

2022

Business Strategies Towards Financial Stability for Community College Administrators: A Qualitative Study

Lauren Holubec
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Business Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Lauren Stauffer Holubec

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Pam Epler-Brooks, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Sarah Inkpen, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. David Moffett, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Business Strategies Towards Financial Stability for Community College Administrators:

A Qualitative Study

by

Lauren Stauffer Holubec

MEd, The Pennsylvania State University, 2012

BA, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2008

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

Nationwide, community college administrators are attempting to maintain financial stability amid extreme budget challenges. The problem that was addressed through this study is that some community college administrators at a large Northeastern state lack strategies to sustain financial stability, which threatens the 14 institutions' ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice. The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies that community college administrators at multiple institutions of varying financial stability use. The conceptual framework that grounded the study was Porter's five forces framework. Research questions focused on what strategies are used, why these strategies are used, and in what way they support financial stability currently and in the future. For this case study, purposive sampling was used and semi structured interviews with 10 community college administrators were conducted. Data was analyzed by transcribing interviews, participant member checking, and the use of an online tool to identify codes and themes. The themes that emerged are budget control, marketing strategy, industry attractiveness, and competitive environment. These findings led to the development of a policy paper with the following recommendations: develop committees to share best practices on cultivating auxiliary revenue and competitive advantage strategies, adopt new marketing and outreach strategies, and invest in professional development for college administrators related to business strategies. These recommendations provide the potential of positive social change by supporting continued operations of the community colleges not only allowing the faculty and staff to continue their employment but also serving students that depend on community colleges. Educated students, in turn, serve their communities and society.

Business Strategies for Community College Administrators Towards Financial Stability:

A Qualitative Study

by

Lauren Stauffer Holubec

M.Ed., The Pennsylvania State University, 2012

BS, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, 2008

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2022

Dedication

To my mom and dad, Jim and Sue Stauffer. You have always provided a safe space for me to dream big and land softly. Thank you for being my anchor and the reason for this success.

To Ryan, Eric, & Emerson- may you love learning as much as your father and I do, and always know we will be here to support you in your big dreams.

Acknowledgments

This milestone would not be achievable without the love, support, and encouragement of my husband and best friend, Steve. Thank you for helping me achieve this goal by being my true partner. I love you and am so proud of what we can do together.

To my chair, Dr. Epler, and second chair, Dr. Inkpen- thank you for your guidance and knowledge through this extraordinary process.

Thank you to my family, friends, and colleagues who helped me along this journey. It is overwhelming to think of the love and support that has guided me to this place.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|----|
| Section 1: The Problem..... | 1 |
| The Local Problem..... | 1 |
| Rationale | 2 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 3 |
| Significance of the Study | 4 |
| Research Question | 5 |
| Review of the Literature | 5 |
| Conceptual Framework..... | 7 |
| Review of the Broader Problem..... | 8 |
| Implications..... | 19 |
| Summary | 20 |
| Section 2: The Methodology..... | 21 |
| Research Design and Approach | 21 |
| Description of Qualitative Research | 21 |
| Justification of Research Design..... | 22 |
| Participants..... | 23 |
| Data Collection | 25 |
| Data Analysis | 26 |
| Data Analysis Results | 27 |
| Data Generation | 28 |
| Data Gathered | 28 |
| Data Recording | 28 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Build the Findings From the Problem and Research Questions | 29 |
| Data Analysis Findings | 35 |
| Theme 1: Budget Control..... | 35 |
| Theme 2: Marketing Strategy | 39 |
| Theme 3: Industry Attractiveness | 41 |
| Theme 4: Competitive Environment..... | 46 |
| Conclusion | 48 |
| Section 3: The Project..... | 51 |
| Introduction..... | 51 |
| Project Description and Goals | 52 |
| Project Description..... | 52 |
| Project Goals | 53 |
| Rationale | 53 |
| Review of the Literature | 54 |
| Justification of a Policy Recommendation Paper | 55 |
| Usage of Evidence in the Development of Policy | 56 |
| Higher Education Policy Development | 56 |
| Use of Policy in Development of Financial Stability Strategies..... | 57 |
| Project Description..... | 58 |
| Resources Needed and Existing Supports..... | 58 |
| Potential Barriers and Potential Solutions | 59 |
| Timeline for Implementation | 59 |
| My Roles and Responsibilities..... | 62 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Project Evaluation Plan..... | 63 |
| Outcomes-Based Evaluation..... | 63 |
| Justification for Outcomes-Based Evaluation..... | 63 |
| Overall Goal and Stakeholders | 64 |
| Summary | 66 |
| Project Implications | 67 |
| Social Change | 67 |
| Local Stakeholders..... | 68 |
| Higher Education Context..... | 68 |
| Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions..... | 70 |
| Project Strengths and Limitations..... | 71 |
| Strengths | 71 |
| Limitations | 72 |
| Recommendations for Alternative Approaches | 72 |
| Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change | 73 |
| Reflection on Importance of the Work | 74 |
| Growth as a Scholar | 74 |
| Growth as a Practitioner..... | 74 |
| Growth as a Project Developer | 75 |
| Reflection on Importance of the Work | 75 |
| Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research..... | 76 |
| Implications..... | 76 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Applications | 76 |
| Future Research | 77 |
| Conclusion | 77 |
| References..... | 79 |
| Appendix: The Project | 90 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1. Comparison of Research Question One and Codes | 32 |
| Table 2. Comparison of Research Question Two and Codes | 32 |
| Table 3. Themes and Focused Coding | 33 |

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Funding and student enrollment for community colleges in a large Northeast state have declined in the past 9 years (Peterson, 2019). This enrollment decline has led to an imbalance of revenue to expenses. In some instances, to decrease expenses, community college administrators are selling buildings on several campuses (Shaver, 2019). These factors have forced community college administrators to examine how to best operate courses and serve students with fewer classrooms (Shaver, 2019). As noted in a 2015 white paper prepared by the Council of Higher Education and the state's board of education, community college administrators at these institutions cite the need for new strategies to remain fiscally stable (Micek, 2019).

Funding and student enrollment challenges are not unique to this local problem. On a national level, community colleges are experiencing declining funding from local and state appropriations, as well as decreased student enrollments. Confidence of financial stability from community college leaders has dropped to 44%, from 52% in 2017 (Hanover Research, 2019). Community college leaders at the national level are investigating if mergers, acquisitions, alternative education models, and attracting new learners are effective strategies to support financial stability. Community colleges must act more like businesses and focus on increasing and diversifying revenue to continue operations.

A gap in practice exists for some community college administrators in practicing effective financial stabilizing strategies (Micek, 2019). Community college leaders must

understand its position within a competitive environment to support long-term sustainability. The problem investigated by this study is that some community college administrators in a Northeastern state lack strategies to sustain financial stability, which threatens the institution's ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice. If this is not studied, other community colleges risk relevancy in the new economy and eventual redundancy from competitors that are more flexible and nimbler to change (McKenzie, 2020).

Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies used by community college administrators in a large Northeastern state to establish financial stability. The study site, a large Northeastern state, has 14 community colleges that serve nearly 300,000 students per year. The 14 community colleges and its students contribute \$13.6 billion in income to the state's economy in 2016-2017, approximately 2% of the total gross state product (State Commission for Community Colleges, 2020). At the 2021 Annual Meeting, community college presidents highlighted the need to use proactive business strategies to remain financially stable and continue to serve students and contribute to the state's economic well-being (State Commission for Community Colleges, 2021).

Interviews with community college administrators from several community college in a large Northeastern state were used to develop an understanding of strategies that might support financial stability. Like businesses, community colleges must be aware of the opportunities that can be taken advantage of for success as well as the conditions

and events that can threaten sustainability. Community colleges' business environment is supported and formed by its relationship with students (customers and buyers), faculty (suppliers), and intensity of competition among other higher education institutions that compete for the same value-added opportunities that drive revenue. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies used by community college administrators in a large Northeastern state to establish financial stability. Several of the successful community colleges in the large Northeastern state might be using strategies that could add value to other community colleges in the large Northeastern state that are currently struggling.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, I used several key terms found in scholarly literature. These terms clarify the background to the problem.

Community college: A community college is a 2-year public higher education institution that offers technical diplomas, associate degrees, industry-based certification programs, and professional development (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Competitive advantage: The strategic advantage one business entity has over its rival entities within its competitive industry is known as competitive advantage (Negulescu, 2020).

Financial stability: Financial stability is the ability for an organization to facilitate and enhance economic processes, manage risks, and absorb shocks (Schinasi, 2004).

Significance of the Study

Higher education funding in the study state is reported as one of the lowest funded in the United States by a 2021 Center on Budget and Policy Priority report (Jackson & Saenz, 2021). The state has consistently reduced higher education funding by over 33% over the past 10 years. Funding concerns coupled with decreasing enrollments and increased higher education competition have resulted in community colleges in this state experiencing significant budget challenges. This study addresses a local problem by focusing on community college administrators in a large Northeastern state that used strategies leading to financial stability. If specific strategies are used, it supports these institutions' ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice (Morton, 2019). Understanding what strategies can support financial stability can provide new guidance to community college administrators in a large Northeastern state and add to the body of knowledge surrounding this topic.

There has been significant research in understanding how 4-year public and private institutions use strategies to support financial stability (Jessop, 2018; Somers et al., 2018). Research on the alignment between financial stability and community colleges may not exist (Jessop, 2018). This research may contribute to the gap in practice for community college leaders. This qualitative study, while focused on the local level, may also have applicability to community colleges across the country that are also experiencing financial challenges. The results of this study may provide suggestions to improve financial stability, which may lead to better training or mentoring of other community college administrators.

Research Question

The focus of this study was to identify what strategies community college administrators at multiple institutions of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state may use to support financial stability. Financial stability for this study was described as a community college's ability to continue its operations to remain a viable educational choice for communities. Because financial stability is the result of many reasons, this study includes conversations with community college administrators from institutions of varying financial stability to gain an understanding of the strategies used or not used that support financial stability. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability?

RQ2: Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability?

Review of the Literature

An extensive review of the literature that pertained to business strategies and financial stability provided very little current or relevant research regarding the activities or actions of community college administrators. The existing body of literature was focused primarily on the broader topic of higher education, specifying at times 4-year private and public colleges and universities (Miotto et al., 2020; Rabin et al., 2020;

Turlacu et al., 2019). However, research on business strategies for financial stability for both private and non-profit companies was prevalent (Fruwirth et al., 2020; Taran et al., 2019). The review of the literature has been broken into seven sections to address this topic as it relates to community college administrators. The first section introduces the conceptual framework and provides information on its application to the study. The second section is a historical review of the mission and founding of community colleges. The third section provides more details related to community college funding. The fourth section describes characteristics that 4-year private and public colleges and universities have in common with community colleges as it relates to financial stability and business strategies. The fifth section provides an overview of recent research related to private and non-profit companies and business strategies for financial stability. The sixth section summarizes the research.

The literature review was conducted using databases with an emphasis in Education and Business and Management, including Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis, Academic Search Complete, ABI/Inform, Business Source Complete, and Emerald Insight via the Walden Library and Google Scholar. The key words used for this research included *community college*, *business strategies*, *financial stability*, *higher education*, *competitive advantage*, *entrepreneurial*, *business model innovation*, and *Porter's Five Factors*. Key words produced peer-reviewed research that provided relevancy and applicability to this study.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies that community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability. The conceptual framework that guides this study was Porter's five forces. This framework is a tool for analyzing an organization's competitive environment (Bruijl, 2018). Organizational leaders can analyze external factors that impact their business strategies. Porter's five forces framework includes the microenvironment that drive competition and threaten an organization's ability to make a profit: (1) the bargaining power of buyers, (2) the bargaining power of suppliers, (3) the threat of new entrants, (4) the threat of substitutes, and (5) competitive rivalry (Porter, 1979). Leaders want to maintain a sustainable competitive strategy, especially when seeking financial stability in uncertain times.

According to Yükseköğretim (2017), higher education can be evaluated using a business research approach because of its participation in three assumptions of business-competitive markets, profit maximization, and competitive resource bundles. As community college administrators seek to support operations in an ever-changing environment, community college administrators must have strategies to support the varied external opportunities and be prepared for threats that may exist. As organizations analyze their operating environment, Porter's five forces framework is a strategy to understand the different forces that impact and shape profit (Melahat Oneren et al., 2017).

Porter's five forces framework suggests that the five forces are interrelated (Porter, 1979). Developments in one force may have an impact in another. Furthermore,

understanding this phenomenon allows for leaders to gain a comprehensive view of what is impacting an organization's profitability. Awareness of the five forces can help leaders better understand the structure of an industry and develop a position that is more profitable, more sustainable, and less vulnerable to attack (Bruijl, 2018). In this study, Porter's five forces helped to explain and document the business strategies that community college administrators use to support financial stability.

The use of Porter's five forces as a framework also addresses the research questions in this study. Using these research questions, I sought to understand what strategies community college leaders use, and why they are used. Porter's five forces is a comprehensive framework for business leaders to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to an organization. As community college leaders shared their experiences, the use of Porter's five forces was a way for them to understand how strategies support financial stability.

Review of the Broader Problem

Community colleges were created in the early 1900s to meet a growing need for education outside of the traditional secondary school options. The mission of these early schools was to prepare individuals to locally participate in the workforce. These 2-year institutions were advocated by local community organizations and financially supported by local funds. The formation of the first 2-year colleges provided educational opportunities to communities without access to the tradition of elite higher education (Cohen, 2009).

The success of local support for 2-year education eventually led to the formation of the first permanent 2-year college, Joliet Junior College, in 1901. This formation established financial support to include local and state allocations, a move that continued as junior colleges expanded across the United States (Cohen et al., 2014). By 1947, junior colleges began to be referred to by the term used now, community colleges.

The federal government supplied the first infusion of federal funds to community colleges by way of financial assistance to students with the Higher Education Act of 1965. Cohen et al. (2014) indicated the Act also encouraged states to comingle funding sources to support community colleges. This three-tiered approach to funding allowed community colleges to mission-shift into access and opportunity. Increased funding decreased barriers to higher education for local communities.

The 1960s-70s marked a time of extreme enrollment growth for community colleges (O'Banion, 2019). It was also the first time that educational outcomes were discussed at a federal level (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). Prior to 1960, there were no agreed upon criteria for educational outcomes, and community colleges had previously been under complete local control (Cohen & Valeau, 2009). The positives brought by federal funding came with increased federal and state oversight with a desire for outcomes (Kolbe & Baker, 2019).

Community colleges continue to offer plural missions of transfer and workforce development (Winthrop, 2019). These dueling missions exist to support the diverse student population that exists at community colleges (Maglorie, 2018). Student demographics at a community college include first-generation students and non-native

English speakers (James, 2019). The joint missions support this diverse student body. It also supports community college as a bridge for students where college may not have been accessible via traditional means (Cohen et al., 2014).

The ability for community college students to enter the workforce at a quicker rate than students at 4-year institutions reflects the significant impact that community colleges and community colleges degrees provide on a local and federal economic level (Tyndorf & Martin, 2018). Further, community colleges can also support the local economy by driving economic development (Friedel & Reed, 2019). This can occur by acting as a feature to drive new business to a region (Boerner, 2018). The close connection with community colleges to its local workforce enables rapid acceleration and adoption of new technology (May, 2020).

Community College Funding

Community college funding varies across the country but in general comes from three sources: tuition and fees, local appropriations, and state appropriations (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). Tuition and fees indicate the amount of money that comes from students, including any financial aid. Local appropriations are the amount of funding local communities provide from taxes and typically represent 10% of a community college's financial support. State appropriations are provided to community colleges in most instances via a prescribed formula. Many states use historical data to reimburse community colleges per full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment. As noted by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association 2019 annual report, FTE represents the student credit hours to full-time academic year students.

This same group reported that fiscal year 2019 marked a 2.4% increase in per-student education appropriations. On average, public institutions across the country received \$8,196 in education appropriations per FTE enrollment in 2019. However, this increase does not account for the drastic cut of funding community colleges received post-Great Recession of 2008. Education appropriations per FTE in 2019, despite the increase, continue to be 8.7% below pre-recession levels.

As enrollment at community colleges increases rapidly during economic downturns, state funding is decreasing, and tuition is rising at a faster rate. Public institutions are increasingly supported by tuition and fees with decreasing state funding (Hu & Villarreal, 2019). Net tuition rates have grown consistently over time, reaching \$6,902 per FTE in 2019. In more than half of all states, tuition and fees have become the primary revenue source for public higher education (Kolbe & Baker, 2019).

Unlike secondary K-12 education, there is no federal appropriation of funding to higher education, including community colleges (Melguizo et al., 2017). Federal dollars do support specific programs and initiatives at community colleges that directly support students like Pell Grants and other workforce development initiatives (Koh et al., 2019). Unlike state and local appropriations that are distributed in a general manner for community colleges to decide specifically where to allocate funds, federal dollars are less flexible as these funds are typically allocated to specific programs. Federal financial support also often come with rigorous reporting and performance-based outcome requirements for community colleges.

Porter's (1979) research into organizations' sustainability suggests that business leaders should consider the following five external forces that can affect performance: (a) threat of new entry, (b) supplier power, (c) buyer power, (d) threat of substitutes, and (e) competitive rivalry. The use of Porter's five forces model can help organizations to understand sustainability and maintain a competitive advantage (Aydin, 2017). Mahat (2019) suggested that institutions of higher education can apply a profit-oriented framework to business practices by using Porter's five forces to evaluate competitive advantage and sustainability. Community college leaders can use this strategy and the five external forces as they seek to understand strategies for financial stability.

Threat of New Entrants

The threat of new entrants relates to how strong a new competitor is to an industry. According to Porter (1979), if an industry or organization is established with a strong brand, it is more difficult for a new competitor offering a similar product to thrive in an environment. If the current industry or organization has lower barriers to entry, a competitor can experience an easier time entering the new market and these increases competition to the current organization.

According to Perea (2020), the threat of new entrants in community colleges is high. The barriers to entry into the higher education space is low, and movement over the past 10 years has shown the increase in for-profit higher educational organizations (Soliz, 2018). For-profit higher educational organizations no longer need to invest in typical brick-and-mortar infrastructure with the increased attention to virtual learning. The Hanover Research Report (2019) found that for-profit higher educational organizations

are also able to obtain the same or equivalent accreditation that community colleges use. Doing so provides access to these organizations to give students federal financial aid and other assistance, thus making the institutions more popular to students.

Moreover, other entities outside of educational institution are entering the educational market (Hanover Research, 2019). Private companies have begun to certify specific skills and credentials within their organization. Community colleges are no longer the first place an individual can get employed with beginner skills. On top of that, companies are accelerating the rate that individuals learn new skills and compensating appropriately (Winthrop, 2019). These actions compete with the brand loyalty community colleges may have previously established in a community. As Soliz (2018) noted, companies are challenging one of the biggest ways community colleges build brand loyalty: a local, low-cost education.

Bargaining Power of Buyers

The threat of buyer power is the availability of customers to drive the price of a product or service (Porter, 1979). As buyers make choices, this impacts demand for better quality products and increases competition. An organization's threat in the bargaining power of buyers is determined by variables including the number of customers, the buyer's ability to substitute the product easily, and the cost of switching products or services.

According to Weahaton (2020), the threat of buyer power in community colleges is high. Due to the surplus of higher education options available to students, community colleges must be deliberate in explaining the value of a community college education to

current and future students (Sublett & Tovar, 2021). To be competitive, community college administrators must effectively sell value that includes low tuition prices, flexible learning, and exceptional faculty. Amizawati (2016) noted that higher education institutions can be more strategic in setting prices by understanding customer expectations of the service and cost in comparison to the competitors.

Corporate environments also understand that reputation and influence are strategies that can support financial stability by establishing a competitive advantage in the market. Miotto (2020) noted that research has been done to measure how reputation, by way of its influence on legitimacy, can create a sustained competitive advantage for public universities. Miotto's research also studied reputation and its association with performance and sustainability. The findings of this study suggest that a university's reputation has a significant and positive effect on its legitimacy.

Threat of Substitutes

Substitutes can be a similar product or service that provides a customer with a similar result (Porter, 1979). As organizations produce unique products, there is a lesser threat for substitutes. When organizations produce products that can be easily replicable, this threat is increased as customers have more options. The threat of substitutes can be impacted by the quality of a product, advertising, or general usefulness of a product.

According to Rizvi (2018), the threat of substitutes in community colleges is high. The features that typically draw students to community colleges such as small class sizes and affordable prices are strategies that have been adopted by public and private 4-year colleges and universities (Soliz, 2018). Winthrop (2019) argued that students are being

offered larger scholarships or other financial aid incentives to enroll in public and private 4-year colleges and universities as opposed to a local community college.

The threat of substitutes continues to be high when community college administrators evaluate how courses are offered. As community college leaders work to transform classes to incorporate virtual learning, this is the same strategy that is occurring throughout the entire higher education industry (Hanover Research, 2019). Students have a plethora of choices and can make changes easily to transition to new institutions.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers

The threat of supplier power relates to the number of suppliers an organization relies on, what they provide, and how quickly an organization could switch to a new supplier (Porter, 1979). Regarding community colleges, one type of supplier is its faculty. This gives the supplier power to drive prices that the organization must pay. Competition in the supplier market allows an organization to seek new suppliers to maintain lower costs and drive profit.

Research from Parker and Richards (2018) noted that the threat of supplier power in community colleges is high. Community college instructors are hired to teach, not research or other functions that may be associated with public and private 4-year institutions. Additionally, community college faculty are teaching entry-level or generalist courses (Parker & Richards, 2018). Coursework can also include hands-on technical trades, and classes require individuals to have education and industry experience. Because the type of education can be nuanced, finding the right faculty can be difficult, thus making the faculty have a higher bargaining power.

The idea of using faculty for more than teaching is a process that public and private 4-year institutions currently do use as a revenue generation model (Musselin, 2019). Jessop (2017) argued that universities develop profit-oriented entrepreneurial practices in different ways depending on financial, administrative, and ideological pressures. Organizations act more like economic enterprises that aim to maximize their revenues and/or advance the economic competitiveness of the spaces in which they operate. Using faculty to generate revenue by way of research is one facet to financial stability.

Threat of Rivalry

The threat of rivalry relates to the number of competitors and their ability to enter the same space as an existing organization (Porter, 1979). In an environment with high competition, there are many equivalent products and services available to consumers. Highly competitive environments provide consumers with many options and force organizations to aggressively court consumers by product price cutting, increasing advertising, or creating new products and services. In environments with lower competition, organizations retain industry value and can drive market price for services.

In the context of community colleges, the threat of rivalry and competition is high. Tandberg and Anderson (2020) noted that as community colleges experience funding challenges, leaders are forced to make decisions that can negatively impact students. Community college leaders deploy strategies such as increasing class sizes and foregoing important infrastructure upgrades when finances are constrained. Morton (2019) asserted that these strategies that can help community colleges stay fiscally

solvent in the short-term can also make an institution's competitive value decrease in the eyes of students and allow 4-year public and private colleges and universities to compete in this new educational space. Students that previously did not consider 4-year private or public colleges and universities may now choose that route.

According to Banuelos (2019), public and private 4-year colleges and universities are capitalizing on the unique nature of community colleges and creating spaces for students to thrive. Strategies can include smaller classes, more focused sports and clubs, and appealing living spaces. Guth (2020) asserted that these organizations can be competitive in this space as they offer larger and more comprehensive scholarships than a student would typically find at a community college. Somers et al. (2018) wrote that as the financial barrier to education is decreased for students with access to larger endowments than traditionally available at community colleges, students may drift from community college enrollments.

The COVID-19 pandemic's aftershocks that are impacting enrollment across the United States is an accelerant to the rivalry in higher education, particularly for community colleges (St. Amour, 2020). According to the 2020 National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, community college enrollment dropped nearly 10% by fall 2020 (St. Amour, 2020). This reflects double the enrollment decline that community colleges experienced during the Great Recession of 2008 (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020).

As community college administrations continue to seek to remain relevant to communities and students, they must understand their business model and how that

supports investment in its suppliers. This can relate to investing in high-quality faculty and new infrastructure. According to Foss and Saebi (2016), the definition of a business model is the design or architecture of the value creation, delivery, and capture mechanisms of a firm. To innovate a business model is to seek to understand what the drivers, facilitators, and hindrances of innovation are. As organizations develop a business model strategy, competitive advantage is the most important part. (Negulesco, 2020).

According to Negulesco (2020), competitive advantage is the differentiation of a company from its competitors and why a company will succeed. The results of competitive advantage are sustainability and increased profit. Companies must innovate technologies, products, and services to make and maintain competitive advantage. Innovation is the main source of continuous improvement of the competitive advantage and the overall performance of organizations. Strategy is aligned with strategic plans and planning.

Each of the five forces for community colleges is high. Community college administrators need strategy to stay profitable. During financially unstable times, community colleges are not only competing with other newer for-profit educational institutions and employers, but with preexisting higher education institutions already established in an area. Although community college administrators may have determined their strategy against current competitors prior to disruption, the impacts of new entrants can create a drastic change in how institutions conduct business through the strategies used to stay profitable during turbulent times.

Community college leaders must identify strategic positioning through the five forces framework to take a competitive stance in the market, determine the rules of competition, and identify the market structure (Porter, 1979). The outward facing assessment is helpful to understand if the firm should embrace the market forces or create initiatives to defend against them. Porter (1979) identified that a strategy is only as good as the response to the organization's environment, as the strongest forces identify an organization's potential vulnerabilities and can define the organization's strategic stance.

Implications

The implications for possible project directions based on the findings of the data collection and analysis can further align community college leaders to understand strategies toward financial stability and continue operations in an uncertain economic climate. This information will be shared with the study participants with the goal for mentorship, or a workshop for individuals that need additional business strategies for financial stability. This qualitative study, while focused on a local level, may have applicability to community colleges across the country that are also experiencing financial instability. This includes implications for positive social change, like allowing a large community college in the Northeast to continue operations and thereby adding economic value to its community. Continuity in operations also allows for more students to continue to receive quality educational services and increased credentials, degrees, and diplomas.

Summary

Some community college administrators at multiple organizations of varying size in a large Northeastern state may lack strategies to support financial stability. The focus of this study is on understanding the perceptions of business strategies used by community college administrators to address the idea of financial stability of an organization. This section described the problem and purpose statement of the project study. Also addressed were the research problem, nature of the study, and associated literature review. The literature review included information related to community college, higher education, and business efforts to maintain financial stability. In Section 2, information related to data collection, data analysis, research design, participants, data reliability, and validity are provided.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Research methodology is used to design a study to ensure valid and reliable results that address the research objectives (Lee & Saunders, 2017). Effective research seeks alignment from the problem and purpose statement to study design. A researcher uses a systematic and objective approach to identify, collect, analyze, and distribute data findings (Tight, 2017). This study was designed to understand the perceptions of community college administrators of business strategies for institutional financial stability.

The research methodology for this project study was qualitative. Qualitative methodology is used to understand individual groups and phenomena in natural settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research was an appropriate method for this study, as it may be used to understand community college administrators' perceptions of the strategies used or not used to support financial stability that allow an institution to continue operating as a viable educational choice. This was measured by semi-structured interviews with multiple community college administrators in one large Northeastern state.

Description of Qualitative Research

The research design was a qualitative case study, as I sought to understand how individuals interpret personal experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Using this type of design uncovered strategies used by community college administrators.

A case study was applicable, as the purpose of this research was to explain a phenomenon (Tight, 2017). The use of case studies allowed for an investigation of a real-life situation to understand the experiences of community college administrators. By using this method, I was able to take an in-depth look at current financial records at community colleges of varying sizes in a large Northeastern state. Additionally, case studies are appropriate when the boundaries between the context and phenomenon are difficult to distinguish, as evident in a community college setting (Mills et al., 2010). Community colleges are complex organizations with multiple facets that affect business strategies. In this instance, using a qualitative case study methodology allowed for the use of multiple sources of evidence to help me understand the factors that influence the development and implementation of business strategies for community college administrators. Based on the data collection method and the in-depth nature of the questions being asked, I deemed a case study most appropriate.

Justification of Research Design

In a review of research methods, it was evident that a quantitative research method was not appropriate for this research. Quantitative research is best used to understand large portions of data and large number of participants (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Control is also very important in quantitative research, as researchers follow a clearly defined path that must be followed (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Quantitative research also relies on a hypothesis in the development of research questions to establish relationships between variables (Salkind, 2010). This project study did not have a goal to

establish control groups, follow a defined path, or reliance on a hypothesis. Therefore, a quantitative method was not appropriate for this investigation.

A mixed methods approach was also not appropriate for this research. Mixed methods research allows for both quantitative and qualitative research to support each other (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). A mixed method research design includes closed-ended and numerical data collection and open-ended and textual data to be individually analyzed and collectively support the research conclusion (Salkind, 2010). Because this project study did not support the strands of quantitative research, the use of a mixed methods approach was not considered.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. A purposive sampling approach is used to seek out participants with specific characteristics and relationship to the phenomenon being researched (Emmel, 2013). The predetermined criteria for selection of participants were community college administrators working at multiple institutions in a large Northeastern state.

There are 14 community colleges in this state. Because I was interested to understand strategies used to support financial stability, and leaders in different parts of an organization may have different viewpoints that are important for saturation, I interviewed community college leaders from multiple community colleges throughout the state. A total of 10 presidents, chief academic officers/provosts, and chief financial officers were interviewed to provide data for this study.

To gain access to the participants, I first acquired approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I developed and distributed an email to share with all community college presidents, chief academic officers, and chief financial officers in this state. I also posted to my personal social media networks to further distribute the news that I was looking for research participants and would be happy to speak with anyone that may fit the research qualifications. Snowballing was used for this research study, which is the method of generating a pool of research participants by referrals (Frey, 2018). This method is also referred to as chain sampling or chain referral sampling.

To establish a researcher-participant working relationship, I connected via email with all participants that expressed interest to explain the study, introduce myself, provide a rationale for my research, describe the measures I would take to ensure confidentiality, and express my appreciation for their participation. Because the present study involved the participation of human subjects, I sought to make the participants feel comfortable prior to asking any questions. All participants were provided a document that outlined this information, including: the use of pseudonyms instead of names in my project study, how I safely and securely stored data until I could appropriately dispose of it, and an explanation that all participation in this was voluntary and confidential. All participants signified consent via email and acknowledged verbally on the recorded interview. Participants member checked the recording, that is, checked for internal validity and to verify the contents of the transcript.

Data Collection

The goal of this qualitative research was to understand the topic from the perspective of each participant. According to Given (2008), interviews allow a researcher to structure questions that participants can answer with spontaneous descriptions to add a richness to the research and understand the other person's perspective. A semi-structured interview was used in this study to allow for themes and topics to develop in an organized setting. The information that was collected consisted of participants' perceptions of strategies used to support financial stability for community colleges. Because interviewing is the most common form of data collection in qualitative research, this method was appropriate for this project study.

The data collected in this study was sourced from strategic plans of the community colleges, interviews with community college administrators, and archival documents such as operational budget reports and annual financial reports that were relevant to the development of business strategies for financial stability. According to Yin (2018), the use of multiple data sources is helpful to ensure the analyzed data is accurate and credible and will assist with triangulation and data saturation. I used methodological triangulation of interview responses, interview observation notes, and archival documents to address the problem of this project study. I achieved data saturation, which is considered when additional interviews are unable to produce new or additional themes, at 10 interviews. I was familiar with some of the potential sites because I had previously been employed at one community college in this state. To avoid

potential bias, all participants received the same set of questions and followed the same cadence of interviews and review of site documents.

Data collection instrument and sources included:

1. Archived documents: strategic plans, operational budget reports, and annual financial reports. This information was published and available via public documentation in the state where the study was conducted.
2. Interviews and interview observation notes with community college administrators: researcher-produced from semi-structured interviews. This was done via videoconferencing. This allowed for a conversational interview with follow up questions as needed. Each session was recorded.

The data collection instruments listed above were sufficient to answer the research questions. The information that was collected was the participants' perceptions on business strategies that support financial stability. The use of interviews and archived documents as data collection tools were appropriate qualitative research tools (Guest et al., 2013). Interviewing in particular is one of the most common forms of data collection for qualitative research (Guest et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

Data for this study were obtained through purposive sampling and interviewing 10 community college administrators currently working at various institutions of varying sizes at a large Northeastern state. Archival data were obtained by using the internet and working with community college administrators. According to Durdella (2019), analysis requires a targeted population or set of procedures to collect and interpret evidence and

present findings that resolve questions and addresses particulars rather than generalizations to fully organize the research. I followed a three-phase iterative process of data analysis as outlined by Durdella (2019). First, during preliminary data analysis, I formulated interview questions that aligned to my research questions. The second step was thematic data analysis. In this step, I analyzed primary data (recorded interviews) by transcribing the audio interviews and in-session notes immediately following each session. This step also included identifying codes and mapping categories to understand the theme from all the interviews. Finally, I participated in interpretation data analysis to understand the relationships between different data pieces.

Discrepant cases are when a participant's experiences or viewpoints differ from the main body of evidence (Suter, 2012). After I reviewed the video/audio recordings of each participant and coded for major themes, I reviewed any discrepant cases as an additional element to the study. Because a discrepant case can add value to a study by adding to the richness of a study, this also supported my role as a researcher in presenting data in an unbiased way.

Data Analysis Results

The following section outlines the specific details for data analysis. To start this process, I obtained Walden IRB approval to conduct a study on human subjects. Once I obtained approval, I gathered data via teleconference interviews of the study's 10 administrative participants. The interviews were recorded in Zoom and stored in a password-protected file on my computer. When not in use, the computer was locked with a password of which I only had access.

Data Generation

I obtained approval from Walden University IRB to conduct research on human subjects. My Walden IRB approval number is 08-17-21-0760927. In alignment with my IRB application materials, I emailed potential participants that fit the study's criteria. The email included an overview of the study, a brief biography of my study goals, and an explanation of how this study can help community college administrators in practice. I also used social media like LinkedIn to contact potential participants.

Data Gathered

A total of five participants responded to my initial email request. Five additional participants responded after my LinkedIn communication. In the initial communications from participants, each potential participant consented electronically to be a part of the study. All participants were provided a secure Zoom link to participate in each interview. All 10 participants were assigned a code to protect their identity. One hour was allotted for each interview session, and each participant was informed that there would be a follow up interview (member checking) requested as part of this study.

Data Recording

All interviews were recorded using Zoom teleconference software. During the interview, I also took handwritten notes of important items I wanted to remember post-interview. This allowed me to begin to see some early themes for this study. The Zoom teleconference software also had transcription capabilities. I used this feature to listen to the recordings as I read the transcription. I did not make any revisions to the transcripts,

as it was important to me to keep authentic recordings to fully understand the participants' perspective.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I uploaded the transcription and recordings to a private drive on my personal computer. Each file title aligns with the code I assigned to each participant and the date of the interview. I am the only person with access and knowledge of this password.

Build the Findings From the Problem and Research Questions

The problem investigated by this study was that some community college administrators in a Northeastern state may lack strategies to sustain financial stability, which threatens the institution's ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the strategies that community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use or not use to support financial stability.

Based on the 10 personal interviews I conducted, I found that administrators face competition at every angle: within the community college spectrum, through other 2- and 4-year institutions, and even the private sector. Administrators acknowledge that diversification of funding is important for financial stability. Administrators also reflect that funding is extremely political in this large Northeastern state, with leaders regularly spending time advocating for funds and funding is appropriated differently depending where in the state a school is located.

In this section, I describe the major themes and findings from my analysis of the data gathered from the personal interviews of community college leaders in a large

Northeastern state. The major themes and findings are discussed in relationship to the conceptual framework and research questions of the study. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability?

RQ2: Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability?

An analysis of the data derived from the research questions yielded the following number of themes: (1) Budget Control (2) Marketing Strategy (3) Industry Attractiveness (4) Competitive Environment.

According to Saldana (2016), coding is a way of organizing data. Coding occurs in stages as an iterative process. In this research, I used inductive coding to build codes from the ground up and derive codes from the data collected (Saldana, 2016). This allowed me to start from scratch and create codes directly from the qualitative data collected. I considered developing codes pre-research to conduct deductive coding but decided I would rather hear directly from participants to build codes and themes.

To begin the coding process, I first transcribed each interview using the Delve Tools technology. Delve Tools is a paid qualitative research tool that you can upload transcripts and highlight words and phrases to help researchers develop codes for ease in qualitative analysis. After each interview, I moved each copy of the Zoom transcription

into the Delve Tools website and assigned a pseudonym that would follow the participant throughout my research document. Once the transcript was in the system, I went into each document and read it thoroughly while listening to the audio to ensure the transcript was correct. After I reviewed each transcript, I sent the rough copy to each participant for member-checking.

Each participant was given two weeks to review the transcript for member-checking. None of the participants chose to send the transcripts back with revisions. After each participant had the opportunity to member-check the transcript, I used the software to begin coding. The software allowed me to use a highlighting feature to visually underline themes as I started to understand in each participant's interview. I also listened to each recording while reviewing the transcript to ensure nothing had been missed.

Once I completed the first pass to highlight each transcript, the Delve Tools software pulled each highlighted piece into common responses, or initial codes, from all the interviews. I put the common responses into an Excel document, and grouped like-minded phrases, words, or thoughts. I completed the first cycle of coding using descriptive coding, which is a first cycle method of coding that involves reading the data and coding passages according to topics (Saldana, 2016). Some first cycle codes included "key performance indicators," "COVID19 implications," "competitive advantage," "traditional revenue sources," and "mission of community colleges."

After reviewing the transcripts, listening to the recordings, and reviewing the common responses, I developed 16 codes from the first cycle of descriptive coding (See Table 1). According to Saldana (2016), descriptive coding summarizes thoughts into a

word or phrase. This first cycle of codes is aligned with the research questions as seen below in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1

Comparison of Research Question One and Codes

| Research question | Codes |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1: What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community college of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competitive advantage 2. Auxiliary revenue 3. Advocacy 4. Partnerships 5. Diversification of revenue 6. Private sector strategies 7. Save money/reduce expenses 8. Covid relief |

Table 2*Comparison of Research Question Two and Codes*

| Research Question | Codes |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ2: Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competition 2. Decreasing enrollment 3. Funding challenges 4. Staffing costs 5. Funding is political 6. Longevity of an organization 7. Mission of community colleges 8. Evaluate everything |

I completed the second cycle of coding using focused coding. According to Saldana (2016), the goal of focused coding allows a researcher to group into categories by clustering like-minded topics. My goal was to identify recurrent patterns and multiple layers of meaning from the codes to ultimately build themes. To complete focused coding, I moved phrases and words around to align in like categories. For example, in this study, many participants referenced *COVID19 relief money* and *save money and expenses*, these transitioned into the Theme of *Budget Control*. Processing the codes via focused coding resulted in four themes (See Table 3).

Table 3*Themes and Focused Coding*

| Themes | Focused coding |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Budget Control | Auxiliary Revenue Save Money/Reduce Expenses COVID Relief |
| 2. Marketing Strategy | Private Sector Strategies |
| 3. Industry Attractiveness | Mission of Community Colleges Longevity of an Organization |
| 4. Competitive Environment | Competitive Advantage Advocacy Partnerships |

After establishing the four themes using descriptive and focused coding, I compared the codes and themes against the study's conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for this qualitative case study was Porter's five forces. Porter's five forces framework is a tool for organizations to identify the forces that drive industry competition (Porter, 1979). In terms of this study, the five forces are applicable to the community college setting as community college administrators are utilizing strategies that mirror the five forces to become and remain competitive.

The findings of this study further offer community college administrators' unique perspectives for addressing financial stability during times of uncertainty. Study

participants recommended (a) controlling budgets and increasing auxiliary revenue to support financial stability, (b) increasing the effectiveness of marketing to mimic private sector strategies with the byproduct of increasing enrollment and other auxiliary revenue (c) creating value by highlighting the community colleges mission and longevity to a region and its leadership, and (d) developing and nurturing a competitive environment to drive interest and enrollment to community colleges.

Data Analysis Findings

Four themes were identified through descriptive and focused coding of the 16 codes. The four resulting themes are: (1) Budget Control, (2) Marketing Strategy, (3) Industry Attractiveness, and (4) Competitive Environment. All themes align with both research questions and the conceptual framework as noted in the Tables above.

Theme 1: Budget Control

All the administrators that participated in this study cited controlling budgets as one of the most important strategies their organization can do to stay financially stable in uncertain times. Most of the survey participants operate with a one-to-three-year budget plan that aligns with their organization's strategic plan. Additionally, many of the participants use the budget plan and strategic plan to align for Key Performance Indicator (KPI's) that are used both internally and externally to ensure financial stability. This is a measure that can be used by the board of directors/trustees, senior level staff, and accreditation bodies. Participant 7 noted "financial sustainability is one of our goals, and we have a dashboard that is used by the senior leadership team for accountability." Participant 6 said "we need to take an annual 10,000-foot view of the organization. We

analyze where we are efficient, where we are not efficient, and sometimes we need to make decisions that affect people's lives." Participant 3 explained "One of our standards [in accreditation] is that we must have 10% of our operating budget in a reserve or savings. This is one of our benchmarks of success for financial stability."

All survey participants noted that while budget controls are invaluable to understanding an organization's financial stability, for a community college, this can be a reactive strategy as the budget is supported very heavily by student enrollment. This is again supported by the alignment of a budget plan and strategic plan. Participant 6 said "we have a five-year plan, but to get to five years, we need to project in uncertain territory. One thing we need to be able to move the needle on his enrollment."

Participant 9 declared "While we have several strategies in our strategic plan, none is more important than budget control. I emphasize to the college that we cannot look at the credit side of the house [general enrollments] to fully support the budget. The 'bread and butter' revenue is going away."

Codes

The four codes that formed this theme are: (a) Save Money/Reduce Expenses (b) Auxiliary Revenue, and (c) COVID Relief Funds.

Save Money/Reduce Expenses

This theme was the first echoed by all participants in the study when asked about financial stability. Nearly all participants noted activities at each institution that monitor or control expenses considering continual decreasing student enrollments. Participant 7 said "I know our staff would like to have every new gadget, but that's not going to

happen, and we need to set aside [money] for a rainy day.” Participant 6 said “we saved money on a part-time position. It wasn’t a whole lot of money, but it’s \$20-30,000 to the college.” Participant 4 said “you don’t always need to replace [a person] with another person; sometimes there’s a piece of software that you can buy for \$20,000 and it does the job for you.”

Participant 1 said “we’re going to have to make hard decisions as we continually see enrollment decline. We continually have conversations about students and families as a consumer of education, and it’s our job to give them what they want in terms of education. Sometimes that means letting go of outdated programs to make way for new. The byproduct of those actions is saved money.”

Participants also noted the need to look at efficiencies at their organizations.

Participant 5 remarked “We’re talking about an entire campus population and having to shift them in the same paradigm of thinking. There are ways to do that, and we can continue a lot of the efficiencies we’ve learned coming out of COVID.”

Participant 8 said “We need to look at business models and when we look at business models, we look at overhead- are we really in that business, or do we need to get out of it? We look to see if we can outsource using RFP’s (request for proposals). Sometimes we find it makes sense to outsource. Other times, it’s still cheaper for us to do the work. But continually evaluating our business model is a necessity.”

Participant 7 said “it helps that as a community college, we pride ourselves in being nimble and flexible. It works in our favor because we are never going to

say, 'oh we can't do that.' No, we are going to roll up our sleeves and understand what we can change."

Auxiliary Revenue

The idea of auxiliary revenue, or additional revenue outside of traditional community college's enrollment, was another recurring theme that was mentioned by many participants in the study. Participant 7 mentioned their organization had recently "revamped their college store to increase sales." Participant 5 "increased endowments and other charitable giving to the college" to provide another revenue source. Participant 3 noted that "we are always looking for other revenue streams, you know, we've been invited to another county to teach." For community colleges in this large Northeastern state servicing a particular region, expanding into new territories can lead to increased revenue but also contribute to competition between community colleges. Participant 8 noted "selling or leasing real estate, selling services to other colleges (such as bookstore services)" are additional ways their organization is increasing auxiliary revenue.

Auxiliary revenue continues to be a strong strategy for community colleges in this large Northeastern state to increase revenue.

COVID Relief Funds

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provided \$15 billion dollars to the Office of Postsecondary Education as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This funding was provided to support basic needs for students, student caregivers, mental health needs of students and staff, broadband and device access for higher education, as well as

supporting higher education infrastructure. The community colleges in this large Northeastern state allocated funding to students as directed by the federal government, and overwhelmingly the community college administrators surveyed for this study noted a byproduct of this funding was a positive net on budgets for their community colleges.

Participant 7 noted the funding “comes with a lot of restrictions, so we’ve found ourselves getting creative to keep spending this money.” Participant 9 expanded on this, indicating their organization used the CARES Act funding “to invest in long-term infrastructure projects that can in turn be rented out to provide ongoing revenue sources.”

Participant 2 discussed using the CARES Act funding to “help students in the way the money was intended, but also stretch the dollars in a research and design fashion as this could be a once-in-a-lifetime funding.”

Participant 6 noted “we have to be very efficient at community colleges. Historically, we’ve been generally careful with money—we don’t walk around flush with cash. So, using these opportunities for extra funding has allowed us to find more opportunities to work efficiently.” By allocating resources in the manner the federal government dictated, the community college administrators were also able to use this funding to help positively support financial stability during a very uncertain time. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on community colleges and downward enrollment trends, the financial support can be seen as a strategy to support financial stability.

Theme 2: Marketing Strategy

A shift in marketing strategy emerged as an additional theme from the data, indicating that a change of marketing efforts was in development to focus on attracting

new students to community colleges to drive revenue. The participants' comments in this theme aligned with my findings from the literature review that discussed engaging students through different types of marketing avenues increase the potential for additional revenue from increased and diversified student enrollment (Evans, 2017). This also aligns with Porter's five forces threat of substitutes and bargaining power of suppliers.

Codes

The code that formed this theme is Private Sector Strategies.

Private Sector Strategies

Typical community college marketing efforts highlight traditional community college values- low costs, ability for students to stay close to home, and marketed to an average 26-year-old student (Jones, 2016). All participants in this study noted the importance of community colleges making substantial changes to traditional marketing strategies to support financial stability. A theme that reoccurred was the importance of using private sector marketing strategies to drive interest in community colleges.

As Participant 7 said, "we can no longer rely on the students to come to us on their own. We must now show our added value." Participant 9 said "I want a pro forma for nearly everything we do. Tell me why this [action] matters and what's the ROI (return on investment) we're going to see from this action."

Participant 1 said "we need to know our market. We can't just put marketing pieces out there that say the 'same old same old' tired community college messages. We need to play up the value that we can provide to our community."

Participant 2 said “We always look at marketing within the four quadrants of new product development, you can go in with existing product, you can get a higher penetration rate, and your existing market stays strong with existing product. Or you can go with your existing product to different markets. So, we continually look at what is our distinctive competence, that we can take to a regional or national level. Even though community colleges were formed to serve the local community, why must we stop here?”

Theme 3: Industry Attractiveness

Industry Attractiveness emerged as the third theme in this study. Aligning most closely with the threat of new entrants from the conceptual framework of Porter’s five forces, industry attractiveness can also be expressed as brand loyalty or creating value for an organization.

Codes

The two codes that formed this theme are: (a) mission of community colleges, and (b) longevity of an organization

Mission of Community Colleges

All participants reflected on the importance of the historical mission of community colleges, and how staying focused on this historical mission allows each community college to find continued relevance in its market.

Participant 5 said “It doesn’t sound very academic, or it doesn’t sound very, you know, sort of the high and lofty when you think about our mission to, you know, help people with upward mobility and make a better life of themselves. But at the

end of the day, you know, especially for us as a community college where we have everything from training that you can do in three weeks and be out making a pretty good decent living wage to two years of education, it's all about meeting people where they are at. You have to just believe in the mission, and what you do, and community colleges have great value."

All survey participants also reflected on how the mission of community colleges is changing along with the idea of traditional higher education. While some can view this as a threat, the community college administrators interviewed for this study saw an emphasis on the traditional community college mission coupled with moving into a new mission to support financial stability. Participant 9 said "Academics is still in our existing markets, it's what we were made to do. But what else can we offer to be competitive?"

Participant 8 "We have to buck trends, challenge accreditation bodies, debtors, agencies, challenge all of them to help us think how education is going to be delivered in the future. The issue of 2 year or 4-year degree is no longer king. Industry or diploma-based credentials are gaining momentum and we need to think of ways we can repackage things. Maybe it's not 3 credits, maybe it's 1.5 credits plus noncredit. We need to look at business models and when we look at business models, look at overhead- are we still needing to be in that brand of business, or do we need to get out?"

While some of the survey participants noted that they've heard their colleagues reflect on this mission-shift as moving away from what community colleges are designed

for, most of them saw this as a form of creating additional industry attractiveness to their institution.

Participant 7 said “We’re transforming how our communities think of community college. Students that come to us to transfer now give us a competitive edge.

When we’re in the high schools talking to parents, we can tell them we will fight for them to get the best deal. Jumping right into a four-year degree may not be the most financially savvy situation. [If you come to us first] we will make sure your courses transfer, we will give you that guarantee because we are not signing any agreements or articulation agreements that don’t give you that kind of deal.”

Along with appealing to larger audiences or different populations than in the past, an emphasis on mission—even a changing mission—allows for community college administrators to focus on other avenues of student success that impact financial stability. Many survey participants brought up the need to enroll students, but also hold onto those students as completers.

Participant 6 said “It’s not just about recruiting new students to our campus, but we have to be focused selfishly on retaining students because students that are retained, right, also pay tuition and fees. And then unselfishly it helps us accomplish our mission which is the day they graduate with certificates or degrees.”

Longevity of an Organization

In addition to leaning into the original mission of community colleges, the administrators interviewed for this study also reflected that longevity of an organization

is crucial to effective change management for financial stability. On one hand, longevity of an organization can supports financial stability to sustain operations. Participant 5 said “We have embedded into our strategic plan specific measures that we need to meet, and we promote the fact that we’re turning money over into our fund balance.”

Participant 3 said “I still operate from the business background that I was trained in. I think it was very shocking to the school as it was not a perspective that ran the school previously. I said “no, this is the bottom line, you’re either going to sink or swim, we’ve got to make tough decisions for the longevity of this institution.”

Participant 7 noted “Financial sustainability for the organization is indirectly academic affairs. It’s all intertwined.”

The community college administrators surveyed for this study also noted the importance of longevity in leadership to support financial stability. While the length of time an organization has been fiscally solvent can give a community peace of mind that the organization is committed to its mission, survey participants also noted the length of time leadership is embedded at an organization gives the same peace of mind.

Participant 5 said “Longevity in leadership has given us the ability to make long-term planning decisions for the organizations in ways we would not have had with newer leadership. Longevity has made it possible to develop relationships with the community, to establish ourselves as embedded into this community, and the result has been donors have given us lots of money. Fundraising has skyrocketed because they’ve seen longevity.”

Survey participants also noted that longevity in leadership had the same effect on both external and internal community college stakeholders. Longevity in leadership provided internal stakeholders—namely, faculty and staff—a sense of belonging. This led to supporting financial stability at an organization, particularly as internal stakeholders see longevity in leadership, internal stakeholders make the decision to commit to a community college. This increases a return on investment for hiring and maintaining staff.

Participant 9 “There’s a curve for leadership. The first year, you get a pass to do whatever you want. And then you hit a bump in the road of the second-third-fourth year where everyone hates everything- because the stuff you’ve been talking about is starting to be implemented and it’s uncomfortable and the change can feel ridiculous. And if you can stay the course and bring the team together, you get to the other side where people see the result of the implementation. They’re realizing, okay, this is saving us. You know, maybe we need to come along with the changes.”

Participant 6 said “I believe in shared governance and shared planning. At the end of the day, you can talk about ideals and philosophies all day long- but have you looked around where we are to make sure the lights are staying on”?

Participant 4 said “I believe in transparency, sharing voices and development in a shared strategic plan. It’s the organization’s change, everyone has had the opportunity to provide input. As leaders, it’s our responsibility to articulate,

develop, and articulate that change within our institution. I remind my team that, leaders, or being a leader, is about change.”

Theme 4: Competitive Environment

All the administrators that participated in this study shared a common perception that a strong competitive advantage is necessary for community colleges to maintain financial stability during uncertain times. This theme aligns with Porter’s five forces thread of rivalry among existing competitors. This also aligns with Research Question 2, in understanding ‘why’ community college administrators use strategies for financial stability.

Codes

The three codes that formed this theme are (a) competitive advantage, (b) advocacy, and (c) partnerships.

Competitive Advantage

The community college administrators interviewed in this study all acknowledged there are other institutions of higher education competition for students and associated funding in their region. Participant 7 stated “we know that our reputation has taken us this far. Now we need to make sure it continues.”

Participant 6 said “cost differential is so important to us. If our costs go too high, we lose our value, and therefore our ability to market ourselves in a competitive way. We pride ourselves in being a place for students that cannot afford a four-year university can come to us for the same, if not better, quality of education.”

Participant 5 noted “we are the communities’ college, and we need to market ourselves as such.”

Advocacy

All administrators interviewed for this study discussed how in theory, their organizations should be equally funded by local, state, and federal dollars. This equal funding in theory would allow the community colleges to serve its constituents and be less reliant on raising funds. All administrators noted that this equal funding is not something that naturally occurs each year. Participant 8 said “lobbying for state funding is one of the most critical aspects of my role. It influences how we look at tuition and fees [how much is received from local legislatures]”. Participant 6 said “you have to be continually lobbying your local legislatures [for funding], and they have power.” Participant 3 noted “in order to continue to stay competitive we need to further embed ourselves into the backbone of the communities we serve.” All administrators noted the desire to be competitive, yet there’s no legislation or mandate about what each community college can or cannot do.

Participant 2 noted “we need to go hat in hand to [the state capital] for continued funding, and when we decide to pilot something innovative, there’s no clear direction from [the state capital] on which community college can do certain programs. So, we invariably begin to compete against each other.”

Partnerships

Many of the participants interviewed for this study noted the importance and significance of partnerships to maintain competitive advantage.

Participant 9 said “we’re not going to push people out, or duplicate, or be in a price war. All of that is short term strategy. We’re in this for the long haul, and that means becoming a non-duplicative partner. If we continue to be good partners and show up, people will continue to want to work with us, and that makes us relevant.”

Participant 7 echoed what many administrators cited, as “we’re teaming up with a lot of employers to understand their workforce development needs and work side-by-side, not just telling them what they want anymore.”

Participant 4 said “we’re all just trying to adapt and help ourselves, but I think our ability to be flexible will always serve us well and that will be positive. At the same time, it’s a caution because there’s a tendency to bite off more than we can chew. People think ‘you’re the community college, you can do anything’ and even though I’d love to say yes to everything, that’s not feasible.”

Conclusion

A qualitative research design was used to understand what and why community college administrators use or do not use strategies to support financial stability at institutions of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state. 10 individuals participated in this study using purposive sampling. This allowed me to seek participants with specific characteristics and a relationship to the phenomenon being studied (Emmel, 2013). From the data gathered, I was able to provide thick and rich descriptions of the community college administrators strategies and thoughts about financial stability to answer the study’s research questions.

RQ1: What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community college of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability? Findings suggest there are multiple strategies used by the community college administrators to support financial stability. The community college administrators are consistently looking to control budgets, by cutting extraneous or inflated areas as well as increase new funding sources to increase auxiliary revenues. Increased marketing efforts are also being undertaken by many community college administrators surveyed, in the goal of increasing student enrollments in traditional and nontraditional college courses. Finally, the community college administrators are seeking to create a competitive environment by aligning their organization with partnerships to highlight the mission and longevity of community colleges but also show the how community colleges are a benefit to individuals outside a traditional community college region.

RQ2: Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability? Findings suggest that community college administrators are using strategies to support financial stability because there is a distinct advantage to a region that has a thriving community college. All the administrators spoke to the economic impact that a community college can bring a region and noted the importance of that continued economic impact on individual people (staff and faculty) and the larger economic footprint of a region. Findings also suggest that community colleges offer

distinct and specific educational opportunities for students uncertain of career paths, but also students looking for the best financial option for post-secondary education.

Based on my findings and the application of Porter's five forces theory, the community college administrators interviewed for this study are using facets of Porter's five forces to support financial stability at their institutions. The next section will describe the project deliverable- a policy paper to be shared with community college administrators. This policy paper will provide a summary of the findings of the study and recommendations for positive organizational change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In this study, the problem I addressed was while community college administrators in one large Northeast state are seasoned professionals, there appears to be a lack of business strategies to sustain financial stability. Previous researchers have explored this topic from the perspective of both traditional 4-year higher education and private-sector businesses, but research stops short at understanding this phenomenon from a community college perspective (Jessop, 2018; Somers, et al., 2018). Understanding the complexities of business practices through a community college lens is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of higher education financial stability. This lack of knowledge threatens an institution's ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice.

Based on the findings of this research study, community college administrators that participated in the study are engaging in strategies to support financial stability. The findings of this research study suggest there are multiple strategies being concurrently used to support financial stability, with the goal of emphasizing the importance of a community college's economic output to a particular region. The project derives from the research findings that indicate the use of Porter's five forces is a valuable strategy when evaluating financial stability for community colleges.

In Section 3, I provide information about the selection of a policy paper that highlights the strategies identified in research as policy recommendations to these community colleges. I include a description of the project and its goals, a literature

review, and the study's research findings addressing the need for the project. I also describe the goals for the project's implementation and evaluation plan. This includes a discussion of the project study's implications for community college leaders as well as social change implications.

Project Description and Goals

This project is grounded in Porter's five forces. Porter's five forces is a tool for organizations to identify the forces that drive industry competition (Porter, 1979). The five forces that drive competition are:

- Threat of New Entrants
- Bargaining Power of Buyers
- Bargaining Power of Suppliers
- Threat of Substitute Products of Services
- Rivalry Among Existing Competitors

Porter's five forces theory was used to guide this project because the interrelated five forces impact all facets of an organization's financial stability policy. The policies set forth will have its foundation based on the five tenants of this theory that can help community college leaders impact meaningful change to support financial stability.

Project Description

The project is a policy paper recommendation that community college leaders formally adopt identified strategies from this research into practice at all institutions to support financial stability. The policy paper includes how this information will be communicated to stakeholders. I will deliver this information to the community college

administrators to assist them in making informed decisions. The policy paper consists of an introduction, the problem section describing the background information related to financial instability, and a discussion of the lack of policy surrounding new strategies. The policy paper will be supported by Porter's five forces theory, including a literature review highlighting key findings in financial stability strategies. It will also include data collection, analysis results, recommendations for practice and future research, conclusion, and references.

Project Goals

The policy paper has two goals. First, the project will communicate to community college administrators in a large Northeastern state the background of its current financial instability. Second, the project will provide recommendations to improve financial stability for organizations by using strategies found in this research. There is currently no policy goal that suggests community college leaders in this large Northeastern state adopt new strategies to support financial stability (PA Code, 2022). This policy paper will show how the adoption of these new strategies at all institutions can support financial stability for years to come.

Rationale

This study and the project are significant because a gap exists for community college leaders in a large Northeastern state related to financial stability. I chose a policy paper as the appropriate project because of the project's emphasis on evidence-based research. Showing this relationship between evidence-based approach and policy is one

way to support financial stability (Leonard, 2018). Policy papers also need to be persuasive and data-driven to be effective (Christensen et al., 2020).

The data and results indicated that current strategies may not support long-term financial stability, something all study participants indicated was an important component of success for their institutions. The findings support the decision to deliver a policy paper as a result for this project. The problem in this study was a lack of financial stability strategies for community college administrators in a large Northeastern state. Creating a policy recommendation will help fill this gap identified by research.

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I have provided a review specific to the benefits and purposes of a policy paper in supporting organizational change. The literature review of a policy paper provides evidence of the appropriateness of a policy paper as the genre of this project study. I started my literature review using Education Source, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis Online, ABI/INFORM Collection, Business Source Complete, and Emerald Insight. Because the topics I researched straddled the education and business and management topics, I searched both education and business and management journals for articles related to policy papers as well as best practices in developing a policy recommendation paper (see Appendix). This included research for organizational change in higher education and policy recommendations. The search terms I used included *policy paper benefits*, *policy paper purpose*, *policy paper in education*, *policy paper in higher education*, *policy paper initiatives*, *change*, *higher education*, *community college*, *organizational change*, *institutional policy*, *higher education policy*,

community college policy, higher education administration, writing policy papers for higher education, and presenting policy recommendations to stakeholders. The literature was categorized in the following themes: justification of a policy recommendation paper, the usage of evidence in the development of policy, higher education policy development, and the use of policy in development of financial stability strategies.

Justification of a Policy Recommendation Paper

A policy paper is one way for educational leaders to help stakeholders understand change and instances where new opportunities exist (Leonard, 2018; Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2019). Policy papers can lead to positive social change for organizations large and small. As policies are established and supported by stakeholders, policy papers can help to guide an organization's culture (Christensen, et al., 2020; Fisch 2017; Leonard, 2018). Additionally, policy papers that appropriately align with core organizational values can be an important motivator for faculty and staff output (Christensen et al., 2020; Galea et al., 2015). In this project study, a policy paper can support community college leaders in championing to adopt new financial stability strategies throughout one large Northeastern state. This may positively impact organizational stability, student success, stakeholder engagement, and continuity of operations planning, among other important aspects.

A policy paper that is developed using research and data is a strong asset to an organization (Herman, 2018; Steiner-Khamsi, et al., 2020). This data can inform stakeholders to understand the facts of why a required change or modification via policy is necessary (Leonard, 2018). In this study, I used data analysis to understand strategies that some community college administrators did or did not use to support financial

stability. From that analysis, I was able to make data-informed suggestions that guided the policy paper.

Usage of Evidence in the Development of Policy

Leaders must build in evidence during the development of policies to be successful (Nehring & Szczesiul, 2016; Parkhurst, 2017). Using evidence builds in the essential information that is necessary for policies to be effective (Shannon, 2019). Evidence also provides quality assurance checks for leaders to ensure policies are not based in opinion (Helgetun & Menter, 2020). This allows an evidence-based policy to be a persuader to stakeholders (DuBrin, 2017; Parkhurst, 2017).

Policies must also be evaluated to ensure efficacy and relevancy to an organization (Leonard, 2018). Policies must be monitored and eventually changed or altered to ensure alignment to the business need (Lingard, 2013; Pechmann & Haase, 2022). By using evidence-based information and a continuous improvement evaluation, this brings a scholarly approach for leaders in the development and implementation of policy (Kogan, 2018; Zachariou & Korfiatis, 2021). In the creation of this project policy paper, I based my recommendations on the evidence of research findings and built-in continuous monitoring examples to ensure a successful policy.

Higher Education Policy Development

Higher education leaders use policies to create meaningful outcomes for organizations (Ellegood, et al., 2019; Gorard, et al., 2020). Like public policy development, higher education policy development appears to address a problem that's impacting its society (Bremner et al., 2020; Soobrayen, 2020). Regular policy analysis

allows higher education leaders to ensure policies continue to be relevant to the college community (Mizrahi, 2021; Soobrayen, 2020). In fact, continual and consistent evaluation of higher education policies is cited as one major factor to ensuring quality assurance in policies at the higher education level (Chitralada & Mokbul, 2021; Pechmann & Haase, 2022; Ralarala, 2019).

In this research, community college leaders have been given one data set and four associated recommendations for policy implementation to support financial stability strategies. To implement this successfully, the community college administrators must ensure clear communications with all stakeholders on the benefits of positive financial stability. Strategies and policies adopted must be evaluated by internal and external stakeholders regularly and consistently to define what success is for each organization (Christensen et al., 2020; Gandara, 2020).

Use of Policy in Development of Financial Stability Strategies

The use of policy to support organizations is positively correlated to financial stability across the world (Matousek et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2022). Most research found with financial stability supports private sector growth strategies, but for the purposes of this paper alignment can be found to the higher education/community college sector. Strategies are similar: the transparent development of policies, critical quality assurance, and consistent evaluation (Saha & Dutta, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

Additionally, research from the private sector shows the development of financial stability policies are critical components for regulating economic processes and stimulating economic growth (Dorofyeyev et al., 2020; Valentyna, 2021). As seen in the

private sector, after periods of financial crisis or uncertainty, financial stability policies play a crucial role in organizational financial stability and sustainability (Ying et al., 2019). The proposed recommendations in this project's policy paper encourage community college administrators to lean into best practices found in the private sector to support financial stability. When community colleges achieve financial stability, it is reflected in overall community economic growth and prosperity.

Project Description

After conducting the literature review specific to my study findings, I have written a policy paper (Appendix) to be presented to the community college administrators. My policy paper explains an executive summary, a background and rationale of my study, key points from my literature review, an explanation of the study population and sample size, and descriptions of the data collection method and analysis. The policy paper also describes the main findings of my research, recommendations to address the findings, and the potential implications of my research.

Resources Needed and Existing Supports

The resources needed for a policy paper is minor. The policy paper will be shared with community college administrators via email. To share my policy paper with the community college administrators, I will need internet access and access to the college leaders' institution-specific email addresses. I have these email addresses from my original requests to participate in the study, as this was the population that participated in the study. After the policy paper has been distributed to college leaders, I will need access to different communication methods for answering their questions or having

discussions regarding the study's findings. These communications methods can include phone, Zoom, Microsoft teams, or email.

The supports needed for the execution of this project area already set up. I have access to reliable internet daily, both at my home office and at my personal office in my workplace. I currently have access to community college administrators' institutional email addresses, as my initial research for data collection allowed me to receive this information. I can freely share the findings of this report and the evaluation project with these community college administrators.

Potential Barriers and Potential Solutions

My original plan was to share this report in person, but a barrier noted is the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Due to this ongoing health crisis, follow up conversation with community college leaders likely will need to take place via email, telephone, or Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. It is unfortunate that immediate feedback that in other times could take place in person may unavailable due to the inability to meet in person currently. However, the increase of electronic communications during the coronavirus pandemic has made scheduling time more efficient with senior leaders that have very busy calendars. Email communication also allows individuals to think through critical questions and synthesize answers in a way face-to-face communication does not allow.

Timeline for Implementation

The comprehensive findings of this study and the literature review both contributed to the development of my recommendations. My goals for recommendations are to provide research-based best practices for community college leaders struggling to

support financial stability in good and bad times. The recommendations put forth in the policy paper can be implemented on a continuous basis. In the following sections, I outline the recommendations and recommended timelines for implementation.

Develop a Committee to Share Best Practices Between Community Colleges on Cultivating Auxiliary Revenue

The recommendation to develop a committee to share best practices between community colleges on cultivating auxiliary revenue is based on the study's findings that community colleges that cultivate auxiliary revenue can better withstand financially unstable times. To implement this recommendation, community college leaders would each need to identify a lead person from their organization who would represent their organization at regular meetings between all the state's community colleges. Each community college can share opportunities and challenges with developing and nurturing auxiliary revenue. This can be an ongoing strategy that is useful for community college leaders to develop alternative revenue sources to support financial stability.

Adopt Private Sector Marketing and Outreach Strategies

The research from this study shows that some community college administrators have begun the process of changing the marketing strategies they use from traditional community college outreach to adopting private sector strategies. These strategies can include diversifying the types of individuals that get messaging about community college opportunities, investing in new and emerging technologies and social media outreach, and using data to make necessary investments to drive awareness of their organization. More community college leaders could initiate a re-branding or improved marketing

strategy that would positively impact each organization's financial stability by potentially increasing student enrollment. To implement this recommendation, the community college leaders in this study state could share best practices on innovative and new marketing and outreach strategies, as well as study private sector strategies for companies that have successfully re-branded during financially instable times. This recommendation would be an ongoing strategy.

Invest in Professional Development for Senior Leaders Related to Business Strategies

The research conducted from this study found that all community college leaders are aware of the historical mission of community colleges to serve a local community with academic rigor. The research conducted does find that not all community college leaders understand the importance of business strategies for financial stability and how these strategies can be seen as mission critical as academic rigor. Most importantly, the findings of this study show that most community colleges in this state make financial investments in professional development for community college leaders related to academic-focused topics, not topics related to business stability. To implement this recommendation, community college leaders in this study state could align the business-related strategies found in most strategic plans with professional development classes or other opportunities. Investing in this can be strategy that helps support senior community college leadership, but also something offered to all community college faculty and staff to infuse business-related strategies into to ecosystem of an organization. This recommendation would be an ongoing strategy.

Develop a Committee to Share Competitive Advantage Strategies With Other Community Colleges in the State

The research from this study found that most of the community college administrators interviewed understood the need to be competitive both within the higher education space and with private sector organizations that are pushing into the higher education market. While the community college administrators interviewed discussed the importance of forming partnerships to support financial stability, creating a committee to share these competitive advantage strategies between community colleges is a strategy for these organizations to ensure financial stability. If competitive advantage strategies are shared between the community colleges, it can allow these organizations to understand best practices for financial stability. This can look like offering new and innovative programming, creating new student schedules based on demand, and investing in new on-site infrastructure or technology based on consumer desire. As community colleges in this study state also receive some institutional funding from the state, it also creates an opportunity for community college leaders to come together and work cohesively to showcase best practices for financial stability that could potentially result in increased funding. This recommendation would be an ongoing strategy.

My Roles and Responsibilities

As the author of the policy paper and responsible party for the literature review, it is my responsibility to share my findings with community college leaders. I will also be responsible for communicating any questions to all community college leaders to continue to share on the knowledge found.

Project Evaluation Plan

Outcomes-Based Evaluation

As has been discussed, financial stability is the goal for community college leaders. As the community college leaders in this study continue to seek financial stability, the findings of my research and recommendations can be evaluated. An outcomes-based evaluation can be utilized to assess the recommendations of the study as community college leaders continue to thoughtfully assess strategies for financial stability. The following section outlines the method for evaluating the research recommendations that were developed on the qualitative research that occurred in this study.

Justification for Outcomes-Based Evaluation

An outcomes-based evaluation is a systemic way of assessing the extent to which a program has achieved its intended result (New York State Library, 2018). An outcomes-based evaluation answers the questions of what difference a program makes and how did participants benefit from the program. Using an outcomes-based evaluation can help communicate the value and success of a program.

An outcomes-based evaluation is an appropriate method of assessing this project because the primary emphasis of it is continuous improvement (Berea College, 2017). The ultimate assessment for this study would be the review of community colleges' financial records if the recommendations of this study were implemented. To accurately assess this study's impact on the financial stability of community colleges in this study, I will need to complete an evaluation based on the following questions:

- Was a committee developed to share best practices between community colleges on cultivating auxiliary revenue?
- Were private sector marketing and outreach strategies adopted?
- Were investments made in professional development for senior leaders related to business strategies?
- Was a committee developed to share competitive advantage strategies with other community colleges in the state?

The evaluation of outcomes can be conducted by working with the community college administrators that participated in this study and their colleagues. This can occur via interviews, focus groups, or through documentation of activities.

Overall Goal and Stakeholders

This section describes the outcome-based measures that will be utilized to evaluate this project and the stakeholders.

Overall Goal

The overall goal of this project is to provide community college administrators with business strategies that support financial stability. The goal of the evaluation plan is to determine which recommendations were implemented, if the implemented recommendations were effective, and to determine how the recommendations could impact financial stability strategies.

Stakeholders

Multiple stakeholders may realize a benefit from the research findings and recommendations of the study. These stakeholders include community college

administrators and board of trustees, faculty and staff, community college students, and the local community. The following section describes the stakeholders in more detail along with the positive social change anticipated from this research project.

Community College Administrators and Board of Trustees. The community college administrators and board of trustees are made up of multiple individuals from varied backgrounds. Administrators interviewed previously were academic faculty, workforce development professionals, or worked directly in business and industry. The board of trustees of each institution are individuals appointed and serve for specific lengths of time. For both the community college administrators and board of trustees, the financial instability that each institution has experienced has resulted in difficult decisions made by these members and communicated to the larger college community. Identifying strategies for financial stability may provide the college administrators and board of trustees with more financial resources to make better decisions. Financial stability can also lead to the college leaders feeling more satisfied and less stressed in their roles.

Community College Faculty and Staff. Both current and future community college faculty and staff are stakeholders. Current faculty and staff have been with each organization for a multitude of years, with varying levels of degrees and experience. This can be expected for future staff as well. For current faculty and staff, financially stable fiscal operations allow them to perform their job functions with less stress and potentially more financial support of classes and programs. In the future, financially stable fiscal operations allow each organization to potentially recruit more qualified faculty and staff

as a result of improved pay and benefits. The ability for each organization to be fiscally secure makes each organization have the ability to be an employer of choice within its region.

Community College Students. Both current and future students can benefit from the findings of this study. Current and future student body makeup are diverse, with student populations being traditional and non-traditional students that primarily commute to each institution. With increase financial stability, both current and future students can experience solid academic choices, increased technology, expanded physical campus accommodations, and increased student supports.

The Local Community. The local community can be one of the largest benefactors from the findings of this study. The study looked at multiple community colleges in one large Northeastern state, so the industries and local community makeup is different from institution to institution. However, the benefits of a community college within a region withstand specific industries or high priority occupations. The economic impacts that a community can experience with a local community college support continued employment for residents as well as a first opportunity to experience the positive impacts of higher education.

Summary

In Section 3, I provided a detailed outline of the project study and showed evidence why a policy paper is the most appropriate deliverable for this project. The literature provided support for the policy paper genre and offered several appropriate

themes to this research. The community colleges in this large Northeastern state have the resources in place to provide further action to each recommendation.

In Section 4, I explain the experience of developing a project study and the skills and knowledge I have gained in this process. I will discuss the project strengths and limitations and recommendations for alternative approaches as identified by the research. In addition, I will discuss the learning growth I have discovered on this doctoral journey and reflections on the importance of this work. Finally, implications for future research and increased positive social change can be found in the last part of Section 4.

Project Implications

In this section, I present the implications of the project regarding general social change, local stakeholders, and in the larger context of higher education.

Social Change

Understanding community college administrators' perceptions on strategies for financial stability may contribute to improved stability and long-term viability of organizations. By understanding the strategies used or not used to support financial stability, institutions may realize what strategies can be effective for long-term sustainability in a region. Long-term sustainability in a region can improve an organization's community relations. This can lead to increased student enrollment, increased financial giving from local philanthropic organizations, and other means that can positively contribute to a community college's positive financial standing. Additionally, local business and industry can benefit from this study as financially viable

community colleges produce graduates to a region, helping fill the pipeline of skilled workforce that is necessary for economic net growth.

Local Stakeholders

Researching and implementing strategies used or not used for financial stability may have positive social change implications for multiple stakeholders within an organization. This can include students, faculty, board of trustees, community businesses and local employers, as well as the community college administrators interviewed. Institutional stability is an organizational issue that impacts all stakeholders. Using strategies to support financial stability can mean investments in infrastructure and new programming, increased marketing to drive enrollment, diversifying revenue streams to increase auxiliary revenue, and developing strategic budget analysis tools. A financially stable community college can lead to improved student outcomes like retention and graduation. Improved student outcomes can lead to a stronger economic community for students, their families, and the overall economic output.

Higher Education Context

A policy paper is a useful tool for college leaders throughout the country. As many college leaders seek to understand strategies to become or stay financially stable, reading this report can glean strategies that are not just applicable to the community college setting. The larger applicability of this evaluation project is supported in the literature review I conducted. This research suggests the challenges faced by community college administrators in this study is also felt across the country. The recommendations suggested in this project based on community college administrators' interviews can

provide useful information for financial stability for college leaders throughout higher education.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Community college administrators that are experiencing flat or declining revenue may benefit from the findings of this study. Community college administrators struggle to maintain financial stability for a variety of reasons. There is a need to analyze the current strategies used in conjunction with community college administrators regarding financial stability. The outcomes from this study suggest how community college administrators in one large Northeastern state understand the problem of revenue loss from declining enrollment, declining funding sources, and competition. The themes emerged to provide evidence of the application of business practices to the community college educational environment.

Community college administrators should approach their respective institutions as true business entities and look to business strategies and theories to shape the stability of financial framework long-term. The use of quick budgetary controls offers short-term relief. However, other strategies such as differentiation, marketing changes, and creating value help to create a competitive advantage within a complex system.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies used or not used by community college administrators in a large Northeastern state towards financial stability. The findings of this research provide information to other community college administrators in other states by sharing strategies implemented by multiple institutions in one large Northeastern state.

Communities of many sizes benefit from financially stable institutions as they provide key business for local economies. Community colleges are often a first

steppingstone for many individuals into higher education, so it's critically important for their fiscal stability.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this project include research findings that were achieved by collecting data and conducting research by adhering to the conceptual framework that grounded this study, the development of an evaluation paper that connected research findings to straightforward recommendations, and the ability to provide the community college administrators with relevant feedback for decision making. The limitations of this study are that I am not a current employee of a community college in this region and may not be aware of all specifics required to implement strategies for financial stability.

Strengths

One strength of this research study was the use of Porter's five forces as the conceptual framework to ground the study and guide the research, data collection, and evaluation paper recommendations. The conceptual framework provided me with the tools and guidance for developing and conducting a research study that identified business practices used to evaluate financial stability for community college administrators. Additionally, the conceptual framework provided the basis for determining recommendations that may strengthen financial stability that were extracted from the research findings.

The second strength is that there is a lack of studies related to community colleges and financial stability. Prior to this research, most studies I found were related to private and public 4-year higher education institutions. This project study allowed me to provide

crucial research to community college administrators and opened the doors for future research.

Limitations

A limitation that exists includes a limited view on stakeholders needed to take action to address the problem of financial stability. As I am not a current employee of any institution surveyed for this research, I may not be aware of additional institutional issues or processes that could prevent stakeholders from implementing recommendations. Resources and staffing may be an issue.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem that prompted this study was some community colleges administrators in one large Northeastern state potentially lacked strategies to sustain financial stability that could threaten each institution's ability to continue to operate as a viable educational choice.

I chose to conduct qualitative research on this topic by interviewing community college administrators about their perceptions on what strategies are used and why. I chose this type of research as opposed to others, as I was seeking rich and thick descriptions of the community college administrators' perceptions. Alternative approaches that could have been used to research this topic included conducting a quantitative research study with a larger audience or conducting a study with different participants like faculty or other staff.

Conducting a quantitative survey allows researchers to collect original data from a population that is too large to observe directly. This survey could be shared with many

community college administrators from many different levels, including directors, vice presidents, and assistant vice presidents. The use of a quantitative survey could provide a larger sample size for gathering feedback from the larger community college team that is involved in financial stability efforts.

A possible alternative approach to the problem of financial stability could be defining the problem using the lens of more community college staff. Instead of focusing on just community college administrators, the qualitative case study could have interviewed faculty, staff, and other non-executive staff at the community colleges that participated. The problem could be further investigated using a singular community college. An alternative solution to address financial stability would be to create a rating program for community college administrators to rate how they perceive financial stability at their organization.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Throughout this doctoral study process, I have grown as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. When I think back to when I started taking classes, developing the prospectus, and beginning research, I am amazed at how far I have come. I am proud of discovering how satisfying the iterative writing process for a project study like this can be. The stress that came with completing a doctoral study pales in comparison to the pride I feel in completing this great achievement.

As I developed my project evaluation, I learned to write with a scholarly tone and understand my audience. Community college administrators are busy working professionals that need to have only the relevant information presented to them.

Information like data storage and collection was not relevant to them understanding the focus and end results of the study. Through this process, I learned to provide just enough information to highlight the background and procedures of the study, and then summarize the finding of the study in a way that would be meaningful to my audience.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As I embarked on this writing journey, I found myself becoming a more effective writer and scholar. Working with my peers and learning from my instructors and chair in the iterative writing process made my writing more scholarly as the weeks and months progressed. Through the process of researching, analyzing, synthesizing, writing, editing, and revising, my enhanced skills provided me confidence to conduct future research and publishing.

Growth as a Scholar

When I started this journey, I found myself uncertain in the specific direction I should take my research. Once I dialed into a topic, I became overwhelmed with the sheer volume of research articles. Using the Walden writing center and library resources allowed me to ask smart questions that allowed me to funnel my research into a specific topic and keywords. I find myself now able to synthesize literature quickly and efficiently, which has helped me as a scholar.

Growth as a Practitioner

My doctoral project study has allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist for community college administrators. Moving through the doctoral degree process has allowed me to find a commonality with my

faculty-peers and increased my ability to speak their language when we discuss institutional-level changes for the betterment of our school community. While I am currently working in the private sector in a higher education-adjacent position, the lessons learned from this study are applicable in both the private and public sectors. Sharing my findings has been incredibly impactful to me as a practitioner and professional.

Growth as a Project Developer

Working on this project study has taught me true time management skills. Additionally, it has taught me the full scope of developing a project using a specific research topic and how to move a project forward effectively. The experience gained in this process of developing a topic and gathering feedback to ultimately finish a project will carry with me to future projects. Most importantly, I have gained confidence that I am capable of scholarly research.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to examine the perceptions of community college administrators in a large Northeastern state about the strategies used or not used to support financial stability at institutions of varying sizes. The purpose of this project was to provide recommendations to community college leaders for financial stability strategies to support financial stability during times of instability. The importance of this study is the project provides research from the community college perspective on business strategies and financial stability. Prior to this study, research had not been conducted about community college administrators' perceptions about financial

stability and business practices. Now that this study has been completed, community college leaders from around the country can use the strategies listed to support financial stability.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In this section, I outline the implications, applications, and directions for future research. My conclusions end the section.

Implications

The implications for positive social change because of this study may include improving a community college's financial stability through new and updated strategies as identified through the study. Improving community college financial stability has positive benefits for multiple community college stakeholders outside of just the community college administrators; students, faculty, staff, and local businesses all benefit when community colleges experience financial stability. Financial stability can lead to long-term institutional viability that can result in positive economic impacts in a community. Financial stability can also support long-term student success, including degree completion and improved employment opportunities.

Applications

The research findings of this study and the recommendations of the evaluation paper can be used to create financial stability planning at other community colleges interested in long-term sustainability. Community colleges across the country may find this study to be applicable to addressing their own institutional challenges.

Future Research

This study contributes to the existing literature on higher education financial stability practices. There is a great need for additional research on this topic from the community college perspective. During my research for the literature reviews, I found little research that centered on the community college's perspective of this issues. The existing body of knowledge is focused on 4-year, private, and public institutions of higher learning. While there are similarities between the two entities, community colleges have specific challenges that exist that require focused research on that category of education.

Conclusion

Community colleges in the study state, a large Northeastern state, are experiencing extreme financial challenges. The problem in this study is community college administrators may lack strategies to sustain financial stability. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the strategies that community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability use or do not use to support financial stability.

Using Porter's five forces for the conceptual framework to align business practices and financial stability, I conducted personal interviews of 10 community college administrators from varying institutions throughout this study state. The information collected consisted of community college administrators' perceptions on business strategies used or not used to support financial stability. Based on the research findings, community college administrators are using strategies to support financial stability.

Community college administrators in this large Northeastern state are seeking to control budgets, increase marketing to increase enrollment, and create a competitive environment to support long-term sustainability in a region. Additional findings suggest community college administrators could benefit from sharing these best practices widely to increase financial stability opportunities for all community colleges in a region or state. Findings also suggest community college leaders could benefit from professional development related to business strategies to encourage continued knowledge growth in this area.

The interview findings contributed to a policy paper that summarized the interview-specific information and participant suggestions that should be viewed as valuable, as it represents community college administrators' thoughts on this topic. The community college administrators provided several business strategy recommendations that should be considered by other community colleges that are experiencing varying levels of financial stability.

References

- Ayers, D. (2017). Three functions of the community college mission statement. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2017(180), 9–17.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20276>
- Barringer, S. & Jaquette, O. (2018). The moving missions of community colleges: An examination of degree-granting profiles over time. *Community College Review*, 46(4), 417–443. <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/crw>.
- Benyoussef Zghidi, A., & Zaiem, I. (2017). Service orientation as a strategic marketing tool: The moderating effect of business sector. *Competitiveness Review*, 27(1), 40–61. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CR-02-2015-0012>
- Berzin, S. C., & Dearing, T. C. (2019). Building capacity for innovation: The case of an academic--nonprofit partnership. *Journal of Nonprofit Education & Leadership*, 9(2), 149–164. <https://doi.org/10.18666/JNEL-2019-V9-I2-9740>
- Bremner, D., Ansari, I. S., MacDougall, J., Hussain, S., Ma, M., Ponciano, J., Liu, X., Ur-Rehman, M., & Imran, M. (2020). A novel approach to policy development under disruptive circumstances using situation awareness and scenario planning in higher education. *2020 IEEE International Conference on Teaching, Assessment, and Learning for Engineering (TALE)*, 265–272.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/TALE48869.2020.9368434>
- Bruil, G.H. (2018). The relevance of Porter's five forces in today's innovative and changing business environment. *SSRN Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3192207>

- Christensen, M., Dyrstad, J., & Innstrand, S. (2020). Academic work engagement, resources, and productivity: Empirical evidence with policy implications. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(1), 86–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1517304>
- Cohen, A., Brawer, F., & Kisker, C. 2014. *The American Community College*. Jossey-Bass.
- Cunningham, J. & Menter, M. (2021). Transformative change in higher education: Entrepreneurial universities and high-technology entrepreneurship. *Industry and Innovation, 28*(3), 343–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2020.1763263>
- Dally, D., Sinaga, O., and Saudi, M, bin, M, H. (2021). The impact of 7p's of marketing on the performance of the higher education institutions. *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO), 11*(3), 235–252.
<https://doi.org/10.48047/rigeo.11.3.26>
- Dorofyeyev, O., Lozinska, T., Ponochovnyi, Y., & Vlasenko, T. (2020). Linear regression model for substantiation of sustainable state policy in a digital economy. *2020 IEEE 11th International Conference on Dependable Systems, Services and Technologies, 399–403*.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/DESSERT50317.2020.9125066>
- Evans, S., Vladimirova, D., Holgado, M., Van Fossen, K., Yang, M., Silva, E.A., & Barlow, C.Y. (2017). Business model innovation for sustainability: Towards a unified perspective for the creation of sustainable business models. *Business Strategy & the Environment, 26*(5), 597–608. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.1939>

- Farhat, K., Mokhtar, S. S. M., & Salleh, S. B. M. (2021). Role of brand experience and brand affect in creating brand engagement: A case of higher education institutions (HEIs). *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 31(1), 107–135.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2020.1759753>
- Finkel, E. (2020). A piece of the pie: Colleges and districts leverage CARES Act funding. *Community College Journal*, 91(2), 10–17.
- Fisch, A. (2017). New Jersey City University's college of education writing assessment program: Profile of a local response to a systemic problem. *Composition Forum*, 37. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1162180>
- Foss, N., & Saebi, T. (2016). Fifteen years of research on business model innovation: How far have we come, and where should we go? *Journal of Management*, 43(1), 200–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316675927>
- Fredricks, L. I., & Smith, I. N. (2020). Academic capitalism and the conflicting ideologies of higher education as a public good and commodity. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2020(192), 21–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20388>
- Fruhworth, M., Ropposch, C., & Pammer-Schindler, V. (2020). Supporting data-driven business model innovations A structured literature review on tools and methods. *Journal of Business Models*, 8(1), 7–25.
- Galea, S., Fried, L. P., Walker, J. R., Rudenstine, S., Glover, J. W., & Begg, M. D. (2015). Developing the new Columbia core curriculum: A case study in managing radical curriculum change. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105, S17–S21.
<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302470>

- Gándara, D. (2020). How the sausage is made: An examination of a state funding model design process. *Journal of Higher Education*, 91(2), 192–221.
- Hahn, C., & Gangeness, J. (2019). Business, leadership, and education: A case for more business engagement in higher education. *American Journal of Business Education*, 12(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.19030/ajbe.v12i1.10251>
- Helgetun, & Menter, (2020). From an age of measurement to an evidence era? Policy-making in teacher education in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 0(0), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1748722>
- Jessop, B. (2017). Varieties of academic capitalism and entrepreneurial universities. *Higher Education*, 73(6), 853-870. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0120-6>
- Jones, L. (2016). Bridging the workforce and civic missions of community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 173, 121-129. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/15360733>
- Kara, A. (2021). Covid-19 pandemic and possible trends for the future of higher education: a review. *Journal of Education & Educational Development*, 8(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v8i1.183>
- Krücken, G. (2021). Multiple competitions in higher education: a conceptual approach. *Innovation: Organization & Management*, 23(2), 163–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14479338.2019.1684652>
- Li, A. & Kennedy, A. (2018). Performance funding policy effects on community college outcomes: Are short-term certificates on the rise? *Community College Review*, 46(1), 3-39. <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/crw>

- Leijerholt, U., Biedenbach, G., & Hultén, P. (2019). Branding in the public sector: a systematic literature review and directions for future research. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(2), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-018-0116-2>
- MacDonald, M. (2016). Regulating the capitalists of higher education. *Higher Education in Review*, 60-70. www.higheredinreview.org/
- Matousek, R., Panopoulou, E., & Papachristopoulou, A. (2020). Policy uncertainty and the capital shortfall of global financial firms. *Journal of Corporate Finance*, 62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcorpfin.2020.101558>
- Mizrahi, S. (2021). Performance funding and management in higher education: The autonomy paradox and failures in accountability. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 44(2), 294–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2020.1806087>
- Magloire, J. (2019). Who Wants to Teach a Diverse Student Body? Community College Missions and the Faculty Search Committee. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(3), 165-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1424666>
- McClure, K. (2016). Building the innovative and entrepreneurial university: An institutional case study of administrative academic capitalism. *Journal of Higher Education*, 87(4), 516-543. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2016.0023>
- McHenry, W. (2016). Online MBA programs and the threat of disruptive innovation. *International Journal of Management Education*, 14(3), 336-348. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2016.07.002>

- Melguizo, T., Witham, K., Fong, K., & Chi, E. (2018). Understanding the relationship between equity and efficiency: Towards a concept of funding adequacy for community colleges. *Journal of Education Finance*, (2), 195-216.
<https://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jef.html>
- Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design & implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Micek, J. (2019). Higher education shouldn't be a luxury: PA community college advocates rally for more state funding. *Pennsylvania Capital Star*.
<https://www.penncapital-star.com/education/higher-education-shouldnt-be-a-luxury-pa-community-college-advocates-rally-for-more-state-funding/>.
- Miotto, G., Del-Castillo-Feito, C., & Blanco-González, A. (2020). Reputation and legitimacy: Key factors for higher education institutions sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Business Research*, 112, 342–353.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.11.076>
- Molander, S., Fellesson, M., & Friman, M. (2018). Market orientation in public service—A comparison between buyers and providers. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 30(1), 74–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2017.1326342>
- Nik Ahmad, N., Ismail, S., & Siraj, S. (2019). Financial sustainability of Malaysian public universities: Officers' perceptions. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(2), 317-334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-06-2017-0140>

- Ortagus, J. C., & Hu, X. (2020). A national study of the financial implications of community college baccalaureate adoption. *Journal of Higher Education, 91*(7), 1053–1086.
- Ozturk, Z., & Kikilkaya, S. (2017). Chaos-complexity theory at management. *International Online Journal of Education & Teaching, 4*(3), 259-264.
- Parkhurst, J. (2017). The politics of evidence: From evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence. <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/31002>
- Parnell, J. A. (2018). Nonmarket and market strategies, strategic uncertainty and strategic capabilities. *Management Research Review, 41*(2), 252–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-05-2017-0151>
- Page, D. (2020). The Academic as Consumed and Consumer. *Journal of Education Policy, 35*(5), 585–601.
- Pechmann, P., & Haase, S. (2022). How policy makers employ the term quality in higher education policymaking. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 66*(2), 355–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1869081>
- Peterson, A. (2019). HACC leaders address declining student enrollment, financial issues. <https://www.abc27.com/news/local/harrisburg/hacc-leaders-address-declining-student-enrollment-financial-issues/>.
- Perera, C. H., Nayak, R., & Nguyen, L. T. V. (2021). The impact of subjective norms, eWOM and perceived brand credibility on brand equity: application to the higher education sector. *International Journal of Educational Management, 35*(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2020-0264>

- Pierce, D. (2021). Attracting Enrollment: How to Use Strategic Marketing to Boost Enrollment. *Community College Journal*, 91(5), 22–27
- Porter, M. (1979). How Competitive Forces Shape Strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 57(2), 137-145.
- Price, P., Schneider, D., & Quick, L. (2015). Financial challenges in higher education: community college leadership style and ranking. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(6), 508-522.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2015.1069226>
- Ralarala, M. K. (2019). Policy analysis as “Text” in higher education: challenging South Africa’s “Use of Official Languages Act”: A case-based approach. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(4), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.20853/33-4-3030>
- Rasool, F., Koomsap, P., Afsar, B., & Panezai, B. (2018). A framework for disruptive innovation. *Foresight*, 20(3), 252-270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-10-2017-0057>
- Ravitch, S. & Carl, M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Saha, M., & Dutta, K. D. (2021). Nexus of financial inclusion, competition, concentration, and financial stability: Cross-country empirical evidence. *Competitiveness Review*, 31(4), 669–692. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CR-12-2019-0136>
- Schulze-Cleven, T. & Olson, J. (2017). Worlds of higher education transformed: toward varieties of academic capitalism. *Higher Education*, 73(6), 813-831.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0123-3>

- Schulze-Cleven, T., Reitz, T., Maesse, J., & Angermuller, J. (2017). The new political economy of higher education: Between distributional conflicts and discursive stratification. *Higher Education*, 73(6),795-812. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0114-4>
- Shaver, D. (2019). HACC President tells PennLive sale of Lebanon campus will soon be finalized. Retrieved from <https://lebtown.com/2019/12/07/hacc-president-tells-pennlive-sale-of-lebanon-campus-will-soon-be-finalized/>.
- Singh, D., Singh, H., & Sandhu, N. (2017). New market entry strategies: Public and private sector banks in India. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, 14(1), 123–134.
- Soler, M. C. (2019, November). Updating the national landscape: State adoption of community college baccalaureate degrees (New Baccalaureate Series, Data Note 3). Seattle, WA: Community College Research Initiatives, University of Washington. <https://www.washington.edu/ccri/2019/11/18/datanote3-ccb/>
- Soliz, A. (2018). The effects of the expansion of for-profit colleges on student enrollments and outcomes at community colleges. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 40(4), 631-652. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/epa>
- St. Amour, M. (2020). Report: fewer high school students went straight to college. Inside Higher Education <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/12/10/report-fewer-high-school-students-went-straight-college>

- Sutin, S. (2018). Reforming higher education from within: Lessons learned from other mature sectors of the economy. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 58, 18-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.11.003>
- Taran, Y., Goduscheit, R.C., & Boer, H. (2019). Business Model Innovation -- A Gamble or a Manageable Process? *Journal of Business Models*, 7(5), 90-107
- Taylor, A. (2017). Perspectives on the university as a business: The corporate management structure, neoliberalism, and higher education. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 15(1), 108-135.
- Turlacu, I., Orzan, G., Chivu, R.G., & Herrezeel, T. (2019). Strategic Technologies: Innovation in Higher Education in Romania. *eLearning & Software for Education*, 1. 400-406. <https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-19-053>
- Winthrop, E. (2019). *Top 6 Trends in Higher Education*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2019/01/10/top-6-trends-in-higher-education/>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications.
- Yoshinaga, K. (2018). The merger of departments across universities: The case of veterinary schools in Japanese national universities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 63, 59–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2017.10.006>

Zachariou, A., & Korfiatis, K. (2021). Sustainability education research and policy in Cyprus: An investigation into their roles and relationships. *Environmental Education Research*, 27(4), 614–629.

Appendix: The Project

Policy Paper

Prepared by Lauren Holubec, M.Ed., Doctoral Candidate May 2022

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Executive Summary | 86 |
| Introduction..... | 87 |
| The Problem..... | 87 |
| The Purpose | 88 |
| Methodology | 88 |
| Research Questions..... | 88 |
| Study Design..... | 89 |
| Evidence-Based Literature..... | 89 |
| Analysis for Findings..... | 91 |
| Best Practices | 92 |
| Project Recommendations | 92 |
| Recommendation One..... | 93 |
| Recommendation Two..... | 94 |
| Recommendation Three..... | 96 |
| Recommendation Four..... | 96 |
| Next Steps | 98 |
| Conclusion | 99 |
| References..... | 100 |

Executive Summary

Community colleges are vital to the economic success of a community. In recent years, community college administrators in a large Northeastern state have experienced financial stability challenges. These challenges are also being felt on a national basis by community college administrators and have been amplified by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. To provide insight into the strategies that are used or not used to support financial stability in this large Northeastern state, community college administrators' perceptions were evaluated, and the following research questions guided the research:

- What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community college of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability
- Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability?

Ten community college administrators from multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in this large Northeastern state participated in personal interviews. The findings from this study indicate community college administrators' unique perspectives for addressing financial stability during times of uncertainty. Study participants identified four areas to support financial stability: (a) increasing auxiliary revenue to support financial stability, (b) increasing the effectiveness of marketing to mimic private sector strategies, (c) investing in professional development for business

affairs colleagues, and (d) developing and nurturing a competitive environment to drive interest and enrollment to community colleges.

The following policy paper includes recommendations for community college administrators in this large Northeastern state to support financial stability. The policy will lead to the development of necessary organizational structures to share data and best practices to support financial stability. The findings of this study can also impact community college administrators throughout the nation.

Introduction

The Problem

The problem that instigated my research into this policy paper was funding and student enrollment for community colleges in a large Northeast state have declined in the past 9 years. This enrollment decline led to an imbalance of revenue to expenses. These factors forced community college administrators to examine how to best operate to support financial stability. No policy existed in the sharing of or implementation of best practices towards financial stability.

Despite individual administrators exhibiting years of experience within their discipline—academic affairs, student affairs, and business affairs—the business practices to support financial stability had not been studied until now. This problem was exacerbated in the traditional higher education 4-year space with ample research, but none at the community college level. As these institutions are looking for long-term financial stability to support operations and local economic growth, this project will result in recommendations to address the missing policy for shared best practices and

provide data-driven information needed to enhance the current financial efforts of the schools in this large Northeastern state.

The Purpose

The purpose of this project was to address a gap in practice by exploring if community college administrators in a large Northeastern state use or do not use specific strategies to support financial stability. The project's purpose builds upon the study's findings. In this policy paper, recommendations to address financial stability at the community college level are provided. The policy paper's recommendations include developing a committee to share best practices between community colleges to cultivate auxiliary revenue, adopting private sector marketing and outreach strategies, investing in professional development for senior leaders related to business strategies, and developing a committee to share competitive advantage strategies with other community colleges in the state.

Methodology

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What strategies do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use to support financial stability?

RQ2: Why do community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use specific strategies to support financial stability?

Study Design

This qualitative study used a case study research design. The research participants in this study were community college administrators at one of the 14 community colleges that exist in this large Northeastern state. Community college administrator was defined as chief executive officer/president, chief operating officer/vice president of finance, and chief academic officer. I chose to research between 10-12 participants to achieve theoretical saturation. Interview participants were recruited for participation in this study by direct personal emails and social media solicitation. I secured 10 participants that met the study participation criteria.

The research for this study consisted of personal interviews with each of the 10 participants. The interviews were conducted via Zoom technology. The interviews were recorded via the Zoom technology. Each interview followed a semi-structured interview with predetermined open-ended questions. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. The information that was collected from each interview consisted of the participants' perceptions on strategies used or not used to support financial stability at their organization. Recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for themes that aligned with the study. Themes were then aligned with codes and patterns to connect like-minded concepts.

Evidence-Informed Literature

The literature review that was conducted brought multiple themes to light that are relevant to the history of community colleges, as well as the trends current impacting funding and support of community colleges. Community colleges were created in the

early 1900s to meet a growing need for individuals looking for education outside of the traditional secondary school options. Today, community colleges continue to offer plural missions of transfer and workforce development (Winthrop, 2019). This mission exists to support the diverse student population that exists at community colleges (Magloire, 2018). Student demographics at community college include first-generation students and non-native English speakers (Cunningham & Menter, 2021). To that, community college can serve as the bridge for students where college may not have been accessible via traditional means (Cohen, et al., 2014).

To support this diverse student population and mission, community college funding generally comes from three sources: tuition and fees, local appropriations, and state appropriations (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). While public institutions across the country received an average of \$8,196 in education appropriations per full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment in 2019, this increase does not account for the drastic cut of funding community colleges received post-Great Recession of 2008. Education appropriations per FTE in 2019, despite the increase, continue to be 8.7% below pre-recession levels. This decrease in state funding coupled with a decline in student enrollments served as the impetus to this research.

Current research in this topic primarily focuses on the broader topic of higher education, specifying at times 4-year private and public colleges and universities (Miotto et al., 2020; Rabin et al., 2020; Turlacu et al., 2019). However, research on business strategies for financial stability for both private and non-profit companies is prevalent (Fruhworth et al., 2020; Taran et al., 2019). Utilizing Porter's five forces as the

conceptual framework that guided this study, this tool is useful for analyzing an organization's competitive environment (Bruijl, 2018).

Organizational leaders can analyze external factors that impact their business strategies. Porter's five forces framework includes the microenvironment that drive competition and threaten an organization's ability to make a profit: (1) the bargaining power of buyers, (2) bargaining power of suppliers, (3) the threat of new entrants, (4) the threat of substitutes, and (5) competitive rivalry (Porter, 1979). The application of Porter's five forces provides the framework for leaders who want to maintain a sustainable competitive strategy, especially when seeking financial stability in uncertain times.

Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the strategies that community college administrators at multiple community colleges of varying financial stability in a large Northeastern state use or do not use to support financial stability. Based on the 10 personal interviews conducted, the findings suggest there are multiple strategies used by the community college administrators to support financial stability. The community college administrators are consistently looking to control budgets, by cutting extraneous or inflated areas as well as increase new funding sources to increase auxiliary revenues. Increased marketing efforts are also being undertaken by many community college administrators surveyed, in the goal of increasing student enrollments in traditional and nontraditional college courses. Finally, the community college administrators are seeking to create a competitive environment by aligning their

organization with partnerships to highlight the mission and longevity of community colleges but also show the how community colleges are a benefit to individuals outside a traditional community college region.

Additionally, findings suggest that community college administrators are using strategies to support financial stability because there is a distinct advantage to a region that has a thriving community college. All the administrators spoke to the economic impact that a community college can bring a region and noted the importance of that continued economic impact on individual people (staff and faculty) and the larger economic footprint of a region. Findings also suggest that community colleges offer distinct and specific educational opportunities for students uncertain of career paths, but also students looking for the best financial option for post-secondary education.

Best Practices

The study's findings and evidence-based research on best practices in financial stability led to identifying four recommendations that could be used by community college administrators in this large Northeastern state. The recommendations provide strategies for these stakeholders to support continuity of operations at these and other organizations. The recommendations are based in Porter's five forces theory of private sector strategies that support financial stability.

Project Recommendations

From the interviews I conducted, I was able to generate information and suggestions that should be viewed as valuable. Interview participants provided several

recommendations that should be considered when seeking to understand financial stability for community colleges. The four recommendations are:

1. Develop a committee to share best practices between community colleges on cultivating auxiliary revenue.
2. Adopt private sector marketing and outreach strategies.
3. Invest in professional development for senior leaders related to business strategies.
4. Develop a committee to share competitive advantage strategies with other community colleges in the state.

Recommendation 1

The community college administrators in the study suggested that one of the key elements to financial stability is growing additional revenue. Identifying auxiliary revenue, or additional non-tuition revenue, is a growing trend for community colleges that presents an opportunity for those that participated in the study. This strategy allows for diversification of revenue to assist with financial stability, but also assists in the marketing of a community college into new markets. Strategies can include expanding into new territories not yet utilizing community college services, like new counties outside a typical community college's reach in a particular state. Strategies can also include outsourcing components of the budget like the bookstore or food services or renting buildings that may sit unused for portions of time.

Research shows some community colleges like the state system of Texas and individual institutions in California have developed additional auxiliary revenue policies

like investing in baccalaureate degree program to support financial stability. According to the Community College Baccalaureate Association, 23 states and 121 institutions now offer community college baccalaureate degrees. This strategy supports auxiliary revenue development for those community colleges, as most organizations that adopt baccalaureate degree programs are associated with decreases in the reliance on public funds and increases the reliance on tuition and fees.

The first recommendation is to require a committee to share best practices between community colleges on cultivating auxiliary revenue. While ad hoc communication exists, no formal best practices arrangement is set up to ensure practices are shared among the community colleges in this large Northeastern state. This recommendation will help ensure new ideas and practices are filtered throughout the entire state for all to use. It can also spur creativity or sharing outside of this large Northeastern state.

Recommendation 2

There is an opportunity for the community colleges in this study to compete like private sector organizations. In a competitive market like higher education, it is necessary for community colleges to lean into new and different strategies to remain competitive. The threat of rivalry in Porter's five forces suggests that highly competitive environments provide consumers many options (Porter, 1979). Unfortunately, while community college administrators in this study may note the need for different marketing strategies such as leaning to what the private sector may use to help support new marketing tactics, best practices in higher education marketing that are typically shared between organizations

center on traditional higher education tactics. Administrators noted the importance of taking cues from the private sector and how different organizations increase visibility with different tactics. Aligning private sector and public sector strategies increases the diversity of marketing tactics, but also fosters efficiencies.

Research suggests that private sector strategies include always looking for new markets to enter. This can be un-tapped geographic pockets or neglected demographic niches within existing markets. Reaching new areas or persons unfamiliar with the community college will also naturally increase how typical stakeholders hear about the community college. This can also support a competitive environment, as will be discussed further.

Community colleges can also use corporate branding principles utilized by the private sector as one strategy to support financial stability. Branding allows an organization to distinguish its market offerings from competitors. The private sector has developed an approach to highlight the relationship between strategic vision, organizational culture, and corporate images for comprehensive branding. Community colleges can specify their organizational identity to find a brand, formulate a strategy that drives communications, and implement specific marketing activities to show how an organization is unique from its competitors. Strong brands can enable community colleges to shine in competitive markets.

The second recommendation is for the community colleges to adopt private sector marketing and outreach strategies. In this instance, this includes mirroring the private sector organizations that are interested in offering the best product or service that is

available on the market. Participating in this type of recommendation can be viewed as a competitive strategy to improve revenue and overall financial growth.

Recommendation 3

The community colleges in this study have an opportunity to invest in professional development for senior leaders related to business strategies. The research conducted from this study found that all community college leaders are aware of the historical mission of community colleges to serve a local community with academic rigor. The research conducted does find that not all community college leaders understand the importance of business strategies for financial stability and how these strategies can be seen as mission critical as academic rigor. Most importantly, the findings of this study show that most community colleges in this state make financial investments in professional development for community college leaders related to academic-focused topics, not topics related to business stability. To implement this recommendation, community college leaders in this study state could align the business-related strategies found in most strategic plans with professional development classes or other opportunities. Investing in this can be strategy that helps support senior community college leadership, but also something offered to all community college faculty and staff to infuse business-related strategies into to ecosystem of an organization. This recommendation would be an ongoing strategy.

Recommendation 4

The community college administrators in this study have an opportunity to build and maintain a competitive environment as a strong tactic to support financial stability.

Aligning with Porter's five forces threat of rivalry among existing competitors, the participants in this study noted a competitive environment can spur innovation, including how to increase revenue and decrease costs. A competitive environment also spurs innovation in programming, how classes are offered, and what marketing tactics are used.

The idea of competition within higher education, particularly at the community college level, has increased substantially. Competition exists at both the individual and collective level. At any level, competition can be both a positive and negative force towards financial stability. As competitive environments continue to grow in higher education, organizations strengthen their competitive position of brand and equity throughout different markets.

Competitive advantage aligns with Porter's five forces threat of rivalry. In an environment with high competition, organizations must aggressively court consumers using creative strategies. To that, community colleges must build on their longevity and historical mission to build a reputation that is competitive both in and outside of the traditional higher education sphere. By building high levels of legitimacy and trust with the community it serves, community colleges can withstand several negative impacts like mergers, restructuring, or even closure that can negatively impact financial stability.

As community college administrators seek strategies to support financial stability, developing a competitive advantage can also support organizations as they seek to create a competitive environment for long-term stability. As mentioned above when talking about marketing strategies, reputation and legitimacy are key factors in gaining a

sustained competitive advantage. This recommendation can assist the community colleges of this study to find and showcase competitive advantage.

Next Steps Following Policy Acceptance

The policy recommendations must be presented, discussed, and approved by the community colleges that participated in this study. These organizations typically use committees to approve new policies. Once participation in the policies is approved at an organization level, each community college will need to identify a representative in each subject area to support ongoing collaboration. The adoption of new policies that can support the initiative towards financial stability can impact multiple stakeholders across each organization and should be continually assessed for involvement.

Conclusion

Understanding community college administrators' perceptions on strategies for financial stability may contribute to improved stability and long-term viability of organizations. This can lead to increased student enrollment, increased financial giving from local philanthropic organizations, and other means that can positively contribute to a community college's positive financial standing. Additionally, local business and industry can benefit from this study as financially viable community colleges produce graduates to a region, helping fill the pipeline of skilled workforce that is necessary for economic net growth.

The four policy recommendations provide a systemic approach to identifying, supporting, and promoting financial stability for the community colleges in this large Northeastern state. Recommendations exist to support stakeholders of these organizations

and are aligned with data. By understanding the strategies used or not used to support financial stability, institutions may realize what strategies can be effective for long-term sustainability in a region. Long-term sustainability in a region can improve an organization's community relations.

References

- Bruijl, G.H. (2018). The Relevance of Porter's five forces in today's innovative and changing business environment. *SSRN Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3192207>
- Cohen, A., Brawer, F., & Kisker, C. 2014. *The American Community College*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rabin, E., Kalman, Y.M., & Kalz, M. (2020). The cathedral's ivory tower and the open education bazaar -- Catalyzing innovation in the higher education sector. *Open Learning*, 35(1), 82-99
- Cunningham, J. & Menter, M. (2021). Transformative change in higher education: Entrepreneurial universities and high-technology entrepreneurship. *Industry and Innovation*, 28(3) 343-364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2020.1763263>
- Fruhirth, M., Ropposch, C., & Pammer-Schindler, V. (2020). Supporting data-driven business model innovations A structured literature review on tools and methods. *Journal of Business Models*, 8(1), 7-25.
- Magloire, J. (2019). Who wants to teach a diverse student body? Community college missions and the faculty search committee. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 43(3), 165-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2018.1424666>
- Miotto, G., Del-Castillo-Feito, C., & Blanco-Gonzalez, A. (2020). Reputation and legitimacy: Key factors for higher education institutions' sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Business Research*, 112, 342-353. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.11.076>
- Porter, M. (1979). How competitive forces shape strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 57(2), 137-145.

Taran, Y., Goduscheit, R.C., & Boer, H. (2019). Business model innovation -- A gamble or a manageable process? *Journal of Business Models*, 7(5), 90-107.

Turlacu, I., Orzan, G., Chivu, R.G., & Herrezeel, T. (2019). Strategic technologies: Innovation in higher education in Romania. *eLearning & Software for Education*, 1. 400-406.

<https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-19-053>

Winthrop, E. (2019). *Top 6 Trends in Higher Education*. Brookings.

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2019/01/10/top-6-trends-in-higher-education/>