)	Carnegie Classification
Alabama Southern Community College Monroeville, AL	1,278	6,862	Rural-Small
Coahoma Community College Clarksdale, MS	1,961	20,645	Rural-Small
Fort Belknap College Harlem, MT	257	848	Tribal
Fort Peck Community College Poplar, MT	504	911	Tribal
Hazard Community College Hazard, KY	3,790	4,806	Rural-Medium
Northern New Mexico Community College Española, NM	2,121	9,288	Pub4 Pri Assoc
Salish Kootenai College Pablo, MT	1,130	1,814	Tribal
Southeast Community and Technical College Cumberland, KY	4,517	2,611	Rural-Medium
Southwest Texas Junior College Uvalde, TX	5,140	14,929	Rural-Medium
Blackfeet Community College Browning, MT	561	1,065	Tribal
Danville Community College Danville, VA	4,060	48,411	Rural-Medium
Laredo Community College Laredo, TX	9,032	176,576	Rural-Large
Meridian Community College Meridian, MS	3,572	39,968	Rural-Medium
Mountain Empire Community College Big Stone Gap, VA	2,906	4,856	Rural-Medium

Colleges	Enrollment (2003-04)	Community Population (2000)	Carnegie Classification
New Mexico State University - Carlsbad Carlsbad, NM	1,236	25,625	Pub2in4: Assoc
Phillips Community College Helena, AR	2,350	6,323	Pub2in4: Assoc
Big Sandy Community and Technical College Prestonsburg, KY	2,547	164	Rural- Medium
Sinte Gleska University Rosebud, SD	1,400	1,557	Tribal
Sitting Bull College Fort Yates, ND	289	228	Tribal
Somerset Community College Somerset, KY	5,819	11,352	Rural-Large
Southeastern Community College Whiteville, NC	2,011	5,148	Rural- Medium
Technical College of the Lowcountry Beaufort, SC	1,693	12,950	Rural- Medium
University of New Mexico-Gallup Gallup, NM	3,056	20,209	Pub2in4: Assoc
Wallace Community College-Selma Selma, AL	1,840	20,512	Rural-Large

Note: Size (public rural - serving categories) Institutional size is based on full-year unduplicated credit headcount, where small is defined as less than 2,500; medium as 2,500 through 7,500; and large as greater than 7,500. Size is based on IPEDS data for 2003-04. (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.)

Sources: Enrollment (Carnegie, n.d.), Community Population (U.S. Census at <http://www.census.gov>), Listing of colleges (Torres & Viterito, 2008)

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Informed Consent**

As the researcher, I will introduce myself, ask the participant if I may digitally record our conversation and the interview. If consent to record is given, I will turn on the digital recorder and review the informed consent information. I will playback the initial conversation to check the recorder position and sound level. I will proceed with the interview with the recorder turned on. I will ask the participant to choose a pseudonym to be used in the data analysis and report.

For the initial interview, I will introduce the topic of the college's role in economic development and then conduct an unstructured, open-ended interview. Potential questions will be recorded on non-sequenced notecards to use to encourage the interviewee to continue discussing the topic. If the participant stays on topic, the notecards will not be used. Potential questions include:

- What initiatives do you identify as part of their rural community college's mission?
- What experiences influence your understanding of economic development?
- How emphatically do you embrace the economic development mission for the college?
- What skills do you identify as needed to succeed at implementing an economic development strategy?
- How have you developed those skills?

- What leadership styles do you use to effectively implement an economic development strategy?

For subsequent interviews, I will listen for similar categories to those introduced by the earlier interviewees. If these are not brought up by the participant, the researcher will introduce the categories in the form of open-ended questions. Categories and questions related to them will be recorded on non-sequenced notecards

At the conclusion of each interview, I will explain my plan for member checking and ask if the participant will be willing to review either transcripts or concepts developed from their interview. I will confirm their permission for me to contact them by telephone or email for follow-up questions or clarifications. I will mail a thank you note to each participant following the interview.

### Appendix C: 110 Colleges for Potential Pool from RCCA Membership

College	City	State	2008 Population
Ilisagvik College Tribal	Barrow	AK	4,010
Snead State Community College	Boaz	AL	8,349
Enterprise - Ozark Community College	Enterprise	AL	25,351
Northeast Alabama Community College	Rainsville	AL	4,990
Northwest-Shoals Community College	Muscle Shoals	AL	13,032
Northwest Arkansas Community College	Bentonville	AR	35,526
South Arkansas Community College	El Dorado	AR	19,905
Ozarka College	Melbourne	AR	1,685
Rich Mountain Community College	Mena	AR	5,630
Tohono O'odham Community College Tribal	Sells	AZ	2,799
College of The Siskiyous	Weed	CA	3,024
Lake City Community College	Lake City	FL	22,360
Altamaha Technical College	Jesup	GA	10,459
Northeast Iowa Community College	Calmar	IA	1,017
North Iowa Area Community College	Mason City	IA	27,337
Indian Hills Community College	Ottumwa	IA	24,342
Northwest Iowa Community College	Sheldon	IA	4,757
Southeastern Community College	West Burlington	IA	3,283
Spoon River College	Canton	IL	14,545
Colby Community College	Colby	KS	4,803
Cloud County Community College	Concordia	KS	5,208
Highland Community College	Highland	KS	945
Labette Community College	Parsons	KS	11,065
Ashland Community College	Ashland	KY	21,346
Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College	Cumberland	KY	2,352
Hazard Community College	Hazard	KY	4,796
Henderson Community College	Henderson	KY	27,933
Hopkinsville Community College	Hopkinsville	KY	32,076
Madisonville Community College	Madisonville	KY	19,106
Maysville Community College	Maysville	KY	9,246
West Kentucky Community and Technical College	Paducah	KY	25,521
Big Sandy District	Prestonsburg	KY	3,862
Berkshire Community College	Pittsfield	MA	42,652
Glen Oaks Community College	Centreville	MI	1,521
Bay College (formerly Bay de Noc CC)	Escanaba	MI	12,214
Gogebic Community College	Ironwood	MI	5,368
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College Tribal	Mount Pleasant	MI	26,675
Riverland Community College	Austin	MN	22,800
Leech Lake Tribal College Tribal	Cass Lake	MN	828

College	City	State	2008 Population
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College Tribal	Cloquet	MN	11,387
Vermilion Community College	Ely	MN	3,473
Itasca Community College	Grand Rapids	MN	8,743
Hibbing Community College	Hibbing	MN	16,209
Rainy River Community College	International Falls	MN	5,906
White Earth Tribal and Community College Tribal	Mahnomen	MN	1,185
Pine Technical College	Pine City	MN	3,285
Northland Community & Technical College	Thief River Falls	MN	8,472
Mesabi Range Community & Technical College	Virginia	MN	8,480
Ridgewater College	Willmar	MN	17,774
Minnesota State College Southeast Technical	Winona	MN	26,785
Linn State Technical College	Linn	MO	12,580
State Fair Community College	Sedalia	MO	20,990
North Central Missouri College	Trenton	MO	6,047
Coahoma Community College	Clarksdale	MS	18,006
East Central Community College	Decatur	MS	1,943
Itawamba Community College	Fulton	MS	4,073
Pearl River Community College	Poplarville	MS	3,003
Southwest Mississippi Community College	Summit	MS	1,624
Blackfeet Community College Tribal	Browning	MT	1,057
Little Big Horn College Tribal	Crow Agency	MT	1,552
Fort Belknap College Tribal	Harlem	MT	787
Miles Community College	Miles City	MT	8,102
Fort Peck Community College Tribal	Poplar	MT	866
Stone Child College Tribal	Box Elder	MT*	794
Chief Dull Knife College Tribal	Lame Deer	MT*	2,018
Stanly Community College	Albemarle	NC	15,522
Richmond Community College	Hamlet	NC	5,807
James Sprunt Community College	Kenansville	NC	1,182
Lenoir Community College	Kinston	NC	22,360
Carteret Community College	Morehead City	NC	9,513
Piedmont Community College	Roxboro	NC	8,667
Edgecombe Community College	Tarboro	NC	10,257
Southeastern Community College	Whiteville	NC	5,233
Martin Community College	Williamston	NC	5,382
Sitting Bull College Tribal	Fort Yates	ND	284
Fort Berthold Community College Tribal	New Town	ND	1,712
North Dakota State College of Science	Wahpeton	ND	7,585
Williston State College	Williston	ND	12,641
Cankdeska Cikana Community College Tribal	Fort Totten	ND*	952
Northeast Community College	Norfolk	NE	22,940
Mid-Plains Community College	North Platte	NE	24,107
Western Nebraska Community College	Scottsbluff	NE	14,785
Little Priest Tribal College Tribal	Winnebago	NE	902
Nebraska Indian Community College Tribal	Macy	NE*	956

College	City	State	2008 Population
Navajo Technical College Tribal	Crownpoint	NM	2,630
Mesalands Community College	Tucumcari	NM	5,268
Rhodes State College	Lima	OH	37,829
Zane State College	Zanesville	OH	25,129
Western Oklahoma State College	Altus	OK	18,912
Murray State College	Tishomingo	OK	3,150
Northern Oklahoma College	Tonkawa	OK	3,136
Eastern Oklahoma State College	Wilburton	OK	2,893
Southwestern Oregon Community College	Coos Bay	OR	15,665
Technical College of the Lowcountry	Beaufort	SC	11,755
Roane State Community College	Harriman	TN	6,658
Coastal Bend College	Beeville	TX	12,682
Frank Phillips College	Borger	TX	12,677
Kilgore College	Kilgore	TX	12,010
Paris Junior College	Paris	TX	26,050
College of the Mainland	Texas City	TX	44,491
Southwest Texas Junior College	Uvalde	TX	16,142
Mountain Empire Community College	Big Stone Gap	VA	5,662
Danville Community College	Danville	VA	44,660
Paul D. Camp Community College	Franklin	VA	8,877
Southwest Virginia Community College	Richlands	VA	3,997
Southwest Wisconsin Technical College	Fennimore	WI	2,314
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College Tribal	Hayward	WI	2,342
College of the Menominee Nation Tribal	Keshena	WI	1,394
Northern Wyoming Community College District	Sheridan	WY	17,197
Eastern Wyoming College	Torrington	WY	5,514

Note: 2000 population data used when 2008 was not available. This is indicated by an \* after the state.

## **Appendix D: Initial Correspondence to Potential Participants**

Dear President (name):

My name is Susan Bigelow. I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership program at Colorado State University. I am currently an administrator at a rural community college and worked for over a decade as an economic development practitioner. I am conducting qualitative research for my dissertation on the topic of tribal and rural community colleges' role in economic development from the presidents' perspective. During the next several months, I hope to interview several presidents who have been recognized by others as having successfully implemented economic development initiatives at the colleges they lead. I am interested in having you participate in this project.

I am hopeful that you will consent to be an integral part of this study. The Rural Community College Initiative/Alliance recognized that rural and tribal community colleges can benefit the economy of their region when they have the capacity to influence change. My research project is focused on describing your perception of the colleges' role in economic development, using a grounded theory approach. I believe the results of this study will be beneficial and interesting to the RCCA members.

Should you agree to participate, I would like to interview you at your college, at another location that is convenient for you, or by telephone. The interview will take about 2 hours. I may have additional questions following review of our interview and would like to follow-up by telephone or email.

I will follow CSU's research standards and ethical codes to protect your identity and privacy. I will ask you to select a pseudonym for use during the audio-recorded interview and in the research analysis and study presentation. I will not share the link between your identity and your pseudonym with anyone. I will use generic descriptors to protect your identity in the study. Your participation, if you agree, is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, even after we start the interview. Questions regarding your rights as a participant may be directed to the Colorado State University – Research Integrity and Compliance Review Office at (970) 491-1553.

I am grateful that you will consider participating in this study and look forward to visiting with you to answer any questions. I will call you within 24 hours to answer any questions and, if you agree to participate, schedule a time and location for the interview. Please give this initial request your favorable consideration. You may contact me by email at [sbigelow@sheridan.edu](mailto:sbigelow@sheridan.edu) or at (307) 752-1762, my mobile telephone.

Sincerely, Susan Bigelow

## **Appendix E: Member Checking Follow-up Email to Participants**

Dear President (Name):

It has been many months since you graciously agreed to be interviewed for my dissertation research. Life and work have both intervened during this past year, but I am nearing completion of my analysis and writing.

As an integral part of the quality construct, I am checking back with you and the other participants. I am attaching a transcription of the core of your interview and a draft copy of my dissertation. My findings are in chapter 4. I have some writing to complete in this chapter, but wanted to show you the quotes which I am planning to use from your interview and have you see them in the context in which I plan to use them. If I have misinterpreted any part of your interview or you would like me to omit any quote because of sensitivity, please let me know.

I would also appreciate your feedback on the grounded theory as I have developed it and any further thoughts you would like me to consider as data for my study.

My proposal to make a short presentation on some aspect of this study was accepted for the RCCA conference in Oklahoma City in September. I plan to complete writing by August 18 and defend my dissertation in early September.

Thank you again for participating. I have been honored to spend this time with you and seven other wonderful people who lead tribal and community colleges in rural areas.

Susan Bigelow

## Appendix F: Cross Case Analysis to Support Selection of Core Category

	<b>Causal category</b>		<b>Core category</b>		<b>Consequences</b>
Matilda	(A new economic development director) would call me. “I’m working on such and so. Can you provide this if they come?” He knew what the college could do because he had done this in a bigger area. He knew that he relied on the local community college that had been doing this kind of stuff forever to do.	→	“Yeah, absolutely. We can do that.” So that’s when I got it. Yeah, we can do that. I went, “Ah ha, we’re key to making this happen. I love this.”	→	So at that point is when I decided I wanted to be a community college president. I want to know what role community colleges play in this whole deal.
Jack	We got to see all of the different things that each of the colleges were doing to try to impact the economy around them other than offer a traditional course of study. So that’s how we got to know each other.	→	But RCCI seemed to crystallize some of the things we were doing. I try to think of it in terms of how does it do better things for the communities. How can the communities live more wholesome, healthy, wealthy lives?	→	I don’t know if we would have gone particularly in the pattern that we did if we hadn’t been involved with RCCI but we were.
Russell	Close to thirty years ago, our unemployment rate was 44% on this reservation. Thirty-some, close to forty years later, it’s now 67%. But we’ve failed to attract those people (businesses) to come here because the other part of the whole structure is not in place.	→	I realize I need to be educated on that whole topic myself. That’s why I’m interested in RCCA to have them come and help create that vision, create that philosophy and understanding of how tribal colleges need to play a bigger part in economic development.	→	What I see with the bigger picture of the economic development side of this is how do we use the college as a way to train not just two, three, or four people on our reservation but on a much larger scale in terms of understanding economic development? Be the true leaders in the economic development leadership.
Bob	He said, “You really have to be a leader. You have to actually lead economic development and sustainment and growth of this area.” I said, “Well no, we need to be actively engaged. I agree.” He said, “No you’re going to have to lead.”	→	I think it’s a little different twist but it really means something because I’ve taken off since that discussion and have been really forcing the regional picture concept. Not forcing it, but working with a lot of communities to think regionally rather than locally. It really springboards us into a different discussion.	→	It continues to make me press forward and actually engage with communities in a different way. What we’ve done is we’ve done just an overhaul or retrofit of the extended campus operations.

	<b>Causal category</b>		<b>Core category</b>		<b>Consequences</b>
Troy	I don't know that we understood the importance of our role in economic development. That has evolved over time, no question about that. It really took shape I think when the Rural Community College Initiative was introduced. We started looking for ways that we could engage the community in economic development.	→	We recognized almost immediately that it was not us but it was the community.	→	We actually created what I would call a think tank. We just brought some people together, a cross section of our community. We said, "What can we do, all of us together, to grow the economy?"
J./D.	In these rural communities, you have iconic leaders who are old men and women who are looked upon and revered and who stand up with broken voices and say, "You can't sink half a boat. You can't sink half a ship. We're all in this together." In our region, it goes back to the newspaper owner and publisher, George and the nucleus of people that he had developed. He passed it on to Harry and then Harry passed it on. What we have here is a culture of iconic leadership.	→	The idea that the institutions could be part of the assets in the matrix of incentives was already ingrained quite well with me. I already had the mindset coming into it and being a product of a rural community college.	→	The best thing that we can do is to continue to stress for people to understand and get the big picture and to grow leadership, to grow visionaries, to continue to do a large leadership training academy here. What we have to do is to let people begin to internalize their history and anticipate their future.
Mary Ann	Once you switch from a four-year institution to a two-year institution, and I did that, when I left a private, liberal arts college, to a community college...I realized the mission of a community college is very complex. It's not just of the mind but it's also a very accepted thing to do training and to partner very directly with the community that you serve. That's what is so exciting about that. So that started it.	→	At that time, I asked our president to go ahead and allow me to represent the college in the community. So I was very involved out in the community and as such sat on the Chamber board and other different development boards. I became very much involved in appreciating economic development and where it fits with two-year colleges.	→	So each town takes on a different character, they're very unique. As the president, you have to be out and about and get to know those towns and see what's happening in those towns and build trust with them. I work very closely with the superintendents in each one of these towns.
Mary Ellen	The first thing I did when I came on board as president is I made visits to all of the CEOs of the regional economy. They told me specifically that the workforce needs to have specific skills and they enumerated those skills. They said you need to do stackable credentials. You need to do short-term certificates; not everything needs to be a two-year degree. So they were very open with me.	→	I would say that it enhanced my view of economic development. I feel like I was then armed with good information about what the expectation of business and industry was of higher ed and I had a chance to talk to them about our realities.	→	I asked them if they would be involved in a curriculum design process. They told us what was missing and we created the plan around what they said we ought to start looking at. Now we're actually designing those programs. And industry is still at the table telling us what these programs should look like.