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Accrediting Processes and Institutional Effectiveness at a California Community College

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Walden University

2016

Abstract

Accrediting Processes and Institutional Effectiveness at a
California Community College

by

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MA, Panjab University, 1997

BA, Panjab University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The implementation of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' (ACCJC) 2002 Accreditation Standards significantly increased the number of sanctions on California community colleges resulting in a debate regarding the interpretation and application of the standards. This study examined the perceptions at a community college regarding compliance and the application of ACCJC's 2002 Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission. This qualitative, exploratory case study used Etzioni's 2 constructs—organizational compliance and organizational effectiveness—as the conceptual framework. Data were collected from a focus group and interviews with 12 participants with experience in accreditation as well as documents from a community college in California. A constant comparative method analysis was used to identify 4 main themes: negative perceptions, relevance, integration, and efficacy. The study findings showed that the prevailing climate of the ACCJC and the negative perceptions held by the institutional participants presented challenges in interpreting and applying Standard IB. The scope and pervasiveness of accreditation-related activities are broad and inclusive of institutional stakeholders. Recommendations for improving the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB include applying innovative approaches to application efforts and building on the social capital of community colleges, so as to further promote positive social change by guiding institutions through the cultivation of efficacy for student success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Accreditation is a distinctly American undertaking that consists of a voluntary system of peer-reviewed processes for quality assurance. It is the most accepted indicator of quality for nearly all higher education (HE) institutions (Brittingham, 2009; Eaton, 2009). HE institutions rely on this form of official recognition not only for validation of the quality of the education they offer but also for receipt of federal financial aid without direct government control or interference (Middaugh, 2012). As millions of students prepare to transition to HE each year, colleges and universities rely on public and private sources of funding to calculate their cost and the price of admission (Oden, 2009). HE institutions also accumulate data on institutional performance indicators to demonstrate areas for improvement (Hall, 2012; Kuh, 2007). Perhaps the external push for mandatory reporting for compliance is no greater than the requirements of the accreditation system (Morest, 2009).

In the 21st century, the U.S. government and other sectors have repeatedly called for more institutional accountability and transparency of accreditation decisions in light of the hundreds of billions of dollars in federal student loans administered each year (Eaton, 2009; Hartle, 2011; McFarlane, 2010). The accountability and transparency movements have only intensified the debate in the HE community. The 2002 Accreditation Standards demand outcomes-based evidence to demonstrate student learning and institutional effectiveness (Middaugh, 2012). Shifting social, technological, and political conditions are not new to the HE environment, but the increased speed at

which these changes are occurring has presented new challenges (Mason & Simmons, 2012).

A well-known dilemma facing HE institutions is balancing institutional autonomy and demands for public accountability while debating the legitimacy and scope of general accreditation in HE (Hall, 2012). California community colleges (CCCs) are at the forefront of this intense debate (Theule, 2012). The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) has imposed a high number of sanctions on CCCs (Tharp, 2012). The ACCJC is a component of the Western Association for Schools and Colleges (WASC), one of the six regional accrediting agencies, or commissions (ACCJC 2013). Throughout this paper, the ACCJC is interchangeably referred to as the Commission.

CCCs serve 2.5 million students, composing the largest educational system in the United States (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2011). Giving students a second chance to develop skills and to succeed in college and beyond while keeping tuition low distinguishes community colleges from other HE institutions (CCCCO, 2011; Jenkins, 2011). Almost 80% of law enforcement officers, emergency medical technicians, and firefighters and 70% of nurses earn their credentials at community colleges (CCCCO, 2011). Between 2003 and 2008, over 40% of CCCs faced some form of sanction or probation (Thule, 2012). Consequently, the sanctions looming over many CCCs have put a statewide and national spotlight on the 2002 Accreditation Standards instituted by the ACCJC in 2002 (Theule, 2012).

According to ACCJC, sanctions do not mark institutions as providing low quality instruction to students (Bardo, 2009; Eaton, 2007). Rather, these institutions' deficiencies are related to inadequate procedures related to program review, integrated planning, evaluation, financial management, staffing, roles and responsibilities of governing boards, and resources (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, 2012). Accrediting agencies consider their work a compliance and regulation activity. While the explicit accreditation standards vary among the six regional accrediting agencies, they are implicitly integrated to facilitate an institution-wide dialogue on institutional effectiveness (RP Group, 2011). There is limited research, however, on how institutions have reflected on and responded to the 2002 Accreditation Standards. The purpose of accreditation has made the accreditation process a profound activity at most institutions. The measurement of student learning outcomes (SLOs) and key competencies since 2002 has been the hallmark of quality of the 2002 Accreditation Standards set by the Commission (ACCJC, 2013). The ACCJC has collected data on SLOs and key competencies since the emergence of the 2002 standards but it did not begin collecting data on the institutional deficiencies that lead to sanctions until 2009 (ACCJC, 2013). The ACCJC introduced the concept of regional workshops in 2010 to help institutions better understand and develop best practices on topics covered in the accreditation standards (ACCJC, 2012). However, all CCCs are yet to reach the proficiency and sustainable level of identifying and measuring SLOs.

The demand for greater attention to research and data, also known as the *culture of evidence*, is both exciting and challenging. However, many institutions in the past did

not evaluate data at the institutional level (Morest, 2009). Furthermore, CCCs face increased sanctions and a downward spiral of recurring budget cuts due to statewide fiscal crises (Clark, 2012; Jenkins, 2011). Developing a culture of evidence significantly expands the role of institutional participants to assess, report, and improve institutional performance and requires extensive time, effort, and financial resources (Bardo, 2009).

Given the unusually high rate of sanctions placed on CCCs, it is imperative to recognize the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 Accreditation Standards in qualifying the effectiveness of CCCs. There is a gap in the literature regarding the perceptions of CCCs regarding the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 Accreditation Standards. This study examined the literature on accreditation and the ACCJC, focusing on one of the four standards—Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness—as an overarching goal of ACCJC accreditation. The study also examined the perceptions of compliance within one member institution of the ACCJC and its accreditation processes in relation to institutional effectiveness.

Standard IB identifies nine measures for institutions to regularly assess, evaluate, and communicate their performance (ACCJC, 2013). The measures rely on an institution's mission through programs, services, policies, and procedures that lead to improvement in institutional effectiveness and academic quality (ACCJC, 2014). For a detailed explanation of Standard IB published by the ACCJC, refer to Appendix A. According to the ACCJC, Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness provides a “common language used in describing the institution's practices” (ACCJC, 2011, p. 1) and ensures continuous quality improvement. Additionally, the Rubrics for Evaluating Institutional

Effectiveness, published by the ACCJC in 2007, provide institutions with criteria for evaluating Standards II and III (ACCJC, 2011).

Background of the Study

Accreditation is the primary means for HE institutions to understand and apply core standards. Each regional agency requires and measures effectiveness and improvement at the student, program, and institutional levels in all 50 states (ACCJC, 2013). The measurements are used to legitimize an institution's ability to seek federal financial aid for student loans and grants (ACCJC, 2013). While the basics of accreditation are well recognized, the complex development and context of accreditation are less known (Brittingham, 2009). Accrediting agencies, legislators, and HE professionals have been engaged in a decades long push to collect meaningful data and to create a culture of evidence of student learning and organizational effectiveness. Consequently, the institutional accountability push has generated an era of continuous improvement in the educational environment (Arnold, 2011).

The federal requirements included in the 2002 Accreditation Standards were first implemented in the 1990s (Smith & Finney, 2008). After the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1992, the majority of colleges and universities struggled to demonstrate accountability for student learning performance, largely with quantitative measures (Crow, 2009). The revised standards and accreditation practices have shifted from largely quantitative measures to include qualitative measures since 2002 (ACCJC, 2013; Morost, 2009). Institutions seek to find new dimensions within the accreditation

process to assess and improve educational quality and institutional performance (Brittingham, 2009).

The 2002 Accreditation Standards require official recognition and approval by an accrediting agency (Neal, 2008). Accreditation enables institutions to become eligible for federal funds and ensures institutional autonomy, protecting institutions from direct governmental pressure and interference (Neal, 2008). The climate of accreditation is changing as the self-regulating process of accreditation is replaced by “mandatory accreditation” (Neal, 2008, p. 432). The push to collect more data to document sufficient effort to be more accountable by HE institutions has created disconnects between this effort and the application of improvement models. Most improvement models are primarily derived from the business sector, and they remain relatively unexamined in educational environments (Arnold, 2011). Also, not all educational institutions are adept at using data. They vary in terms of their ability to use data in decision making (Leimer, 2012).

Federal pressure to overturn the voluntary process of accreditation and its demand that accrediting agencies push for greater focus on student outcomes is legitimate (Neal, 2008). Barbara Beno, president of the ACCJC, noted that accreditors increasingly rely on both qualitative and quantitative data on student achievement and other measures when making their decisions (ACCJC, 2013). Such has been the accreditation situation with differing rates of implementing the 2002 Accreditation Standards. In summary, accreditation seems to be a central driving force for colleges and universities at a time when

Congress's and the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) interests in accreditation were being established and clarified.

The significant increase in attention to U.S. HE and accreditation can be traced back to a single report, (Brittingham, 2008; Eaton, 2010; Mori, 2009). The Commission on the Future of Higher Education, also known as the Spellings Commission, released the report in 2006 (USDE, 2006). Critics found in the report a forewarning of the rise in outcomes-based measures and the "most visible indicator of the changing landscape of accreditation" (Bardo 2009, p. 48). A fundamental shift in the 2002 Accreditation Standards was the move toward more outcomes-based measures, which have created new realities and challenges for HE institutions (Bardo, 2009).

Organizational structures and institutional policies have been challenged to integrate strategic planning and data-informed decision making with the associated costs of the accreditation processes (Bardo, 2009). Regional accreditors have also been challenged for being under resourced and not having the capacity to address the 2002 Accreditation Standards (Brittingham, 2008). Additionally, the work of regional accreditors, as they undertake greater responsibility for accreditation in HE institutions, has become more open to public scrutiny (McGuire, 2009). In response to these pressures, Congress is preparing to introduce the next reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) (Hall, 2012). The redefined relationship brewing between the federal government, HE, and accreditation could be considered "high stakes" (Eaton, 2014, p. 1).

In the case of the ACCJC, the regional accreditor was confronted with a highly publicized debate over the 2002 Accreditation Standards when more than one institution failed to meet the standards (Basken, 2013). In one of the most recent actions by the Commission, the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) was notified that it would lose its accreditation by July 2014 and would not receive an opportunity to demonstrate compliance (ACCJC, 2013). Because the CCSF was found to be significantly noncompliant with applicable ACCJC standards (Basken, 2013), the CCSF's options were to cease operations or merge with another institution. Instead, the college fought back with strong criticism of the ACCJC and an appeal over the ACCJC's adverse behavior (Basken, 2013).

The ACCJC also received a formal complaint from the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) through the DOE (ACCJC, 2013). The complaint outlined allegations about the ACCJC's accreditation review process and the adverse action taken against CCSF (ACCJC, 2013). ACCJC was also scheduled to have a hearing with the DOE about the DOE's action against the ACCJC for noncompliance with federal regulations (ACCJC, 2013). The DOE identified several issues with the ACCJC's fulfillment of the secretary's criteria for recognition and asked the ACCJC to submit a report and come into compliance within 1 year (ACCJC, 2013). Notably, the DOE asked the ACCJC to demonstrate that (a) its standards were sufficient to assess and evaluate baccalaureate level degree programs; (b) its standards were based on commonly accepted standards for ensuring the quality of programs; (c) there was wide acceptance of its standards, policies, procedures, and decisions about granting or denying accreditation to institutions; and (d)

it evaluated institutions based on their specified educational goals and alignment with their mission (ACCJC, 2014a).

As of June 2014, the ACCJC had placed 16 colleges on warning or probation (ACCJC, 2014). Despite the high number of sanctions placed on CCCs, there is little research to show how to prevent the sanctions (Roland, 2011; Tharp, 2012). Most studies have examined the benefits of accreditation, the changing climate for accreditation, and regulation in HE accreditation (Bardo, 2009; Hall, 2012; McGuire, 2009). There is little empirical evidence to show the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 Accreditation Standards. In this study, I reviewed documents about the events of the past 12 years in addition to the past 2 developmental years for updating the standards. The intent of this study was to address the gap in the research by focusing on the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 Accreditation Standards and the ACCJC Commission's assessment of institutional effectiveness for HE institutions. Specifically, I examined the congruence between the interpretation and application of ACCJC accreditation Standard IB. Additionally, the intent of the study was to seek an understanding of the critical perceptions of one community college regarding institutional effectiveness. The CCCs and the ACCJC have the joint responsibility of assessing the evidence of quality and effectiveness. It was the goal of this study to provide a deeper comprehension of the ACCJC's documents and one member institution's perceptions regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. By

providing more insight into how to fully understand and address Standard IB, this study may help augment the accreditation process at one community college.

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

Founded in 1962, the ACCJC is one of three commissions in the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) that accredits all colleges and schools within its region (ACCJC, 2013). This regional commission's territory consists of California, Hawaii, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (ACCJC, 2013). There are 112 college districts in the CCC system and it is the largest system of HE in the free world (CCCCO, 2011). The ACCJC accredits all of the institutions in the CCC system (CCCCO, 2011). To foster a climate of learning, the ACCJC established four accreditation standards by which to evaluate an institution's performance (ACCJC, 2013). The Commission also assists community colleges in conducting self-evaluation of their institutional performance by publishing guidelines and creating the rubrics for evaluating institutional effectiveness to assist community colleges in conducting self-evaluation of institutional activities and performance (ACCJC, 2009, 2010).

According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the accreditation process is a primary, reliable authority to serve the needs of students, society, and the public (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012). In 2002, the emergence of the controversial Accreditation Standards set into motion an unusually high degree of scrutiny and sanctions on California's community colleges by the ACCJC (RP

Group, 2011). While there is extensive documentation of the implementation of the 2002 standards, there is limited literature about the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 standards, which are at the heart of regional and national debates on accreditation. The majority of the literature on accreditation focuses on a variety of components of accreditation—for example, SLOs, assessment, strategic planning, institutional research, evidence-based decision making, and institutional effectiveness measures (Provenzia, 2010; Theule, 2012; Tharp, 2012). In this study, I attempted to shed light on the perceptions of a community college’s institutional participants regarding the congruence between the interpretation and application of Standard IB, which integrates all four standards.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this study was a lack of congruence between the interpretation and application of ACCJC’s 2002 Standard IB within one community college and the published expectations for compliance by the Commission. Without better congruence, the campus risked failure in future reviews and weak evaluations of effectiveness. There was potential for variance between the accreditor and the campus in the interpretation and application of accreditation standards as too many CCCs have remained continuously in improvement mode and are still unable to fully meet the standards. Identifying the nuances of understanding and application of Standard IB was critical to a community college’s success because institutional effectiveness is recognized as a major theme by the ACCJC to develop and integrate the other standards.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB at one community college and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. For this study, I analyzed participants' reflections as well as documents about the expectations between the ACCJC and a member college regarding the understanding and application of ACCJC Standard IB for institutional effectiveness. A case study design allowed a deeper understanding of the complexity of complying with accreditation standards on one community college.

Research Question

The study addresses the following research question:

Research Question 1: What has been and is one community college's perception of compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework draws upon relevant concepts, theories, models, terms, and definitions that frame a study and help the researcher interpret the findings (Merriam, 2009). A focus on Etzioni's (1961) theories of compliance and organizational environment for organizational effectiveness guided this study overall. Drawing on this conceptual framework, the study focused on one community college's perception of compliance in relationship, in particular, to the use of power, as well as two aspects of organizational environment: scope and pervasiveness. For the purposes of this study, two

constructs— organizational compliance and organizational effectiveness —provided the conceptual framework. This conceptual framework helped identify and determine the perception of a community college’s institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB and the ACCJC’s published expectations for compliance.

Etzioni’s Compliance Theory

One of the two conceptual foundations for this study was organizational compliance. The study of the phenomenon experienced by a CCC in relation to accreditation standards and practices was addressed by using Etzioni’s (1961) compliance theory for several reasons. First, throughout most of U.S. accreditation history, the emphasis has been on compliance; only in the 21st century has the focus of accreditors shifted to quality improvement (RP Group, 2011). Second, the use of compliance in accreditation is based on two integral functions of accreditation: quality assurance and improvement. Compliance fulfills the need for quality assurance and continues to be relevant to accreditation (RP Group, 2011). Third, Etzioni’s compliance theory may provide pertinent perspectives on the use of power, scope, and pervasiveness found in educational organizations.

Etzioni’s compliance theory has been used to engage faculty in assessment programs and activities for accreditation (Deide, 2009). Because most organizations are performance oriented, goal driven, and outcomes based, there is an association between compliance, goals, and effectiveness (Deide, 2009). Compliance gives organizations a

vital relevance in determining their power structure and their strengths and weaknesses in ensuring compliance with standards and policies (Etzioni, 1961).

The roots of compliance theory can be traced to Germany, where Etzioni (1961) identified organizational hierarchies based on compliance and the use of power for social control. The central principle of compliance theory suggests that social influence in organizations is the driving force behind compliance, which then affects behavior and interactions (Etzioni, 1961). According to Etzioni, compliance in organizations is based on three kinds of power that individuals in positions of authority use to influence a group or groups, which match his identification of three classifications of organizations according to which type of power they wield. The three powers and organizational classifications are coercive, remunerative, and normative (Etzioni, 1961).

Coercive power relies on affliction and threat of force, whether applied or implied (Etzioni, 1961). The essential idea behind coercive power is the use of coercion as a major form of control over subordinates (Etzioni, 1961). Coercive organizations such as prisons use this power to force individuals to fulfill the major tasks of the organization while subjecting them to alienation and restraint (Etzioni, 1961). Remunerative power uses control over material resources that confine subordinates, such as pay, commissions, and benefits, which are determined by the leaders in the organization (Etzioni, 1961). Utilitarian organizations, such as industries, primarily demonstrate remuneration as a major form of control over subordinates (Etzioni, 1961). Normative power rests on the regulation of a symbolic reward system and the deprivations therein through forms of manipulation, persuasion, and allocation (Etzioni, 1961). Normative organizations, such

as mental hospitals, rely on this type of power to control individuals through directives, rituals, leadership, and manipulation of communal and esteem symbols (Etzioni, 1961).

Etzioni's Theory of Organizational Environment

Etzioni (1961) uses three concepts of organizational environment, recruitment, scope, and pervasiveness, to examine the relationship between compliance and organizational effectiveness. For this study, I examined the concepts of scope and pervasiveness because they go beyond the recruitment of participants and were more aligned with the purpose of the study.

Etzioni (1961) noted that scope and pervasiveness are positively related to compliance and directly or indirectly help in determining the effectiveness of organizations. Scope, as a compliance correlate, either embraces all the participants of an organization in joint activities or limits others in those activities. Pervasiveness is a compliance concept that sets normative standards (e.g. use symbolic reward system) in the number of activities conducted by an organization within and outside of its boundary.

According to Etzioni (1961), certain consolidations of compliance and power structures are more effective than others for different organizations. For example, organizations with economic goals institute the conditions necessary to maintain their subjective or objective realities. Similarly, culture oriented organizations, such as universities, develop an emphasis on cultural modalities to attain their research-based outcomes. In Chapter 2, I provide a more descriptive analysis of Etzioni's compliance theory.

Nature of the Study

This study used a qualitative, single site exploratory case study approach to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of ACCJC Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness and the published expectations of the Commission. While 16 CCCs were on probation or warning at the time of this study, and many were still unable to fully meet the standards, I chose one community college to provide rich descriptions of campus participants' accreditation experiences through multiple sources of data (ACCJC 2014). I gathered information from four sources: (a) a focus group (b) semistructured interviews with community college participants including staff, faculty, and administrators; (c) observations of these participants in accreditation meetings in their work setting; and (d) documents and reports about the college and the ACCJC. I used snowball and convenience sampling to choose institutional participants at the community college site and sought out publicly available documents from the ACCJC in order to obtain rich descriptions of the institution's experiences with the accreditation processes. I used continuous coding to bring new insights and to decide whether to conduct additional interviews or analysis of documents.

Definition of Terms

Several definitions are used throughout this study. The following terms are important to understand within the scope of this research.

Accreditation: The process of certification and legitimization of the authority exercised by educational institutions based on demonstrable standards of quality and improvement as identified by an official review board (CHEA, 2012).

Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC): The accrediting body that accredits all community and junior colleges in the WASC region including California (ACCJC, 2012).

Accreditors: Individuals in a position of legitimate power and responsibility to review and accredit institutions based on standards of accreditation (ACCJC, 2012).

Accreditation standards are a set of benchmarks used to promote quality assurance and improvement. Colleges and universities must meet the standards in order to be accredited and reaccredited (ACCJC, 2011).

California community colleges system (CCC): The largest HE provider in the United States offering access to 2year and certificate programs for students based on minimum admission requirements and low fee structures (CCCCO, 2011).

Commission: An official group of individuals charged with carrying out the obligations, duties, policies, and regulations assigned to the group based on its statutory authority (Eaton, 2012).

Higher education (HE): The progression of formal, postsecondary education primarily delivered in colleges and universities (Hall, 2012).

Institutional effectiveness: A concept of measuring and improving institutional performance outcomes based on organizational goals and objectives (ACCJC, 2011). The

terms *organizational effectiveness* and *institutional effectiveness* are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Organizational effectiveness: A concept of measuring and improving institutional performance outcomes based on organizational goals and objectives (ACCJC, 2011). The terms *organizational effectiveness* and *institutional effectiveness* are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Outcomes: The predictable results derived from institutional goals and objectives (ACCJC, 2012).

Regional accrediting agencies: Voluntary, nongovernmental review boards, designated by the Department of Education, that oversee the accreditation process in colleges and universities in all the regions of the United States (ACCJC, 2013).

Student learning outcomes (SLOs): The results that students demonstrate based on what they learn and do in completing their academic program (Ewell, 2001).

Assumptions

While there is no universal definition or model of institutional effectiveness, this research took into consideration multiple perspectives of institutional effectiveness into one description. For this study, institutional effectiveness was defined as an ongoing and systematic analysis, assessment, and evaluation of an institution based on its mission and through broad engagement and communication with its internal and external constituents about learning outcomes and accomplishments. I assumed that participants in this study would provide information truthfully and completely. Additionally, I assumed they would remember their experiences to the best of their memory and accuracy. Another

assumption of this study was that the use of publicly available documents would provide data that answer the research question.

Scope and Delimitations

The study pertained to CCCs, which represent the largest system of HE in the United States. The study focused on one 2 year community college as the backdrop for understanding the efficacy of the 2002 Accreditation Standards, with an emphasis on one of the four ACCJC standards, Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness. It was not within the scope of this study to explore all four accreditation standards because of the vastness of the literature and research time required to cover all four standards within a single study. To gain meaningful data, all participants in this research had accreditation experience of more than 1 year at the community college under investigation. Given the highly charged nature of events at the Commission, it was impossible to interview the Commission staff or commissioners during the study period.

Additionally, it is important as the author and main instrument of the study to disclose the richly complex experiences I have with this area of study and the chosen emphasis. My inspiration for studying accreditation and my focus on the congruence between the interpretation and application of the 2002 Accreditation Standards came from several years of accreditation experience in a community college setting. The results of this qualitative study may not be generalizable to other institutions due to its focus on examining the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the interpretation and application of the ACCJC's Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness as experienced by one CCC.

Limitations

As with any research study, there are limitations to this study. Whereas examination of the ACCJC is relevant, exploration of only one community college from over 100 CCCs is less desirable. However, analysis of the phenomenon at multiple sites was not feasible due to limited time and resources. One primary limitation of this study was the use of a small sample at a single community college as a case study. Although the study was not generalizable, the purpose was to understand a particular phenomenon in depth. Setting this boundary at the onset of the study defined the different aspects of a case study approach and allowed me to set limits on time and means. It would have been beneficial to include the experiences of the ACCJC staff and commissioners with the accreditation process, but this was not possible. The highly charged nature of the relationship between the ACCJC and the CCCs made it difficult to seek the Commissions' input during this time. Hence, the missing voices of the ACCJC staff and commissioners were a limitation of this study.

Another limitation of this study was my novice experience in conducting qualitative research. A high level of preparation was essential to overcome limits related to the quality of this study. Finally, the researcher's personal assumptions and research purpose, which are part of any study, can limit the competence of the researcher and the study itself. Presenting the findings and accurately reflecting on the analysis required intimate knowledge of my audience. Accuracy and precision are two areas that required careful planning and action so that I could remain aware of the researcher and participant

relationship throughout the study. As Janesick (2011) noted, the researcher's habits at all stages of the study determine the limitations or strengths of the study.

Significance

I identified several significant areas of this study. The study had the potential to provide a deeper understanding of the ACCJC Standard IB and a common framework for an institution to achieve full compliance with Standard IB. The increased understanding of Standard IB may lead to a consistent application of the standard. The study may provide an exploration and perception of institutional practices to develop and assess Standard IB (i.e. accomplishment of educational goals and mission of the institution and improve related outcomes for the institution). Furthermore, this study adds to the knowledge base of the accreditation practices and standards to advance institutional effectiveness of HE institutions and augment the accreditation process at CCCs.

Summary

Accreditation is an essential practice of the nongovernmental, peer review process for assessing the educational quality of institutions. California community colleges offer a unique gateway of opportunity for students transitioning to HE and beyond. In an era of increased accountability, CCCs face new challenges to demonstrate student achievement, institutional performance, and standards of quality as prescribed by the ACCJC and the federal government. A decade long struggle between the ACCJC and the CCCs has put a national spotlight on the importance of accreditation (Theule, 2012). The debate over accreditation has called into question the meaning and purpose of accreditation in terms of assuring institutional quality and educational improvement in the 21st century.

Simultaneously, CCCs face uncharted territory in the continuing statewide economic downturn, which has further challenged their ability to be compliant with the ACCJC 2002 Accreditation Standards. Examining the congruence between the understanding and application of one of the four ACCJC standards (Standard IB) was vital and relevant. The growing emphasis on accountability at the regional and national levels has raised the importance of accreditation and is changing the dynamics of the relationship between HE institutions, accrediting bodies, and the federal government.

The majority of the research on the 2002 Accreditation Standards focused on the assessment of teaching and learning practices, decision making, and ways to implement and measure the standards. There is limited research on the congruence between the understanding and application of accreditation standards that illustrate organizational improvement. The findings of this study may provide feasible approaches to using improved and meaningful processes for accreditation in the area of institutional effectiveness for HE institutions.

The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a background and in-depth analysis of current research on accreditation in a changing environment of HE. Additionally, the significance of institutional effectiveness was analyzed in terms of their impact on accreditation and HE. I also reviewed Etzioni's (1961) theories of compliance and organizational effectiveness to provide the basis of the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 2 also highlights the current trends in HE accreditation and the importance of institutional effectiveness and accreditation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

HE institutions are facing increasing federal control, which is impacting the processes and validity of accrediting agencies. A nationwide push for more evidence of student achievement, institutional performance, and standards of quality has shifted the relationship between regional accrediting agencies and HE institutions and increased federal control over accreditation (Eaton, 2009, Hall, 2012; Kuh, 2007; Neal, 2008). Consequently, accreditation has been viewed as a gatekeeper for federal education subsidies (Crow, 2009; Eaton, 2010; Ewell, 2011a; Neal, 2008; Urofsky, 2013). In an era of increased regulation, an immutable reality of accreditation is the correlation between regional accrediting agencies and HE institutions (Brittingham, 2009). As a result of the changes in the relationship between accrediting agencies and HE institutions, more needs to be understood about the relationship.

Literature Search Strategy

In preparing for this literature review, I accessed several research databases through Walden University, including Education Research Complete, Education Research Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, and EBSCO Host. I also reviewed the resources of the following national and regional associations: Accreditation Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), and California Federation of Teachers (CFT). Most of the published scholarly articles I used for this literature review

were dated between 2009 and 2014. I used a few articles dated prior to 2009 due to a dearth of more recent material on the topic.

I used the following research terms to identify articles and papers: *accreditation, higher education, compliance, accreditation commission, regional accreditors, organizational effectiveness, goal setting and effectiveness, community colleges, leadership, and ACCJC*. Given the paucity of research on accreditation in HE, the literature review draws heavily on historical perspectives on accreditation and the evolution of accreditation in the contemporary educational landscape.

The literature review consists of six sections. The first two sections provide the conceptual framework regarding the central phenomenon of institutional effectiveness through an exploration Etzioni's (1961) compliance theory and scope and pervasiveness as central concepts in his theory of organizational effectiveness. The third and fourth sections focus on accreditation and its history, along with an overview of the evolution of accreditation standards in the United States. The fifth section discusses recent changes in the culture of accreditation and the sixth section explores the case of City College of San Francisco. The last two sections focus primarily on the importance of accreditation and the use of institutional effectiveness as an accreditation standard.

Conceptual Framework

This research used two theories: organizational compliance and organizational effectiveness. Etzioni's (1961) compliance theory was used to interpret one community college's understanding and application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission. Compliance theory focuses on a fundamental structure of

organizations' use of power (Etzioni, 1961). The term *organizational effectiveness* is used to describe the effectiveness of institutions, or institutional effectiveness. Etzioni's theory of organizational effectiveness includes three aspects of organizational environment: (a) recruitment, (b) scope, and (c) pervasiveness in meeting its goals, and effectiveness. The constructs of scope and pervasiveness were also used to interpret the college's understanding and application of standards. Scope and pervasiveness directly or indirectly influence an organization's environment and its effectiveness.

I anticipated the two theories (organizational compliance and organizational effectiveness) to help clarify some of the perspectives, values, and assumptions of one community college's participants about their perceptions of compliance and congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission.

Etzioni's Compliance Theory

In education, compliance is a means to address regional and national standards on accreditation. It is also used to continuously improve the quality of programs and services in HE institutions (Kinkaid & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, using the accreditation process to go beyond mere compliance to improvement and transformation of programs can be a stimulus for HE institutions in all 50 states (Martin, 2013). Because most organizations have a system of order and different cultural and economic goals, there is a relationship between compliance and organizational goals and effectiveness. Likewise, the compliance structure of organizations and the organization's institutional goals

influence each other depending on the institution's mode of operation and goal of either survival or effectiveness (Etzioni, 1961).

Etzioni (1961) found that organizations with similar compliance structures have similar goals. Etzioni was an innovative researcher in the field of organizational studies who identified the complexity of organizations and the characteristics of organizations at different levels based on the type of power they used. In his examination of the complexity of organizations, Etzioni introduced compliance theory as a way to identify the social order exercised in different organizations to direct the level of power, involvement of participants, and compliance. According to Etzioni, most of the literature on organizational research had focused on the general characteristics of organizations. Organizational effectiveness studies have relied primarily on the case study approach to understand the dynamism of organizations and have not focused on the differences that define the social units within each organization (Etzioni, 1961).

Etzioni identified three types of compliance patterns that exist in most organizations: coercive, utilitarian, and normative (Etzioni, 1961). Any one type of compliance may be predominant in an organization. Each represents a social order that defines an organization's characteristics such as size, scope, pervasiveness, complexity, and effectiveness (Etzioni, 1961).

Etzioni's Theory of Organizational Environment

Every organization has its compliance structure influenced by its environment. According to Etzioni (1975), the organizational environment operates primarily under two modes: scope and pervasiveness. Each organization differs in its degree of scope,

representing either a broad scope or narrow scope of activities (Etzioni, 1975).

Organizations that represent a broad scope embrace all participants in organizational activities (Etzioni, 1975). Organizations that have a narrow scope segregate some of those participants in activities (Etzioni, 1975). Pervasiveness is the range of activities within and outside an organization's boundary and is based on normative standards that go beyond the typical organizational behaviors (Etzioni, 1975). Similar to scope, organizations differ in their pervasiveness or the range of activities. According to Etzioni (1975), pervasiveness is large when activities include the broader social groups of organizational participants. On the contrary, pervasiveness is small when organizational leaders directly control activities and socially segregates the participants (Etzioni, 1975). Thus, pervasiveness and scope are more or less interrelated in most normative organizations (such as educational organizations) even though they may vary in the range and degree of being highly broad or narrow or being highly pervasive or less pervasive.

According to Etzioni (1975), there is a clear relationship between normative compliance and effectiveness even though normative organizations differ from each other in the degree of scope and pervasiveness. Building extracurricular activities is one of the ways to increase the scope of an organization (Etzioni, 1975). Organizations that maximize both their scope and pervasiveness are considered total organizations (Etzioni, 1975). In sum, Etzioni (1975) found the scope of the organization to closely relate to the type of organization (coercive, utilitarian, and normative), and its effectiveness. The greater the socialization, which includes broad scope of inclusion for all participants, the greater is the total scope and effectiveness of the organization (Etzioni, 1975). Hence, the

correlates of compliance, scope and pervasiveness, are directly related to the effectiveness of an organization.

In examining the relationship between compliance and effectiveness, Etzioni (1961) identified several empirical studies of normative, utilitarian, and coercive organizations that tested compliance theory. In particular, Etzioni addressed a research study by Julian (1966, 1968) that focused on the relationships between power and involvement in normative organizations. Julian used a sample of 183 participants and a 36-item scale to collect data based on participants' perceptions of staff in five large hospitals in a Western U.S. city (as cited in Etzioni, 1961). The findings of the study supported Etzioni's (1961) proposition that organizations typically have one dominant type of involvement and that normative organizations typically have a compliance structure and broad relationships to scope and pervasiveness that participants perceive positively.

Several other studies have drawn on Etzioni's (1961) theory. Sutinen and Kupernan (1999) used Etzioni's compliance theory as a basis to study an integrated behavioral model. They combined theories from economics, sociology, and psychology to understand the cost and revenue associated with illegal behavior, moral obligation, and social influence (Sutinen & Kupernan). Sutinen and Kupernan also developed a model to understand the moral obligation and social influence associated with illegal behavior. The framework resulted in the implementation of a more efficient compliance process for regulatory programs.

Using Etzioni's compliance theory, Diede (2009) examined the level of involvement of faculty using a qualitative descriptive case study approach to gain in-depth knowledge of participants' experiences with accreditation activities. The findings confirmed that the three types of powers identified by Etzioni—coercive, utilitarian, and normative—existed in all three institutions participating in the study (Diede, 2009). Similarly, Ortlieb and Sieben (2012) used compliance theory and resource dependence theory (RDT) as a theoretical rationale to identify organizational resource strategies for attracting and securing competent professional and managerial staff. Ortlieb and Sieben used semistructured interviews, a questionnaire, and a sample of 159 participants who held top-level HR positions in companies in Germany. They sought to determine whether employee retention through coercion in the form of employment contracts and penalties was a functional strategy (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012). The findings showed that retention strategies that positioned Etzioni's normative power (such as incentives) were more functional than coercive strategies in safeguarding compliance in organizations (Ortlieb & Sieben, 2012).

However, Etienne (2011) argued that given the complexity of compliance, most compliance theories fall short in determining the interplay of divergent motivations that distinguish emotional goals from material goals. To address this complexity, Etienne (2011) suggested improving compliance theory by accounting for several divergent motivations that simultaneously influence compliance and noncompliance decisions. Lunenburg (2012) noted that organizational life is far more complicated than the oversimplified types of power and involvement identified by Etzioni.

Meeting standards of effectiveness is part of compliance activities for accreditation (ACCJC, 2013). One decisive factor in HE institutions' success is the strategic ability to plan and use decision making in key processes and goals (Jenkins, 2011; Macfadyen & Dawson, 2012). Etzioni's compliance theory will be used in this study to examine the perception of compliance at one community college. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, two constructs—organizational effectiveness and organizational compliance—will provide the conceptual framework.

Cameron's Model of Organizational Effectiveness

Etzioni is not the only theorist or researcher to address organizational effectiveness. Among the major models of organizational effectiveness, Cameron's (1978) model is the only one I found designed for colleges and universities. Cameron designed this model to help identify important dimensions of effectiveness that can be used in assessing key institutional characteristics (as cited in Jacob & Shari, 2012). Cameron's model used both objective and subjective criteria to draw upon the perspectives of students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Cameron, 1978). The model has been used in several empirical studies (An, Yom, & Ruggiero, 2011; Blekic, 2011; de la Cruz, 2011; Hertelendy, 2010; Lejeune & Vas, 2009; Makmee, Sujiva, & Kanjanawasee, 2010; Sirilap, Erawan, & Ruannakrn, 2012).

Cameron (1978) designed a model of organizational effectiveness to address the need for a comprehensive model to assess the unique characteristics, goals, and dimensions of HE institutions (Cameron, 1978). Cameron's approach to creating a model of organizational effectiveness was empirically derived and tested. The model

encompasses the characteristics of four major models of effectiveness: (a) goal approach, (b) system resource approach, (c) process approach, and (d) strategic constituency approach (Cameron, 1978). Because no singular criterion fully measures organizational effectiveness, Cameron's model identifies nine dimensions for measuring the effectiveness of HE institutions.

Cameron (1978) has had a significant influence on the literature on the effectiveness of HE organizations. His model has been used in several empirical studies (An, Yom, & Ruggiero, 2011; Blekic, 2011; Cameron, 1986; de la Cruz, 2011; Hertelendy, 2010; Leimer, 2011; Lejeune & Vas, 2009; Makmee, Sujiva, & Kanjanawasee, 2010; Sirilap, Erawan, & Ruannakarn, 2012; Smart, 2003). I considered Cameron's theory in interpreting the data, as needed, but did not design the data collection instruments based on the theory.

Accreditation

There are four major types of accreditation in the United States based on scope and geography: (a) regional accreditation, (b) national faith-related accreditation, (c) national career-related accreditation, and (d) programmatic accreditation (Eaton, 2009). According to the U.S Department of Education (U.S Department of Education, 2010) six regional agencies are recognized by the DOE for accrediting institutions in specific regions:

- The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
- The Middle States Association of Colleges and Universities.
- The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
- The New England Association of Colleges and Schools.
- The Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Western Association consists of the Accrediting Commission for Schools, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (U.S Department of Education, 2010). Each region has a different structure for their commissions, but all have commissions that cover universities, community colleges, and schools (K–12) U.S Department of Education, 2010. In addition to regional accreditation, the DOE recognizes programmatic or specialized accreditation U.S Department of Education, 2010. National accreditors award program level accreditations for specialized programs/departments in colleges and universities (Drisko, 2014; McFarlane, 2010). The regional agencies grant most public and private colleges and universities their accreditation and are recognized by the CHEA (McFarlane, 2010). The network of regional accrediting commissions focuses on specific regions that differentiate regional standards. However, across the network, basic elements serve a common purpose of institutional engagement and effectiveness, educational improvement, and SLOs (Chaden, 2013; Henry, 2008). The ubiquity of accreditation standards, as set forth by the six regional accrediting commissions, gives HE institutions formal recognition (McFarlane, 2010).

The origin of the term accreditation is from the Latin word *accredere* (Engebretsen, Keggen, & Eliertsen, 2012). It has a double meaning: to give authority or credit, or to reveal confidence (Engebretsen, Keggen, & Eliertsen, 2012). Accreditation

has been an American enterprise for more than a century (Eaton, 2009). The stated purpose of accreditation in the United States is to protect the public interest and the public's safety by providing external quality reviews of HE institutions (Eaton, 2009). Meeting the needs of diverse groups at the local, regional, and national levels is a core mission of public institutions of HE (McGuire, 2009; Smith & Finney, 2008). These institutions attempt to serve students through a range of academic programs and courses (Volkwein, 2010). The federal and state governments recognize accreditation as a "reliable authority" (Eaton, 2009, p. 80) to assure academic quality.

The evolving nature of the accreditation process is a transformation of traditional practices of teaching and learning due to its core focus on new accountability models (Bertrand, 2013; Jenkins, 2011). Patel (2012) used a mixed-methods case study approach to examine the impact and effectiveness of ACCJC accreditation sanctions on student learning and achievement. Using multiple measures to examine two institutions, each with multiple college districts, Patel drew on purposeful sampling to identify one institution with sanctions and another without sanctions. The findings from the semistructured interviews and various performance measures, reports, and documents showed that while the sanctions were a driver for change, there was a disconnect between effective measures of student learning and accreditation sanctions (Patel, 2012). The evolution of accreditation is an ongoing process to improve learning and meaningful outcomes. The American accreditation has been used both as a "system" and as a "benchmark" by other countries, with varying degrees of adaptations (Mori, 2009, p. 70; Wang, 2014). As such, the evolving nature of accreditation continues to provide new

perspectives, including new challenges and opportunities, for higher education (HE) to improve the educational quality of its institutions and the learning outcomes for students.

Accreditation History

American accreditation is unique in the world primarily because of the cultural values it reflects in its structure and composition of entrepreneurship, problem solving, self-improvement, and volunteering (Brittingham, 2009). Accreditation is a nongovernmental system that emerged in the 1940s in the form of voluntary criteria based on a peer evaluation process for assessing institutional performance (Neal, 2008). The advent of formal recognition of accreditation in 1952 by the U.S Commissioner of Education provided federal support to eligible students. Such recognition is embedded in a long-standing tradition of identifying accrediting agencies and associations to ensure academic quality in HE institutions (Mori, 2009; Hartle, 2011). At the time, the self-regulating process of accreditation was simple and straightforward. The purpose was to solve the information barrier and to articulate the transition from high school to college or university through commonly established standards (Hall, 2012). In the late 1980s, the rise in federal student loan default rates further demonstrated the dependence on accreditation and regional accrediting agencies (Hartle, 2011). With the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1992, Congress demanded federal oversight of accreditation by requiring regional accreditors to provide more evidence of institutional quality and improvement.

Twenty years later, accreditation remains a complex process of peer-review. The process brings together a team of educational professionals who serve as visiting team

members or commissioners from member institutions to assess and measure an institution's compliance with accrediting standards and institutional performance (McGuire, 2009). The HE institutions are chastened by "an era of diminished investment in higher education" (Crow, 2009, p. 93). In effect, HE institutions and faculty remain largely constrained by the ever-growing "love-hate relationship with the accreditation" process (Eaton, 2010, p. 7; Frawley, 2014).

The Evolution of Standards

In 2002 and 2014, the ACCJC updated its four standards: (a) Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity; (b) Student Learning Programs and Support Services; (c) Resources; and (d) Leadership and Governance. While the standards are intended to focus on specific areas of institutional performance and improvement, their primary focus is on advancing student learning (ACCJC, 2012). In an effort to provide guidance to community colleges to better understand, interpret, and address accreditation standards, the ACCJC provides a comprehensive list of supplemental materials and resources on its website. The ACCJC relies on 19 commissioners, who represent faculty and administrators of member institutions, as well as the public, to set policies and accreditation standards and oversee the accreditation of member institutions (ACCJC, 2012). Along with the chairman and the president of the ACCJC, the Commission evaluates the effectiveness and integrity of each member institution's self-governing processes and educational quality. Thus, accreditation forms a valid seal of approval and trust between institutions and the accrediting agency. An

approval is also recognized by the DOE and allows the flow of federal Title IV funds (financial aid for students), grants, and contracts to institutions.

The adoption of the 2002 Accreditation Standards by the ACCJC represents a “decade-long movement” (Beno, 2004, p. 65) to assemble a framework for incorporating SLOs in HE. This shift in momentum toward accountability in HE was in part the result of a domino effect. Change movements in the 1990s were aimed at “reinvent[ing] governments and reengineer[ing] businesses” (Burke & Minassians, 2002, p. 5). Consequently, the “old issues” (Eaton, 2009, p. 1) of HE accountability also emerged in the new era (Frawley, 2014). Ikenberry (2009) found that accreditation history is full of adaptations and changes made based on changing circumstances and periods. Despite the ongoing changes, the accreditation issues have kept HE a vulnerable enterprise (Ikenberry, 2009).

The evolving accreditation standards seek to improve and measure student learning along with institutional performance and effectiveness predominantly through quantitative measures (Jenkins, 2011; Theule, 2012). In response to the growing accountability and outcomes movement in the United States, Castiglia and Turi (2011) conducted a quantitative research study. They sought to examine the inferences of the accountability requirement of business graduate programs accredited by the International Assembly of Collegiate Business Education (IACBC). The sample size was 74 business schools accredited by IACBC, which responded anonymously to a 20-item questionnaire. The findings suggested that the two primary reasons that participants made assessment

efforts were self-improvement and accountability, as defined in most accreditation standards (Castiglia & Turi, 2011).

Jenkins (2011), making note of the evolving changes in HE accreditation, claimed that community colleges often lack a well-coordinated process for measuring SLOs for academic programs. In articulating the ACCJC's expectations of the 2002 standards, Beno (2004), the president of the Commission since 2001, noted several changes in the standards. Beno remarked that community colleges would be expected to focus on and develop new institutional practices and measures of student learning and outcomes-based assessment.

Changes made in the ACCJC accreditation standards did not significantly affect the accreditation process in the past, but this was not the case with the 2002 standards (Tharp, 2012). A prevailing debate among many stakeholders throughout the CCC system is over the process of assigning accreditation sanctions imposed by the ACCJC. The intense scrutiny over whether institutions met the 2002 Accreditation Standards was intended to advance student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Professional organizations such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS) and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) were supportive and outspoken about the 2002 standards as soon as the standards were published. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC), however, was the only organization to take exception to the 2002 standards by choosing not to solely rely on them. Instead, the ASCCC identified several modified roles for faculty to work within the objectives of SLOs for accreditation. The ASCCC chose to work with the standards

instead of completely rejecting them because of the organization's long-standing relationship with the Commission and the accreditation process (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2005).

In a paper prepared for the ACCJC, Ewell (2011) underscored the need for the 2002 Accreditation Standards. Ewell noted that prior to 2002 the standards relied on traditional practices of teaching and learning. These practices were not well equipped to address the role of increased accountability in the 21st century in terms of new teaching and learning modes and distance education.

To understand and demonstrate the effectiveness of U.S. teacher education programs, Cooner, Stevenson, and Fredericksen (2011) conducted a quantitative research study. They used teacher work samples as a reliable assessment method and content validity to align with state accreditation standards and course outcomes. Participants included all graduates who completed the teacher-training program at Colorado State University ($N = 492$) between 2006 and 2009. Using descriptive statistics and ANOVA, Cooner et al. (2011) found that students scored in the advanced range for the different categories of work samples. The results also positively linked learning outcomes to the accreditation standards.

As the debate over the 2002 Accreditation Standards and increased sanctions on CCCs wore on, the ACCJC stated it planned to review the standards in 2014 (ACCJC, 2013). In June, 2014, it released the updated Accreditation Standards, which expanded several sections of the four standards, reduced redundancy and complexity, and attempted to clarify the expectations of the Commission (ACCJC, 2014). For example, Standard I

was revised to contain three sections instead of two (mission and institutional effectiveness), adding institutional integrity as the third section.

Recent Changes in the Culture of Accreditation

Accreditation, long perceived as the “collegial” practice of peer evaluation (Eaton, 2010, p. 6) has become “virtually mandatory” (Neal, 2008, p. 26). Maintaining accreditation status makes colleges and universities eligible for federal funds for student financial aid, grants, and loans. In the 2012–2013 fiscal year the federal government provided \$35.9 billion in grant aid and \$106.4 billion in new student loans (New America Foundation, 2013). HE institutions account for nearly \$375 billion per year in expenditures and serve approximately 17.7 million students (Roland, 2011). The federal government’s understandable demand for increased accountability from regional accreditors has further added pressure and uncertainty in HE (Eaton, 2009; Murray, 2012). According to Bardo, HE institutions can expect to be under “continuous scrutiny by the regional accreditors” (Bardo, 2009, p. 47). The practice of continuous scrutiny has evolved in part because accreditation has become a “major force of change” (Wergin, 2005, p. 35) in HE in the 21st century.

The renewal of the HEA in 2008 not only reemphasized the role of regional accreditors but also formed a contention of “social power” (Mori, 2009, p. 71) between the government and regional accreditors (Frawley, 2014; Hoffman, 2013). The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) is a nongovernmental body that advises and provides recommendations to the U.S Secretary of Education. In particular, the NACIQI provides recommendations on the effectiveness

and quality of recognized accrediting organizations throughout the United States.

According to Eaton, the NACIQI has leverage along with the federal government to “pressure higher education” (Eaton, 2007, p. 20). Undeniably, the steady involvement of the federal government has shifted the landscape of HE in the United States with turbulent changes in addressing accreditation (Crow, 2009; Ewell, 2012; Drisko, 2014).

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), when questioning the involvement and integrity of the federal accreditation process, uncovered structural problems, secrecy, and low standards of federal accreditation. The ACTA called for reforms to practices that undermined academic quality in HE (Neal, 2008). Among the reforms was the recommendation to sever the link between the federal government and the accreditors to limit federal oversight (Brittingham, 2008).

Even though quality assurance in HE has gained both national and international traction in accreditation practices, it has yet to gain a systematic structure (Frawley, 2014; Murray, 2012; Patel, 2012; Sungu & Bayrakci, 2010). Although it is important to address the use of quality in different contexts, Nagy and Robinson (2013) noted that the definitions of “quality” and “quality assurance” that are often used in HE are contrived from business, management, and manufacturing contexts. Perhaps one reason for the quality challenge is the unique traits that colleges and universities convey to ensure institutional autonomy and diversity. Because definitions of quality rely on prevailing social and economic trends, educational policy makers struggle to objectively measure quality and related indicators (Ice, Burgess, Beals, & Staley, 2012).

HE institutions that are in the process of transforming traditional instruction delivery to online and distance learning modalities face additional challenges of reenvisioning and redefining the quality of programs and services for online learning and accreditation (Anaper, Ulucay, & Cabuk, 2013; Ice, Burgess, Beals, & Staley, 2012). In order to explore research on distance learning programs and accreditation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Fawwaz (2008) used diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory to assess the nation's current accreditation standards and practices. Fawwaz also conducted a comparative analysis of standards in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom to identify the relevance of the standards used in the UAE.

Fawwaz (2008) designed a mixed-methods, single-site, exploratory case study to address four research questions about the current standards, the processes used, the perceptions of those standards, and the flexibility of the standards to allow for new and innovative programs. To this end, Fawwaz used structured interviews and surveys from staff and faculty. The findings showed that although the UAE accreditation standards relied on current best practices for accreditation in other countries, there was need to improve the scope of the standards. The standards needed to be flexible enough to allow innovative programs in distance learning to grow and to improve accreditation practices.

While standardized programs and policies typically adhere to national benchmarks, standardization of student learning limits an institution's ability to be distinctive in its approach to teaching and learning (Kincaid & Andersen, 2010). According to Leimer (2012), the perceived resistance to being more accountable is not the result of a lack of expertise or autonomy in U.S. colleges and universities. Instead, it

is due to a lack of effective leadership, which is integral to shaping the institutional dialog, policy, and practice for a diverse audience. Although the philosophical debate on accountability practices in HE is not new, the prevailing trends portray different viewpoints. In summary, accreditation in HE institutions is increasingly multifaceted in order to fully measure accreditation standards (Hale, 2013).

According to Chopka, Hughes, and White-Mincarelli (2011), accreditation holds the key to challenging educational institutions to define and assess learning both in public and for-profit HE institutions. In a quantitative study, Maloney, Antommara, Bale, Ying, Greene, and Srivastava (2012) sought to review medical education accreditation. The purpose of the study was to examine medical interns' performance in accordance with newly mandated work hour restrictions to a 30-hour duty period by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in 2003. Using a sample size of 26 interns at a large urban hospital, Maloney et al. (2012) reported the level of hospital noncompliance using the interns' workload. The findings suggested that noncompliance with the ACGME Standards varied greatly among interns. The results of this study ultimately led to changes in the ACGME standards, eliminating the long hours for interns and reducing the maximum number of patients per intern at the facility (Maloney et al., 2012).

In another study, Broom, Wood, and Sampson (2013) sought to understand the current trends in a health care management program at an accredited graduate school. They examined empirical data from 55 site visit reports and direct participation at 29 sites from 2007 to 2012. Using a qualitative study, Broom et al. (2013) assessed the data based

on a new set of accreditation criteria established in 2007 by the Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Management Education (CAHCME). The CAHCME is a well-recognized authority that establishes the quality of health care graduate program in colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada.

Using a sample size of 55 programs that represented over half of the actual population of 99 programs, Broom et al. (2013) conducted face-to-face interviews on site with stakeholders. Participants came from different levels of 55 organizations. Additionally, they used secondary data to gain a deeper understanding of the current trends in accreditation across the field. The findings suggested that the evolving changes in health care accreditation have brought newer challenges for institutions and stakeholders. The results also showed that institutions were in the process of implementing and assessing the new mandates to meet ongoing accreditation requirements (Broom, Wood, & Sampson, 2013).

In addressing the challenge of defining and assessing learning, the European University Association defined accreditation as a two-fold process (Cret, 2011). First, organizations must define and control the threshold of quality. Second, they must improve education as internal and external functions (Cret, 2011). In an effort to improve the quality assurance aspect of accreditation, the European universities received the Bologna declaration in 1999 to reform HE (Cret, 2011).

Armsby (2012) conducted a qualitative research study to identify issues related to accreditation of prior experiential learning in doctoral candidates in the UK. According to Armsby, in seeking accreditation, experiential learning is defined as work-based learning

through which doctoral candidates often struggle to measure and assess their unique work-based achievements. To fully understand the emerging issues in the field, Armsby used a small sample size of 12 participants. Armsby sought participants enrolled in a UK-based professional doctorate program and conducted semistructured phone interviews and focus group discussions to gather and analyze data on participants' prior experience with experiential learning. A quantitative questionnaire was later added to verify or refute the qualitative findings (Armsby, 2012). The findings established an ongoing debate about accreditation among UK HE professionals. In particular, the debate reflected on how to conceptualize and assess the accreditation of experiential learning that constitutes scholarship and research skills at the doctoral level (Armsby, 2012).

In another study, Caldwell, Kunker, Brown, and Saiki (2011) sought to explore meaningful differences in the level of program accreditation. They based their study on shared outcomes that measure graduates' performance in state licensure for marital and family therapy (MFT). Caldwell et al. (2011) noted that the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) faced the challenge of assessing the real-world impact of MFT. Additionally, it faced a challenge in assessing the newer outcomes-based standards of COAMFTE at the master's and doctoral levels in the United States.

Caldwell et al. (2011) used data from California's Board of Behavioral Sciences on the graduate-level state licensure exams administered between 2004 and 2006. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to identify the pass levels based on the accreditation status of programs (Caldwell et al., 2011). The findings showed that even though the data

analysis took into account repeat test takers, there were different success rates for programs at different levels of accreditation. The purpose of using outcomes-based standards was to help students engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and improvement.

Other studies have shown that the challenge of defining and assessing learning through accreditation is gaining a more global presence. The Saudi Ministry of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia addressed perceived barriers to restructuring universities to meet international benchmarks for quality assurance and accreditation guidelines (Onsman, 2010). In Albania, the growth of HE institutions has established a set of legal documents and a framework of quality standards. The standards are aligned to measure the effectiveness of educational institutions based on the European HE accreditation standards (Latifi, 2012). The Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka (IESL) is also revamping its accreditation of engineering programs to prepare engineers to compete at the global level (Somasundaraswaran, 2012).

Although the standards prescribed by accreditation require more reform and revision, accreditation remains a vital source of defining and assessing learning in HE. Through accreditation, regional accreditors continue to be influential in HE institutions (Crow, 2009; Neal, 2008). In one empirical study, Even and Robinson (2013) used a qualitative research design to examine the ethical behavior of alumni related to accreditation. Even and Robinson used archival data from the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and the Related Educational Programs (CACREP) to identify the frequency and number of violations of ethics in graduate counselor education

programs. They examined both accredited and non-accredited programs by the CACREP in the United States, drawing on a sample of 453 fully licensed professional counselors. The selection criteria included receiving sanctions in the form of a revocation of licensure, reprimands, or temporary suspension by a state licensure board.

Even and Robinson (2013) created categorical variables for accreditation, ethics training, years in service, and graduate degree. They used a chi-square analysis and multiway frequency analysis to analyze the results and found a significant difference in the violation of ethics among graduates of CACREP and non-CACREP programs. The majority of violations occurred among non-CACREP graduates (Even & Robinson, 2012). The findings suggested that accreditation makes a difference in the ongoing process of learning and development. Even and Robinson concluded that incidences of ethical misconduct should be part of the outcome measures for the MFT profession to build public trust.

Within the system of accreditation in U.S. HE, regional accreditation is highly prevalent. Regional accreditation is “sufficiently embedded in the culture” (Crow, 2009, p. 88), so its leaders (regional accreditors) have the leverage to “restructure the enterprise to testify” to its quality (Crow, 2009, p. 88). The increase in student mobility and online and distance learning has added new dimensions to the realm of accreditation (Anaper, Ulucay, & Kabuk, 2013; Giogetti, Romero, & Vera, 2013). A proliferation of for-profit HE institutions has further intensified the debate on accreditation in a changing landscape of HE (Urofsky, 2013). Given the increase in international student mobility, the need for

reliable quality assurance and accreditation in HE remains a global challenge (Hou, 2012).

Although accreditation is a symbol of institutional quality and recognition, the accreditation system has encountered several challenges and “near-death experiences” (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 2). Perhaps the most serious challenge faced by accreditation is the weakening confidence in accreditation precipitated by the federal government in the 1990s. Many critics, including policymakers and education leaders, portrayed accreditation as “meaningless and a waste of time and money” (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 3). The regional structure was observed as a “quaint relic of the past” (Ikenberry, 2009, p. 3). The reauthorization of HEA in 1992 charted a new landscape for HE institutions and brought new reporting mandates for regional accreditors to submit to the DOE (Hartle, 2012). A decade later, rising concerns with accreditation throughout HE prompted the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) to conduct an investigation of the accreditation system. In a report called *Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?*, ACTA concluded that accreditation did not ensure quality but rather created additional costs for HE (Leef & Burris, 2002).

With the reauthorization of the HEA every 5 years, criticism of accreditation has mounted. The criticism is largely based on the ability of regional accreditors to respond to increased demands for accountability and transparency, which has brought into question the effectiveness of the accreditation system (Amaral, Rosa, & Taveras, 2009). Current implementation of accreditation in HE has “not significantly altered these critics’ view of erosion of standards” (Murray, 2012, p. 58).

The process followed by regional accrediting agencies has also been the subject of criticism, partly because of the lack of transparency of the discussions and actions of the accrediting bodies, which are kept private until a final decision about the accreditation status of an institution is made (Bardo, 2009). For example, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) stripped Dana College of its accreditation in 2010. HLC is one of the six regional commissions. It oversees over 1,000 colleges and universities in 19 states. HLC showed the level of control that accreditation has over HE institutions if they cannot comply with standards (Epstein, 2012). Without accreditation, Dana College was unable to support its operations financially and was forced to shut down. This case illustrated that public institutions rely heavily on the legal status of accreditation. The impact of accreditation status on institutional eligibility for federal student aid and accreditation status can be a life-or-death matter for any institution (Neal, 2008; Epstein, 2012).

Despite the “periodic attacks” (Amaral et al., 2009, p. 36) on colleges and universities, accreditation is aimed at addressing and improving the operations of HE organizations, although it remains severely challenged. Kemenade and Hardjono (2009) conducted a quantitative study at one university in the Netherlands to explore the factors affecting the resistance or willingness of faculty to address accreditation as part of an external requirement. According to Kemenade and Hardjono, there was no empirical research regarding universities in the Netherlands that addressed participants’ support for or opposition to accreditation practices. They used a Dinamo model based on the theory of planned behavior to analyze participants’ willingness or resistance toward external evaluations.

Kemende and Hardjono (2009) surveyed 63 lecturers at one university using an online questionnaire. The findings suggested that even though the respondents' experiences varied at different stages of accreditation, most lecturers found that mandatory accreditation activities increased respondents' workload, stress, and insecurity. According to Kemenda and Hadjono, these findings may also be generalized to other types of accreditation and involvement of professionals. The evolving changes in the accreditation system may have the potency to engage institutional participants and advance a more contemporary role. Nonetheless, the HE community continues to face numerous barriers and challenges with accreditation (Sandmann, Williams, & Abrams, 2009).

The Case of the City College of San Francisco

A major challenge that the U.S. accreditation system faces is preserving the autonomy of HE and preventing HE institutions from being “overtaken by federal regulation” (Brittingham, 2008, p. 36). According to Neal and Rothkopf (2012), accreditation remains “far from being the generally admirable system of quality assurance” (p. 2). Neal and Rothkopf claimed that accreditation provides students with an inaccurate sense of quality and projects conflicting roles for accreditors as the gatekeepers of federal funds and proponents of institutional self-improvement.

Added to this challenge is the evolving culture of greater public accountability. Such accountability is based on a “substantial escalation of expectations” (Eaton, 2007, p. 21) from social institutions, which has intensified the pressure on all three segments—accreditation, HE, and the federal government. Responding to such complex pressures,

the ACCJC took a tough stance on revoking the accreditation of the CCSF in June 2014, ending the college's federal recognition (Basken, 2013). In the WASC (ACCJC) region, Compton Community College was the only public, California community college to have lost its accreditation. The loss of its accreditation was due to financial mismanagement. As a result, Compton merged with El Camino College in 2005 (Basken, 2013).

Responding to the ACCJC's adverse action against the CCSF, CCSF stakeholders appealed the termination action to an independent appellate hearing panel and outlined errors made by the ACCJC in evaluating the CCSF's accreditation. The panel found no merits to the CCSF appeal, but on June 13, 2014, it ruled that the ACCJC must conduct a comprehensive evaluation of CCSF's compliance with accreditation standards (ACCJC, 2014). Consequently, the ACCJC sought and gained approval from the DOE to include a new policy for accreditation. The policy was designed to restore accreditation that would allow institutions such as the CCSF an additional 2 years to demonstrate compliance with the accreditation standards (ACCJC, 2014).

More recently, a trial began in October 2014 over a lawsuit filed by the CCSF against the ACCJC. The lawyer representing the CCSF established, on the second day of the trial, that the visiting team had concluded in its report that CCSF had complied with some of the accreditation standards, but the president of the ACCJC, Dr. Beno, personally edited out information favoring the college from the report. As a result, the college was at risk of losing its accreditation (*SFGate*, 2014). Responding to those allegations, Dr. Beno stated that the edits were mere recommendations and were not intended to close the CCSF (*The Examiner*, 2014). The ACCJC rules clearly state that the

Commission's members, not the staff members, should be in the role of deciding the accreditation status of a college (*SFGate*, 2014).

On January 16, 2015, the presiding judge made a tentative ruling favoring the CCSF. In the ruling, the judge found the ACCJC liable for violating the Unfair Competition Law and outlined the ACCJC's unfair business practices (*The Examiner*, 2015a). The ruling also noted that the ACCJC did not allow the CCSF due process and asked the Commission to reconsider its decision to terminate the accreditation of the college. The ruling may allow the CCSF an additional 2 years to comply with applicable standards.

Among the critics of the ACCJC, the California Federation of Teachers (CFT) blamed the Commission for negatively positioning the CCSF and changing the rules of the game (CFT, 2013). The CFT found the adverse action against CCSF was unprecedented (CFT, 2013). Likewise, the increased pressure that put the ACCJC under a microscope came not only from inside academia but also from the DOE. The DOE found the Commission to be incompliant with four subsections of federal regulations (ACCJC, 2014). The ACCJC received 1 year to come into compliance with those regulations. In January 2016, the Acting Secretary of Education upheld the 2014 decision against the ACCJC for being non-compliant with federal regulations. The ACCJC was granted an additional year, until January 2017, to get into compliance or lose recognition as an accrediting agency by the U.S. Department of Education (SF Examiner, 2016).

Most recently, the California Community College Board of Governors decided to change their regulation by removing language that gave the ACCJC an exclusive

authority to accredit two-year community colleges (*The Examiner*, 2015b). This change has the potential for the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to seek a different accreditation commission recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

As such, the "mutual frustration" (Moltz, 2010, p. 1) of accrediting agencies and HE institutions is evident among many stakeholders and state education leaders. The frustration is in part with regional accreditors and the federal government, which are in a position to mandate the 2002 Accreditation Standards. As Hartle noted, regional accreditors are "caught in a vise" (Hartle, 2011, p. 13) by policy makers, HE institutions, and the media. Ironically the inadequate accountability and transparency of the accreditation processes more than a decade ago led to the 2002 Accreditation Standards developed by the ACCJC.

Importance of Accreditation

Accreditation has the leverage to change an institution's direction by focusing the attention of administrators, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders on institutional goals for educational improvement (Chaden, 2013). Additionally, the 2002 Accreditation Standards criteria have increased focus on retention and graduation rates, which are likely to evolve at the national and institutional levels (Chaden, 2013). As such, Frawley (2014) positioned the nongovernmental and peer-review process of accreditation as essential to the quality of the HE system, which benefits institutions, students, and the public. In an effort to better understand the importance of medical education accreditation standards in a globalized world, van Zantan, Boulet, and Greaves (2012) conducted a qualitative study

using a range of countries and continents to evaluate the comparative and absolute importance of medical education standards. They focused on several accrediting agencies from different countries. The design of the study included a 150-item survey based on worldwide medical education standards. Van Zantan et al. (2012) used a 3-point rating system to rate the standards in terms of importance to assure the quality of undergraduate medical education. Twenty-two medical education accreditation experts were selected for the study. Respondents from a wide range of countries and continents were contacted using freely available contact information (van Zantan et al., 2012). The results indicated that although some standards were essential and globally accepted, not all were necessary (van Zantan et al., 2012). The authors suggested that future studies should focus on the complexity of nonspecific standards that concentrate on cultural practices of accreditation (van Zantan et al., 2012).

In an effort to improve practices, outcomes, and the system of self-evaluation and continuous quality improvement, Winship and Lee (2012) reviewed a self-evaluation study. They reported on a study at a public state agency in California that became the first public agency in the state to gain professional accreditation based on the processes of accreditation. Using a peer review and site visit process that educational institutions use for accreditation, the state agency completed a self-study and gap analysis to improve organizational performance (Winship & Lee, 2012).

Romanelli (2013) cautioned against developing aggressive assessment plans and bureaucratic processes that collect excessive data but have little to no impact on organizational or program improvement. Ledoux, Marshall, and McHenry (2010)

questioned restrictions imposed by various accrediting agencies that directly or indirectly eroded academic freedom in U.S. colleges and universities. Ledoux et al. (2010) claimed the current trend in accreditation practices was “objectifying the classroom” (Ledoux, Marshall, & McHenry, 2010, p. 250) and the teachers. Nonetheless, accreditation remains critically important to colleges and universities because of its evaluative nature.

Accreditation sets into motion a culture of evidence through which institutions can improve their educational quality and demonstrate their effectiveness (Brittingham, 2009; Jenkins, 2011; Owsley-Stevens, 2010).

Institutional Effectiveness as an Accreditation Standard

Institutional effectiveness is an overarching goal for institutions because it is fundamental to shaping a broader dialog on the effectiveness of programs, services, and institutions. Institutional effectiveness aligns with institutional accreditation processes and standards. The link between institutional effectiveness and accreditation standards is apparent. But it is unclear whether measuring institutional effectiveness leads to improvement in the accreditation process and a reduction in sanctions. Although there is no single, universally accepted definition of institutional effectiveness, all six regional commissions in the United States have adopted this term. They use institutional effectiveness to set accreditation standards for best practices in institutional assessment, data, and evaluation results (Manning, 2011).

There are four major movements that have shaped institutional effectiveness: political, economic, educational, and social (Head, 2011). Among the major forces that have driven institutional effectiveness, the educational movement has been a primary

force for assessing the quality of institutional programs and SLOs (Head, 2011). The expansion of the institutional effectiveness of community colleges since the 1990s has been unparalleled (Alfred, 2011).

The evolution of institutional effectiveness in community colleges can be traced to the regional Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), which revised accreditation standards in December 1984 (Head, 2011). According to Ringrose (2013), institutional effectiveness is an ongoing, systematic, integrated process that sets into motion the institutional mission, goals, processes, activities, and outcomes. Ringrose used a qualitative case study approach to identify the leading organizational excellence frameworks used for management principles and practices in Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States. The findings showed that the use of multiple frameworks of organizational effectiveness garnered more positive results for improving organizational effectiveness (Ringrose, 2013).

Although institutional effectiveness has been prevalent in HE since the 1990s, its meaning and interpretation remain complex and multifaceted in a changing global economy and world order (Alfred, 2011). Among the early developments of institutional effectiveness, a report was published in 1994 called the *Core Indicators of Effectiveness for Community Colleges*. The report was written by several community college educators to identify key indicators of effectiveness and student outcomes (Alfred, 2011). In forecasting novel public accountability measures that supersede institution size and reputation, institutional effectiveness emerged as a central phenomenon in setting novel accreditation standards by all regional commissions (Alfred, 2011).

In light of the changing, dynamic role of HE institutions, organizational effectiveness is helping self-study teams better understand the use of data in measuring SLOs. The need to align the major aspects of an institution in planning and evaluation activities is pivotal in meaningfully addressing accreditation standards (Head, 2011). In HE institutions, the institutional research (IR) personnel are gaining an active role in measuring effectiveness. Johnston (2011) used case studies from a sample of 10 community colleges that represented all six regional accrediting agencies. Johnston used a theoretical model that relied on both traditional and evolved roles for IR to gain a deeper understanding of the role of IR in the accreditation process. Furthermore, Johnston identified several ways community colleges use the IR offices to support accreditation activities and institutional effectiveness.

According to Alfred (2011), measuring and conceptualizing institutional effectiveness in the future will depend on the objective and subjective realms of experience within which institutions operate. The objective realm relies on indicators such as graduation rates, persistence, and transfer rates. Such indicators are independent of individual speculation. The subjective realm focuses on thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions of stakeholders who interpret experiences through subjective reflections of dimensions (Alfred, 2011). Using effectiveness models through objective and subjective realms may help institutions identify their ability to create outcomes based on their needs and expectations (Alfred, 2011).

The goal of institutional effectiveness is continuous quality improvement, by which a number of institutional dimensions are measured and assessed (Bers, 2011).

According to Bers (2011), a common fear among institutional participants is related to conducting program reviews. Program reviews aim to evaluate the performance of programs and services. Because of the evaluative nature of the review, the negative consequences of evaluating the performance may reveal an inadequacy or unsustainable approach. In an era of increased accountability, Bers suggested that community colleges must remain flexible in using effectiveness as a measure for assessing the quality of programs. According to Bers, “institutional effectiveness is a broad umbrella concept” (p. 64), that entails multidimensional approaches to making institutional improvements. Similarly, Banta, Pike, and Hansen (2009) identified the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as a source of engagement data to improve the outcomes of the accreditation process. Banta, Pike, and Hansen used a cyclical model at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to create a culture of evidence that involves all participants.

In considering institutional quality, McFarlane (2010) noted that educators must ask a legitimate question about “whose quality” (p. 1) is being determined through the process of accreditation and institutional effectiveness. McFarlane claimed that accrediting agencies are “private ventures” (p. 1) that hold the same motives as capitalism. However, in a more objective sense, the phrase *culture of evidence* is based on “diagnostic information” about an institution (Morest, 2009, p. 19). Organizational effectiveness measures used by institutional participants are intended to reform practices and focus on improved outcomes. Ewell (2011c) observed that in the first decade of the 21st century, community colleges largely adopted the Community College Survey of

Student Engagement (CCSSE) to measure the effectiveness of institutional practices and student engagement nationwide.

Alongside an evolving culture of evidence in HE, strategic planning has taken a prominent position in institutional activities and is profoundly embedded in the 2002 Accreditation Standards of all regional accreditation (Seymore, 2011). Given the tough economic scenarios facing HE and the nation, organizational decision making has increasingly relied on strategic planning efforts. The strategic planning efforts question the basic assumptions of an organization's mission, purpose, and learning outcomes (Seymore, 2011). In a sense, organizational effectiveness provides a broader framework for organizational participants to analyze information critically. It also sets indicators of quality and performance that have become the institutional benchmarks for comparison of colleges and universities (Ewell, 2011b).

ACCJC Standard 1B: Improving Institutional Effectiveness

According to the ACCJC (2012), the four standards outlined by the Commission are designed to shape the dialog on student learning. Institutional effectiveness is pivotal in improving an institution's performance and outcomes (ACCJC, 2012). Educational institutions within the region of the WASC (ACCJC) must continually meet the 21-point Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation. The Commissioners outlined the expectation that all institutions must regularly assess and improve their educational quality and institutional effectiveness (ACCJC, 2012). As part of the accreditation and reaccreditation process, the ACCJC requires all institutions to make publicly available their reports, Commission action letters, and any documents related to the accreditation

process (ACCJC, 2012). The Commission stated that information should also be easily accessible to students and the public (ACCJC, 2012).

The ACCJC's rubrics for evaluating institutional effectiveness provide a common framework and language for its Accreditation Standards. The rubrics are an effort to provide guidance and resources for the community and junior colleges to prepare the self-evaluation reports and fully address the Accreditation Standards (ACCJC, 2013). The focus of the rubrics is on three major areas: (a) program review, (b) planning, and (c) SLOs. All three areas have levels of implementation that range from awareness, development, and proficiency to sustainable continuous quality improvement (ACCJC, 2013). As part of the ongoing reaccreditation process, the Commission expects all institutions to achieve and maintain a level of sustainable, continuous quality improvement in all three areas (ACCJC, 2013). All three parts of the rubrics relate to institutional effectiveness, and institutions are expected to make continuous quality improvements in all areas.

To explore the extent to which the ACCJC rubrics were being utilized at CCCs for evaluating institutional effectiveness, Grossman (2014) conducted a non-experimental quantitative study. The research questions focused on the degree of utilization of the rubrics, the difference between faculty and administration in using the rubrics, and the perceived impact of the rubrics on the accreditation process. Grossman used organizational change and Kotter's change model as a theoretical framework and the philosophical underpinnings of postpositive research. Grossman designed a survey instrument using an adaptation of Welsh and Metcalf's survey instrument to analyze the

beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices of faculty and administrators. The selection criteria were prior experience with program review and planning rubrics to address the accreditation standards.

Grossman (2014) used a sample size of 447 faculty and administrators of CCCs who had participated in the comprehensive ACCJC accreditation self-studies conducted between 2010 and 2013. Data were analyzed using SPSS software. Grossman analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, an independent-samples *t* test, and a one-way ANOVA. The findings showed that the rubrics were being used at all levels (e.g., program, department, and institution), but further clarification was needed to assess the standards (Grossman, 2014). Further, implications for future research suggested using case studies that indicate institutional effectiveness activities along with statewide best practices of rubrics.

A well-known challenge of planning is engaging all organizational participants in fully addressing the accreditation recommendations (Forsyth, Whitton, & Whitton, 2011). Building engagement in HE is a relatively new concept that can be effectively linked to the accreditation practices and priorities by setting clear goals and expectations for organizational participants (Sandmann, Williams, & Abrams, 2009). Using a qualitative case study approach, Sandmann, Williams, and Abrams selected two institutional cases from the University of New Hampshire and the University of Southern Indiana to study engagement activities for accreditation. By relying on multiple sources of data, including reports, semistructured interviews, and observations, Sandmann et al. (2009) sought to understand how institutional leaders built engagement activities. Sandmann et al. (2009)

examined specific strategies that would continue beyond the accreditation review process to transform individuals and organizations. The findings showed a positive link between engagement activities and accreditation. The authors suggested that organizational leaders should “build on the attitudes, symbols, politics, and culture of stakeholders” (Sandmann, Williams, & Abrams, 2009, p. 18). Using ongoing engagement activities instead of using accreditation as a compliance activity can result in organizational improvement.

In another study, Ning, Wilhite, Wyatt, Young, and Bloemker (2012) sought to understand the impact of SLOs in HE. Ning et al. (2012) constructed a quasi-experimental design to investigate a college freshman class curriculum on social and emotional learning. The findings indicated that students who participated in a curriculum that measured SLOs reaped higher grades than other students (Ning et al., 2012). The authors contended that using assessment measures to understand the link between SLOs and engagement could improve the assessment process for institutional programs and services (Rey & Powell, 2013). Sandmann, Williams, and Abrams (2009) suggested that focusing on the future of an institution’s welfare as part of the accreditation process can create better SLOs. Contrary to commonly accepted notions of accreditation being a tedious and laborious process, SLOs can be a worthy endeavor. In essence, accreditation provides organizational participants with a “rare opportunity to learn” (Oden, 2009, p. 45) about themselves.

Accountability and Change in the Accreditation Process

Among the calls to move forward in a national dialog on accreditation, Neal (2008) suggested that Congress should pay more attention to what matters to students, parents, and the taxpayers. According to Neal, breaking the link between federal financial aid and the accreditation process will provide more institutional independence in HE. Similarly, breaking the monopoly of regional accreditors by providing competition in the form of bids for providing accreditation services will also provide more institutional independence (Neal, 2008).

Sandmann, Williams, and Abrams (2009) suggested an interpretive framework that requires organizational leaders to use strategies to create linkages and engagement activities with internal and external stakeholders to improve effectiveness and quality. Apart from developing a sense of civic duty, the academic community can benefit from the observations of best practices in other institutions. Such engagement practices can help create a more robust role of self-regulation in HE (McGuire, 2009).

The New England Association's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) developed an initiative in 2007 to clearly address student success and achievement in the accreditation process. The CIHE is challenging institutions to develop meaningful measures that define, record, evaluate, and assess student success and achievement through the accreditation process. Specifically, the CIHE noted several ways for the HE community to move ahead (Brittingham, 2008):

1. Regional accreditors should encourage improvement of institutions' assessment processes.

2. Regional accreditors allow institutions to experiment with newer models of quality improvement and effectiveness while safeguarding institutions' efforts and intent.
3. Regional accreditors create innovative ways for institutions to learn and share knowledge and information with others.
4. Regional accreditors help develop a basic understanding among the public and policymakers that there are newer, more useful ways to assess academic quality instead of just relying on current practices.
5. Regional accreditors ensure ways to ascertain that the public has a meaningful understanding of student learning and student success.

Among the suggestions for improvement of accreditation in HE, the peer review process can greatly enhance the results of HE institutions (Jenkins, 2011; Smith & Finney, 2008). Addressing the accreditation experiences from one faculty's perspective, Craig (2010) recounted the accreditation experiences of one university. A gradual shift from denial to recognition of the importance of the new accountability demands and procedures became fundamental in aligning the teaching and learning practices in the accreditation process at the institution.

A common experience faced by HE institutions is the ongoing accreditation planning and process (Bardo, 2009; Jenkins, 2011). Likewise, a common component of the accreditation process is writing a report that serves as a "living document" (Hillard & Taylor, 2010, p. 26). This report evidences the growth and development of the organization. Thus, using a collaborative approach encourages leaders to involve all

participants. Collaboration among different participants can greatly benefit the accreditation process because it gives all participants a platform to address the challenges they face (Hillard & Taylor, 2010). Because the accreditation process is a critical aspect of institutional planning, it requires greater emphasis on strategies of organizations' operations (Bardo, 2009).

Demonstrating increased accountability has been a concern for many colleges and universities. Many stakeholders have joined forces with accreditors to develop outcomes-based approaches that are creative, innovative, long-term, and useful for addressing accreditation standards and improving student learning and institutional effectiveness (Eaton, 2007). Many institutions are also working with state and national associations to develop indicators to measure their planning and assessment efforts (Eaton, 2007). Subsequently, institutional research offices at many institutions have served a dual purpose of meeting the internal and external roles to address accreditation (Ewell, 2011a; Volkwein, 2010).

Clearly, the evolving changes in HE speak to the scope of the 2002 Accreditation Standards. Increased governmental involvement has generated major discussions in recent years, not only in the United States but also in Japan. Japan based its accreditation system on the U.S. system of accreditation in several ways (Mori, 2009). According to Mori (2009), the prevailing convictions held by both nations about the accreditation system in HE are mere compromises because they lack a sense of balance for long-term solutions that solicit the regional accrediting commissions to move beyond their customary role of being federal gatekeepers. Thus, it is imperative to find innovative

solutions that have a wide network of coordinated activities and to create an assertive voice for HE to influence public policy (Crow, 2009).

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the parent corporation of the ACCJC, responded to widespread criticism of accreditation by making major changes to its process (Kelderman, 2011). Among the changes the WASC is considering making is using benchmarking to identify student retention and completion rates. Additionally, WASC is providing improved communications and more public accountability by establishing a more rigorous process for institutional finances and policy review (Kelderman, 2011). WASC is taking these new measures not only to attend to the mounting criticism but also to set a novel path for other regional accreditors who face similar challenges (Carey, 2012).

Prevailing efforts by the ACCJC and other regional accrediting agencies are intended to improve accreditation practices. But they come in the wake of newer challenges in accreditation and HE. However, such efforts also attest to the commitment of accrediting agencies to attentively changing and improving, as well as not blocking innovation (Kezar, 2014). Perhaps improved data and evidence-based approaches may yield better results that guide both the accrediting commissions and institutions in more appropriately pursuing improved outcomes and accreditation practices in HE (Kezar, 2014).

The founding principle of accreditation is in the process of changing. Evolving accreditation processes have fundamentally challenged accrediting agencies and HE institutions to shift their focus from legitimacy to outcomes, quality, and more public

accountability (Jenkins, 2011; Tharp, 2012). In doing so, CCCs face unique challenges in addressing the 2002 Accreditation Standards. The 2002 standards call for greater accountability from leaders at the local, state, and national levels (Jenkins, 2011; Tharp, 2012). While the traditional role of accreditation remains the same, accreditors have risen to the demands for more accountability and are making the necessary changes (Kelderman, 2011).

Kezar (2014) warned that alternatives to accreditation would not produce meaningful change. A renewed focus on accreditation must bring together educators and leaders toward a more constructive dialog and collaborative approach to accreditation. Adopting and implementing accreditation standards is the result of a consensus that builds from gathering the collective wisdom of a wide-ranging community of stakeholders (McGuire, 2009). Given the variety of measurement tools and the uniqueness of institutional characteristics, no single measure provides the best measure of organizational effectiveness in HE. The use of multiple measures is time-tested and assures the value and benefit of accreditation for continuous quality improvement (Murray, 2009).

In determining the effectiveness of HE institutions, accrediting agencies might do better to establish standards that rely on valid measures in their discipline or profession (Murray, 2012). How the emerging changes in the 2002 and 2014 Accreditation Standards impact the effectiveness of HE institutions and accountability should be a matter of interpretive strategy. The new strategies must rely on collaboration and engagement with all participants in the process of accreditation (Sandmann, Williams, &

Abrams, 2009). Indeed, a newly measured relationship is needed to affect the future of accreditation practices (Eaton, 2007). Hanson (2013) noted that the process of accreditation and organizational effectiveness in HE is cultural in nature. Developing new skills and strategies must go beyond predictable and measurable outcomes to advance HE institutions and stakeholders who can successfully inhabit the future (Hanson, 2013).

Summary of Literature Review

In recent years, HE has faced unprecedented challenges in adopting and implementing the 2002 Accreditation Standards. CCCs and the ACCJC are at the forefront of monumental changes, which are causing an overhaul of the traditional practices of accreditation. The 2002 Accreditation Standards are a turning point in the search for novel ways to address accountability, compliance, and institutional effectiveness in HE. A growing number of CCCs are facing accreditation sanctions, and too many colleges are failing to fully implement the 2002 Accreditation Standards.

The ACCJC is also facing growing resistance from the HE community for overreaching in its role of accrediting institutions by placing sanctions on a large number of colleges for failing to address the 2002 Accreditation Standards. At the heart of the heated debate between educators and accreditors is a disagreement over how to interpret and apply the 2002 standards. The turbulent relationship between WASC's ACCJC and its staff and some of the community colleges it accredits has led to widespread focus on accreditation throughout the United States. Added to this dilemma is the growing presence of the federal government in its move to inject new rules and policies that would undermine the basic tenants of HE autonomy. Therefore, it was important to revisit the

2002 Accreditation Standards and the requirements that regulate institutions for compliance and determine their unique roles and responsibilities. In setting the tenor of the 2002 standards and the updated 2014 standards, accreditation continues to evolve and define the effectiveness of HE.

The intent of this research was to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB at one community college and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. It was important to understand the relationship between the ACCJC and one of its member institutions in order to develop a consistent understanding and application of Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness.

Compliance theory serves the dual purpose of defining the perception of compliance and use of power that exists in a community college and identifying its application for Standard IB as defined by the Commission. Similarly, Etzioni's (1961) organizational environment concepts of scope and pervasiveness for organizational effectiveness helped shed light on the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB: Institutional Effectiveness, an overarching concept of the ACCJC that underlies all four standards. This subject is of significance because the 2002 Accreditation Standards are at the forefront of a growing debate in the HE community and beyond.

Chapter 3 details the research design and provides the rationale and justification for the case study approach. I discuss my role as a researcher and the methodology I used.

I also present the logic for participant selection and provide a detailed explanation of the instrumentation and data analysis plan. Furthermore, I identify issues of trustworthiness related to ethical procedures, ethical concerns, and treatment of data in adherence to IRB guidelines and protocols.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Accreditation is a uniquely American enterprise and is an emergent phenomenon in U.S. higher education (Hall, 2012). The increase in sanctions by the ACCJC has added to the challenges of CCCs in meeting the 2002 Accreditation Standards. Too many CCCs have remained in improvement mode continuously and are still unable to fully meet the standards. As a result, it was important to understand the perception of compliance by one community college in relation to the ACCJC's published expectations. This research project examined the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance.

In this chapter, I describe and support the selection of a research design that aligns the methodology and research questions for this study. In my role as researcher and as the main research instrument, I identify and present the meanings, interpretations, and conclusions of the study. Additionally, I draw attention to areas where personal bias might emerge through the process. In describing the methodology, a depth of information is provided about the selection and involvement of the participants, site selection, data collection sources, methods and procedures, and data coding and analysis preparation. Finally, to strengthen the validity of the research, I identify steps to address issues of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and reliability to maintain the research integrity and ethical standards of conduct.

Research Design and Rationale

As identified in the literature review, growing demand for public accountability has heightened the complexity of accreditation in U.S. HE and has challenged many CCCs to successfully apply the 2002 Accreditation Standards (Theule, 2012). I utilized a qualitative, exploratory case study approach to examine a CCC's participants' perceptions of interactions between one CCC and the ACCJC. An exploratory case study approach was most suitable for this study because it relied on multiple perspectives of institutional participants (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Given the scarcity of research in this area, an exploratory approach provided rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Merriam (2009) noted that a descriptive case study approach, also known as exploratory case study, relies on a comprehensive description of the problem under investigation and may include several variables and their interactions over a period of time. An exploratory case study approach not only allows a researcher to study the phenomenon under investigation in detail and depth but also holistically and in context (Patton, 2002). The different elements of an exploratory case study—the problem, the issues, and the context—presented unique learning approaches about the complexity of the issue (Creswell, 2007).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research allows for a flexible research design. This study relied on both inductive and deductive research design. Maxwell (2013) advocated for an inductive design approach because it allows a researcher to develop a definite structure of the research design while relying on a reflexive process throughout the project. Similarly, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) made a case for

using both approaches to allow for flexibility in finding facts and answering the research questions. For this study, it was important to use a flexible, interactive approach to fully capture the meanings and concepts held by the participants. The meanings and concepts became clear only gradually through ongoing interactions with participants and allowed for greater depth in analyzing and reporting the phenomenon experienced by CCCs. In order to study the accreditation practices in CCCs, the research site was an established educational environment that is actively involved in accreditation processes.

The following research question guided this dissertation in the examination of the congruence between the understanding and application of ACCJC's Standard IB:

Institutional Effectiveness:

Research Question 1: What has been and is one community college's perception of compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission?

Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher could only be sustained by addressing the range of strategic, personal, and ethical issues that shape my interpretations and define the most important dimensions of this study. Using the interactive approach outlined by Maxwell (2013), I functioned as an observer in the bounded system of a case study approach.

My experience with accreditation began at the same time as the Accreditation Standards were adopted by the ACCJC in 2002. At the time, I worked at a community college in California where I experienced the transition from the old standards to the adoption of the 2002 standards. It was during this time that most CCCs implemented new

mandates for accreditation that focused on increased accountability and outcomes-based measures (ACCJC, 2013). Given my experience with accreditation and institutional effectiveness, I did not foresee any ethical dilemmas or conflicts of interest with the research site or participants.

The community college investigated in this study has never employed me and I am not currently attending the institution. Although I have visited the research site to gain preliminary information about conducting research, I have no prior connections to any of the research participants. Furthermore, I maintained the role of a methodical and careful observer, keeping complete consciousness of my subjectivity. This awareness helped guide my observations and research experiences with the participants and the site throughout the emergent research project. As such, my primary role as researcher was to maintain an ethical, objective viewpoint while adhering to the best practices of conducting research. Additionally, I maintained confidentiality, anonymity, and integrity of the research study by providing explicit directions, expectations, and the intended purpose of the study.

Methodology

For the methodology of this qualitative exploratory case study approach, I employed several components that were important for aligning the research design, research questions, and data collection methods.

Logic for Participant Selection

The population for this study was chosen from the bounded setting of a community college in California. While there were 16 CCs on probation or warning at

the time of this study (ACCJC, 2014), rich descriptions of one community college's accreditation experiences were essential to gain meaningful insights. Hence, it was essential to select a sample that would provide meaningful information. Convenience sampling was used for this qualitative case study because the study sought to examine the accreditation processes and institutional effectiveness at one community college in California. The campus was selected for its accessible geographic location and because I had a community partner at the institution. Qualitative inquiry can encompass a relatively small sample size as the focus and the intent of a study was to gain an in-depth, rich description of a phenomenon. An ideal sample size for this study was about 12 participants ($n = 12$).

For the purpose of this study, I conducted two levels of sampling for conducting a focus group and interviews, and for observing responses to questions related to accreditation, the setting as well as accreditation documents. The first level of sampling involved the use of snowball sampling. I used a community partner who invited me to the campus and shared information about its members. I relied on a community partner to initially inform me regarding participation selection for the focus group and then used both snowball sampling and convenience sampling to refine the participant selection process for interviews and observations. The second level of sampling was convenience sampling as determined by the availability of participants, location, and time.

Furthermore, I used convenience sampling for choosing the site and the people to be studied based on predetermined criteria (Merriam, 2009). The selection criteria was that

participants needed more than 1 year of experience on that campus with accreditation or related activities and processes in CCCs.

Participants were contacted through established institutional protocols for securing participation involvement in a research study. My IRB approval number for this study is 8-20-15-0057261. The ongoing research relationship with participants relied on established protocols of ethical obligation, behavior, and conduct. Furthermore, to harness ethically appropriate and productive relationships with the participants, I adhered to mutually agreeable and explicit arrangements and expectations for gaining information and reporting the results. Similarly, disclosing methodological and personal conditions that may have impacted the study and the outcomes for participants helped establish research integrity and ensure greater responsiveness from participants. See Appendixes C and D for protocols for contacting the participants.

Instrumentation

For this study, multiple sources of data were used and data were collected using a variety of instruments. In order to strengthen and broaden the understanding of the accreditation experiences, I used different methods of data collection to better understand the interactions of the participants. For example, I conducted a focus group and interviews to understand the critical perceptions of the institutional participants about the phenomenon under study. I used observations to analyze the participants' responses to accreditation questions, the setting, as well as the context of the discussion. I used documents to identify the expectations of the Commission for member institutions regarding Standard IB. A focus group guided by a set of questions found on Appendix B

and was conducted prior to the semistructured interviews in order to identify common themes, which I expanded on with some of the same and some new participants in semistructured interviews (see Appendix B for the focus group guide). According to Maxwell (2013), this approach is most valuable because it enables greater engagement and cohesiveness in understanding the results of the different methods used. This approach also compels the researcher to reexamine the results with a complex understanding of the issue under study (Maxwell, 2013).

Qualitative case study approaches allow researchers to spend a considerable amount of time doing fieldwork and collecting data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2007). To successfully examine the perceptions of compliance between the ACCJC and a member college, I conducted a face-to-face focus group and semistructured interviews at a college in their natural setting. The focus group ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes in duration and occurred in several campus locations. I also reviewed the published documents and reports by the ACCJC and the community college. Data were also generated from reports and documents about the ACCJC and the member college regarding institutional effectiveness and accreditation. I made observations during the semistructured interviews to gain knowledge of participant opinion, the setting, and the context and to combine the interviewing data with observation notes for a more descriptive analysis. My observations included information on the physical setting and the interview participants' nonverbal communication as well as their less obvious, symbolic meanings of words, conversations, interactions, and

activities. A sample observation form is attached as Appendix E. All three sources of data were triangulated to get a more valid exploration of the research question.

A semistructured interview approach was ideal for this study because the purpose was to understand and gain meaningful information about different aspects of participants' experiences. The flexibility in the wording of the questions, the number of questions asked, and the number of issues explored allowed me to respond to the availability of information through a semistructured approach. During the interviews, I asked probe questions as needed for follow-up to ensure the completeness and accuracy of information (See Appendix C for the interview guide). This form of interviewing not only ensured specific information was gained from the interview but also helped shape novel ideas and information that emerged from the participants' worldviews (Merriam, 2009).

In addition to conducting interviews, I collected field notes. My field notes included comments, descriptions, and direct quotations from the participants. I also kept journal notes throughout the study to document information and provide more knowledge about the context of the study.

In addition, I used organizational records and other archival sources data from the past 14 years as primary sources. I used documents from the following organizations as primary sources: ACCJC, CCCCCO, and CCCs. These primary sources are public information that is easily accessible. I used them in conjunction with other forms of data identified for this study (e.g., interviews and focus group). I also used publicly available literature on the Commission; the ACCJC Standard IB practices, procedures, and

trainings; and other ways the ACCJC helps colleges address accreditation standards as they relate to institutional effectiveness. Simultaneously, I also focused on a specific campus to examine a central phenomenon developed from the concepts, themes, and meanings of the experiences of individuals.

Data Analysis Plan

To gather the most useful, descriptive data, I employed the constant comparative method. Glaser and Strauss introduced this method as a strategy to make deductive inferences from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Foremost, I began the analysis of data at the beginning of the data collection process because this study is an emergent design that relied on an ongoing analysis of information. Using this basic organizational approach, I labeled and arranged the data set into tentative themes and categories as I continued to refine and reorganize the findings through an emergent process. Additionally, I used a mix of manual techniques and computer software (e.g., Excel and Word) to organize codes based on similar identifying notations and characteristics for analysis of the data set.

As an important step in the data analysis, I created and regularly updated an inventory of the data set as a cloud-based, electronic copy. The inventory included interviews, observations, field notes, journals, memos, and documents. Linking the methods noted above with the research question not only helped integrate the different components of the study but also assisted in answering the research question (Maxwell, 2013). As Maxwell (2013) suggested, this study used a matrix to assess the coherence and compatibility of the research methods used and the research question. A matrix is a

like-concepts map or flowchart design used for identifying and displaying the design of a study. This visual representation provided an interactive blueprint that could be modified as the research progressed (Maxwell, 2013). This study relied on a combination of two research approaches identified by Maxwell. I purposefully selected participants and collected data for analysis. The execution of this research methodology ultimately relied on the analysis and insights gained from the fieldwork.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research presents unique ethical challenges and issues of trustworthiness to researchers because they are the main instrument for observing, collecting, and analyzing the different events of the research (Merriam, 2009). To ensure the credibility of the methods applied to collect the data and derive findings, I applied several elements of research integrity throughout the different stages of the study.

I used a rigorous method to conduct fieldwork consisting of engagement in the field to systematically analyze and collect high-quality data. Merriam (2009) suggested active engagement in data collection along with identifying variances that may help in understanding a phenomenon and in determining insights and conclusions for the study. To establish internal validity, an interpretive, ongoing dialog about the topic that focuses on understanding rather than on confirming the underlying moral assumptions was the primary focus of the study. To do so, I kept track of and reported alternative explanations, themes, codes, and patterns that emerged from the data analysis. Similarly, the study provided unmediated attention to diverse voices on contrary interpretations, disagreements, and alternative viewpoints and evidence. Because I relied on multiple

methods and sources of data, I paid careful attention to the triangulation of data and to how the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to create an application of research findings or transferability.

I established dependability through the self-reflective process that was at the heart of this ongoing, interpretive, rigorous research strategy. I aimed to identify critical elements of the study. Furthermore, I analyzed the observations and interviews through the lens of credible information. I contacted all of the participants to determine the accuracy of the preliminary analysis gained from the data collected and analysis of documents. The analysis helped revise and fine-tune the meanings and interpretations of those experiences and helped establish a heightened awareness of objectivity. Additionally, clarifying the ethical issues, assumptions, dispositions, biases, and my orientation throughout the study helped alleviate issues of trustworthiness and establish credibility of sources and methods used throughout the study.

Ethical Procedures

Numerous researchers have provided a wealth of information and guidance on maintaining a high level of ethics throughout a research study. I considered the following list of ethical considerations throughout this study: (a) explicit agreements and informed consent with participants on confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, disclaimers, data collection, and the researcher-participant relationship; (b) the purpose of inquiry and methods used; (c) the contribution/worthiness of the project; (d) the risks, benefits, costs, and considerations; (e) data access boundaries; (f) my training, experience, and competence as a researcher; (g) standards of ethical conduct; (h) participant observation

and interview protocols; (i) ownership of data and conclusions; (j) use and misuse of results; (k) the credibility and quality of the research; and (l) intellectual and professional integrity.

Institutional Review Board Documents

I followed best-practice protocols for using human subjects for research in accordance with the National Institutes of Health and Walden University's IRB guidelines and requirements. I addressed all required forms and document approvals in accordance with the requirements of Walden University, the community college in California, and the ACCJC. I provided all respondents selected for this study with a pseudonym to protect their identity and privacy.

Ethical Concerns

I found no ethical concerns in the execution of this study or the recruitment of participants associated with this research methodology. I contacted all participants through verifiable and appropriate sources of connections. Information about this research study is accessible to anyone interested in the project. Participants also had a choice to leave the research participant pool at any given point during the study with no legal, social, or moral implications.

I made ethical choices throughout the study. Additionally, I did not foresee any ethical conflicts or dilemmas as a qualitative researcher. I engaged critically and honestly in all of the content of this study in order to understand the issue and build research integrity and trustworthiness in addition to being a careful, objective observer.

Treatment of Data

To accurately capture data from the interviews, I used a handheld recording device at each interview session. I also sought permission from all participants to use the device to record my observations. I established protocols for using the recording device. In the event that I could not use a recording device, I created detailed handwritten notes as a substitute for recording the interview. I made every effort to transfer the notes through typing or dictation into a narrative format as quickly as possible after each interview. I input all of the interview data into computer software for coding and analysis. I made hand written journal entries of all observations and input and store data on computer software.

No one other than me had access to the recordings for this project. I treated the data collected from all sources equally. As part of a reflective, ongoing data analysis process, I did not make any inferences about the data without determining the interrelationships with my field notes and journals. I engaged in a thoughtful process throughout the collection and analysis of the data in order to ensure the validity and credibility of this study. All of the data collected were secured and stored on my personal computer and on a cloud-based server to ensure a secure backup and easy access to data online. I will store the data for a period of 5 years. After that time, I will destroy it in an appropriate manner.

Summary

This chapter highlighted a qualitative, exploratory case study method that uses multiple research processes to define the various components of this study. The research

design aimed to answer the research questions. To better understand the accreditation experiences of a CCC accredited by the ACCJC, the present study utilized methods that consisted of both structured and unstructured approaches to inquiry. I used both approaches to take into consideration multiple sources of data in order to continually reflect and revise the findings. Likewise, I took into account the choice of the research design and rationale, research questions, methodology, and role of the researcher. This choice aligned the different elements of this study that were inductive in nature and by which the research participants became integral to understanding the meanings and conclusions of the study. Issues of trustworthiness were identified and discussed in terms of credibility, reliability, transferability, application, dependability, and ability to confirm.

Chapter 4: Results

This study sought to examine the perceptions of a California community college's institutional participants regarding compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' (ACCJC, 2012). As such, the research question focused on the perceptions of one community college's stakeholders was: What has been and is one community college's perception of compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission? Data were collected from a focus group, semistructured interviews, and documents. Presentation of the collected data is derived from themes identified from several sources of data. In this chapter, I summarize the setting, the research participants, data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the qualitative case study.

Setting

I selected a community college in California for its accessible geographic location and the availability of a community partner at the institution. The community college selected is part of the California community college (CCC) system in the Western region of the United States (ACCJC, 2013). The college is among the 113 CCCs accredited by the ACCJC (ACCJC, 2013). A district office and a chancellor govern this college and its neighboring sister college and provide oversight for both colleges. The community college was recently removed from accreditation probation status on the basis of an

accreditation follow-up visit and report by the ACCJC. The college is among a large number of CCCs that have frequently been placed on some form of probation or sanctions and have been required to provide additional follow-up reports and arrange visits from the ACCJC visiting teams (ACCJC, 2012). The 2002 Accreditation Standards were updated in 2014, requiring all CCCs to develop innovative ways to address those standards. In the time since I described the problem and proposed this research, the community college has received a positive evaluation from the ACCJC. The community college is scheduled for a comprehensive self-evaluation in 2016.

Participant Selection

This exploratory case study used a sample size of 12 participants ($n = 12$) in either interviews or as part of a focus group. All participants selected for this study had more than 1 year of experience with accreditation or related activities and processes on that campus. Almost half of the participants had worked in the accreditation related activities for several years at the college. Additionally, all of the participants currently serve on one of the accreditation standards committees and are members or chairs of the college accreditation committees.

Focus group participants included seven members of the college faculty and administration. The two tenure-track faculty were from the Art department and the Foreign Languages department and the adjunct faculty member was from the English department. Participants in the focus group also included three administrators, the Dean of Social Science and Humanities, the Dean of Enrollment Services, and the Interim Vice

President of Student Services. One participant represented the student services staffing area.

Table 1
Pseudonyms of Participants

Priya	Student Services
Earnest	Administrator
Jenine	Faculty
Smith	Student Services
Roy	Administrator
Ann	Faculty
Mason	Administrator
Tarek	Administrator
Rita	Student Services
Angela	Administrator
Julie	Faculty
Mark	Administrator

I conducted two of the seven face-to-face, semistructured interviews with two faculty members from the focus group. The other five interviews were with two staff members and three administrators from Academic Affairs divisions. The administrators included a Dean of Business and Workforce Development and the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Accreditation Liaison Officer. I relied on a community partner to select participants for the focus group because the community partner was knowledgeable in identifying participants with accreditation experience and who could provide meaningful data for this study. The community partner also suggested most of the participants selected for the interviews and I identified two of the participants from the focus group to interview.

During the focus group and interviews, I sought to answer the research question and to understand the participants' degree of involvement and experience with accreditation and related activities at this campus. The majority of the participants held vital positions in accreditation related activities and most stated that they had volunteered; only three participants had been assigned to this work.

Data Collection

For this qualitative case study, data were collected through a combination of a focus group, semistructured interviews, and analysis of reports and documents. The focus group was held in a conference room on the college campus. Six of the seven members were present at the venue and one participant participated via conference call. The single focus group discussion with seven participants lasted nearly 90 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven members of the college staff, faculty, and administration. All interviews were conducted in the private offices of the participants. Interview lengths varied from 40 minutes to 70 minutes. I recorded the interviews and focus group using a Samsung smart phone application called *Voice Recorder* and transcribed the recorded materials within 24 hours of the focus group or interviews. I transcribed interviews and notes and transferred them to my personal laptop and backed up on Google Drive.

I made observations from the face-to-face semistructured interviews with the research participants. Using an observation form I created (see Appendix F), I used both descriptive and reflective notes during the interviews and soon afterwards. I used the descriptive notes to observe the physical setting and the reflective notes to make

observations of the nonverbal and symbolic meanings and interpretations of the responses to the questions. The observation notes I made during the semistructured interviews supplemented the data. The observation notes helped me gain a better understanding of the participants' responses to the research question.

There were no variations from the original data collection plan and all interviews and the focus group were conducted uninterrupted. No unusual events occurred during the interviews and the focus group.

Data were also collected from published documents and reports about the ACCJC and the community college regarding institutional effectiveness and accreditation. I used the public website of the ACCJC, the community college, and the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to retrieve this data. Data from the ACCJC and CCCCCO were available for the past 14 years but data from the community college were only available for the past 5 years. The majority of the documents collected were printed or available on websites. All documents used for this study were publicly available documents and I ensured their accuracy and authenticity. These documents included the community college's follow-up reports, ACCJC newsletters, ACCJC recent commission actions, ACCJC publications and policies, a CCCCCO 's task force on accreditation and institutional effectiveness document, and ACCJC press releases, for a total of 78 documents.

Additionally, I made field notes from focus groups and documents collected during the data collection. I printed the majority of the documents I used for this study and used a combination of manually circling, underlining, and highlighting content

relevant for data analysis. I used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method of qualitative analysis for analysis of all data. In the next section, I describe in more detail how I used this method for this study.

Data Analysis

I applied Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method to identify and integrate categories and develop constant analysis of data. I manually coded the data and sorted the codes into categories until saturation of data was reached. I knew I had attained data saturation because no new categories or themes emerged from the triangulation of data. The final categories I derived from this process helped me identify the main themes. Alongside data triangulation, I kept notes capturing my thoughts, speculations, and hunches in the preparation of data analysis.

I used a basic organizational approach to manually sort data from the focus group, interviews, and documents by continuously building a list of preliminary codes. I manually transcribed the data from the focus group and interviews, which aided in the preliminary analysis of data. As I began data collection, I found it easier to first build preliminary codes because with each analysis of data I was able to add new codes to the first round of analysis. I assigned it a Level I coding process. Since I had identified more than a hundred codes at the preliminary coding level, I used a second level of sorting to reorganize and refine the relevant findings and create coherent categories.

During this analysis, I created an Excel spreadsheet to populate with excerpts reflecting the many codes. I found that the excerpts were useful because they related to one or more of the themes and each participant expressed them directly or indirectly. As I

added excerpts, this process helped me further cluster codes and allow the categories of codes to emerge. This process helped me establish a guideline for excerpts that either belonged in an established category or required a new category because some sections of data fit into two or more categories. The preliminary codes identified for the focus group, interviews, and other documents were created in one list from which subsequent codes were identified. I refined and reorganized the codes that represented key concepts drawn from the raw data. I continued to build categories until no new categories were identified. At this point, I had identified 25-30 categories and sought to reduce the number of categories to a manageable size by combining some of the categories and using categories that were most relevant to the study. I used the constant comparative method to move from preliminary codes to categories that represented key concepts drawn from reading and re-reading the text. (See Appendix H for a list of categories.) I generated several categories of codes based on their frequency, distribution, and meaning to the participants. I used the research question as my guiding tool to research valuable data from documents. I identified the following 10 categories from the codes: *accreditation*, *Standard IB*, *perception*, *interaction*, *communication*, *impact*, *institutional effectiveness*, *key players*, *ACCJC*, and *compliance*.

Once I finalized the categories, I sought to identify key themes from those 10 categories. To do this, I identified important patterns and connections within and among the categories. I identified four key themes through this process to help me interpret the data and answer the research question. The four main themes are *negative perceptions*, *relevance*, *integration*, and *efficacy*.

Additionally, I created a matrix (or concept map) to develop and present the graphic picture of the themes that emerged from the qualitative case study design (see appendix G). The map of labeled circles or boxes with lined arrows helped me see the patterns and connections among the institutional stakeholders' perceptions regarding compliance and application of Standard IB. While it took me several attempts to refine the matrix, it helped me gain a visual representation of the research study and identify any possible gaps or contradictions in the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As identified in Chapter 3, I applied several elements of research integrity throughout the different stages of the study to establish credibility and dependability. I reviewed transcripts and I triangulated the data using an interpretive, ongoing analysis of the research study that focused on understanding the phenomenon as the primary focus of the study. Participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript via email and each participant was encouraged to review, comment, or retract any comments. While only two of the participants provided additional comments, their feedback was added to their interview transcripts.

Direct quotes from the focus group, interviews, and documents were used in the analysis of data to ensure transferability of the information shared. Furthermore, I analyzed the focus group and the interviews for meaningful information, relying on highly descriptive language and topical content. To ensure confidentiality of the participants as well as the research site, I assigned all participants with pseudonyms during the transcription of focus group and semistructured interviews.

Information from the focus group was gathered to understand the critical perceptions of the institutional participants about the phenomenon under study. This allowed me to identify common themes and expand on them in the semistructured interviews. I utilized organizational records and archival sources of data regarding accreditation standards and institutional effectiveness. I gave careful attention to the triangulation of data and how they were collected, analyzed, and interpreted through the different stages.

I also used a self-reflective process throughout the study. I kept track of my thoughts, musings, and speculations as I collected and prepared data for analysis. This was done in the form of handwritten memos and notes. Additionally, I had a trusted colleague review my coding and data analysis process. I analyzed my notes, emerging codes, and themes several times to keep track of and report alternative explanations, themes, codes, and patterns that may have emerged from the data analysis.

Results

Results have been grouped by four main themes: *negative perceptions*, *relevance*, *integration*, and *efficacy*. The four main themes emerged from tentative categories and constant comparative method of data analysis. One of the four themes had recurring subthemes. The theme of negative perceptions includes several subthemes: *frustration*, *no clarity*, *punitive*, *disconnect*, *tedious process*, and *roadblocks*. The second theme, relevance, captures the relevance of the accreditation process that participants identified as important to them, the students, and the institution. The third theme, integration, represents combining different elements of the accreditation work, for example

integrating data and processes. The final theme, efficacy, represents the success of the students and the institution.

While I did not seek information from participants about their experience with accreditation prior to 1 year, several participants shared their previous experience with accreditation as a basis for their involvement in accreditation work at the current campus.

Negative Perceptions

The first and most dominant theme is negative perceptions which has six sub themes: frustration, no clarity, punitive, disconnect, tedious process, and roadblock. The college has experienced a frequent change in leadership and administration in recent years that may have added to the participants' negative perceptions. Given the college's history of ongoing change in leadership, frequent probation or sanctions by the ACCJC, and the current efforts to improve the accreditation work, the current college administration and institutional stakeholders reported that they are deeply committed to meaningfully addressing the accreditation standards and complying with ACCJC mandates. This is in line with the college's current efforts to improve their accreditation standing. In the perception of the stakeholders I interviewed, this form of normative power has enabled the current college administration to garner more support than any of the past leaders to revive the college's efforts to fully address the accreditation standards. The 2002 and the updated 2014 accreditation standards serve as mandatory directives by the ACCJC to ensure the college is in compliance with applicable standards.

Etzioni's (1961) theory of organizational environment focuses on the degree of scope and pervasiveness of institutional participants in organizational activities. All the

participants in this study spoke to a high degree of commitment to the institution through the internalized norms of ACCJC accreditation: continuous improvement, quality assurance, and educational effectiveness. Despite the participants' commitment to the institution, they held varying degrees of negative perceptions regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB and the ACCJC's published expectations. The subthemes are: frustration, no clarity, disconnect, punitive, tedious process, disconnect, and roadblocks.

Frustration. Frustration was one of the sub-themes identified by all but one of the focus group and interview participants. Most of the participants indicated varying degrees of frustration with the current efforts in addressing the new standards. When asked, "how do you perceive the current efforts with the new standards?" Earnest stated, "Frustrating. Because in a lot of ways it's a blank slate without any help." Mark noted his perception that the new standards are no different from the old standards because they [institutional participants] have to go through the same process. Mark added

In the end it's the same process. It's just moving the pieces on the board a little bit. The Board is not any smaller, no fewer pieces. They've [ACCJC] combined things [standards] into larger chunks we had before. And they may have been more manageable in smaller chunks from before. I'm not sure the new standards are a benefit or detrimental. I think they just are, it's just not enough of a significant change that would make a vast amount of a difference. And I think they [ACCJC] think they did us a favor by making small changes and I think it

would have been more of a favor to make a greater change and really pair it down to what it is.

Julie noted,

Because of the actions of the ACCJC, there is awful lot of distrust. I think that's an incredible understatement to say there's distrust, like there's so much distrust. And it makes it difficult to actually go forward because it sounds like we are so angry at ACCJC that they resist all of it. You know, all of the accreditation and it's fighting a battle on our own turf, and we're the ones who're going to get hurt by it because no matter who's accrediting us we're probably gonna go through accreditation and how we're we not going to look that much different. So I see this impediment in this trust and anger and I totally share it. It's awkward to being the position where I'm saying we have to look at accreditation and it sounds like we're abetting the enemy in a funny way.

Relating a similar sense of frustration, Mason stated, "we're being punished [by the ACCJC], the college is being punished for things, mistakes being made at the district level." Similarly, Earnest noted,

The standard response [by the ACCJC] is every college is different so you are probably gonna meet the standard differently than any other college. But what happens is I take it as 'give it your best shot but then we'll tell you that you failed'. I don't get the sense that they're there to support or help the college, although they'll probably say that's not true.

Tarek described the accreditation standards as,

I think the idea of the standards is fine. It is the process that is extremely tedious. And someone having to work on addressing the standards, it's a pain, on top of having to do your regular, daily work.

Others stated that while they felt the standards are useful for defining student success, the ACCJC and the college district make the process difficult. For example, the participants noted that they had difficulty in navigating the institutional processes to gather necessary information needed to successfully address accreditation related work. Priya noted, "we should be able to access the data we need to provide as evidence." Adding to the same point Jenine noted, "the problem comes in...when we're trying to get information from a group [college district] that is not as accountable [by the ACCJC] and doesn't see that why we essentially need that [data] as much as we need." Rita described such a predicament as giving mixed messages to the college by the ACCJC. The positive message is that the accreditation work is helpful in determining student success but the people involved in the accreditation work at the college described themselves as being in the position of "head on the chopping block." Julie described her involvement in addressing the Standard IB as an ongoing "state of survival."

Data from the documents showed that the ACCJC's primary focus is on quality assurance and quality improvement that drives institutional compliance (ACCJC, 2013). The ACCJC reports and documents I analyzed consistently state that the institutional deficiencies are intended to help individual institutions identify areas of improvement and develop robust practices of addressing the accreditation standards.

When asked what is the nature of the typical communication between the ACCJC and the college, most of the participants noted that the typical communication between the college and the ACCJC was frustrating. Roy noted “when you do get sanctioned [by the ACCJC], you know for whatever reason it is, plus what the [college] district is and not doing, you still have to deal with that in public.” Some of the participants attributed this to the limited channels of communication between the ACCJC and the college. Roy added

So there’s the perception of the standards for example. We [college] are evaluated, not how our district is evaluated, cuze (sic) our students are our customers. And I couldn’t tell you what you applied but I’m going to return your application back because it’s not complete. And I could call you and ask you but I’m not even going to do that and I’m just going to send it back.

Mason agreed, stating a similar frustration

It’s my 20th year here, when I was around for a long time I did my job and I didn’t play friendship, I went home. I didn’t pay attention to a lot of things that were going on. There was never the information [we needed] in 2010 when the SLO stuff started. It’s like we haven’t been doing it because no one never really told us to do it and I never heard of it before. Honestly, I had not heard about it before. So I think there was a, from the top down there was a lack of communication in getting us to do it [accreditation work] and then all of a sudden we were scrambling to develop these SLOs and to assess them and to get on board.

Mark stated that there is widespread frustration in understanding what the ACCJC expects from institutions and stated,

We operate in a position of fear when it comes to ACCJC and we shouldn't be. And we're not doing crazy things, and if the school's doing crazy things, maybe they should be operating in fear, but we're creating courses that we think are appropriate for the students. We're working with transfer institutions; we're working with employers trying to set up things that are right for the students. And so it's just the matter of hoping that what we're doing is what they [ACCJC] want and creating the report that's meaningful to us even if it doesn't look like everybody else's report.

Priya also pointed to the shared frustration among felt by other institutional stakeholders. She stated

It's a general consensus in the [college] meetings that if we don't give them [ACCJC] information in the format they want, it won't make a difference [in their evaluation]. So it's just concerning, just tell us how to present it to you [ACCJC]. If we're not doing it, we're not doing it, and that's fine. If we're doing it we'd like to present it in a way you're [ACCJC] not going to ding us later coz we gave it to you the wrong way.

Relating to a similar degree of frustration, Earnest noted, "The frustration lies in the interpretation. As long as you hit the points they [ACCJC] want you to hit...But...they're [ACCJC] not very transparent about what those are." Mark noted

I think there have been so many institutions on some kind of warning or probation that it's just created this toxic relationship [with the ACCJC] that we wouldn't allow in our personal relationships. And so why would we allow them in our institutional relationships? And it would be just so simple, just to say that we've been going around this the wrong way. We've thought about this and we want to move from this punitive model to being corrective and if the correction doesn't happen, then be punitive.

All of the participants noted that they had difficulty in understanding and interpreting the new accreditation guidelines recently set by the ACCJC. Most of the participants in the focus group and interviews shared frustration as an underlying sub-theme of negative perceptions.

No Clarity. Most of the participants expressed no clarity in regards to the accreditation standards. This sub-theme overlaps with the theme of frustration because along with the frustration indicated by most of the participants, they also noted that there was little or no clarity from the ACCJC in how to fully interpret and apply the new standards. Earnest noted that while the ACCJC will readily provide an answer to a direct question, they [ACCJC] are “not very forthcoming with information,” [long pause] “not just at the college level.” Other participants had similar responses. Ann noted

I think that's an area that needs more attention, communication about accreditation. I mean we have meetings, people can come to, the whole thing about dialogue, that's the thread that runs through the standards. So it's really a hard question to answer because there has not been a spotlight in my experience.

Really what are we doing? But there are formal channels, we have the academic senate, the various committees, there are forums. But what's lacking is the thread, the information we gather for accreditation should actually be part of the process, flowing like a river, so it's ongoing.

Most of the participants noted that while they understood the meaning and purpose of compliance in education, they were unclear about how the standards should be applied to gain successful accreditation. Many participants noted that not having clarity of how to apply the standards has resulted in a diminished understanding of the standards and that the standards seem redundant, ambiguous, and vague. In discussing the current campus efforts to address the standards, Rita stated,

It is not clear what these new guidelines are that they're [ACCJC] setting. Is it research and how much research should we be giving? And in what format should we be giving it to you [ACCJC]? Our meetings have been quite frustrating in what they [ACCJC] expect from us.

However, the ACCJC reported in a document I analyzed that as part of its policy the Commission annually reviews the accreditation standards to bring more clarity and reduce redundancy to the standards (ACCJC, 2012). The college's historical documents and follow-up reports show that the college has made considerable effort in addressing the standards and is undergoing a systemic way to build a culture of ongoing and continuous improvement for meeting the accreditation standards.

The updated 2014 Accreditation Standards require CCCs to submit an essay that details the work the institution has done during its evaluation period for reaccreditation.

The information sought in the essay is identical to the information provided in the accreditation reports by the institutions to the ACCJC. As a result, most of the participants find the standards and recommendations confusing. When asked if there are any conflicts between the college and the ACCJC, Mark noted

I think the only conflict is the repetitive nature of what they ask. They claim that they're going to simplify what they ask. It's really the same. In fact, they have made it more redundant by having the quality essay in the new standards. I think that's redundant because you've already talked about it in addressing the standards and now we've added a further redundancy.

Along with the participants' near consensus of little or no clarity about the standards, most of the participants expressed a distrust of the ACCJC members, primarily based on the ACCJC's perceived behavior, and not the accrediting agency itself. However, several participants noted they felt a sense of ownership of the accreditation process to make it more effective for the college. While they felt ownership of the accreditation process, the participants shared confusion and little to no clarity in understanding and applying the documented expectations of the ACCJC standards.

Disconnection. Disconnection was a sub-theme in the focus group and interviews. Most of the participants expressed feelings of disconnection between the college district and the ACCJC. A primary disconnect identified by most of the participants was the inaccessibility of information from the college district for accreditation purposes. The participants raised concerns about the difficulty in gathering information, which included access to pertinent data about the college that are required

for accreditation reports. According to some of the participants, while the college is held accountable by the ACCJC to provide all necessary information on reports, the college district is not. As such, most of the participants found a disconnection between the ACCJC and college district's expectations. Lack of ongoing communication between the college and the college district was identified as another disconnection by the participants in sharing information district-wide about accreditation related activities. Jenine stated

Just like the [ACCJC] disconnect, we give them [college district] what we need and they give us something that doesn't make sense to us. They should be here for us. We need to be more structured and unified in what we do. The theoretical compliance is useful because we're building a better institution but then there's the window dressing compliance and we have to make sure the window-dressing looks good enough while we're maintaining the development of the institution. And I think that's where there's sometimes a little disconnect. When people don't see why we do we have to do this when we're doing this.

Angela noted that such internal disconnection causes a "great deal of time and energy" spent by individuals involved in the accreditation related activities.

Most of the participants also noted that there exists a clear disconnection between the ACCJC and the campus. Lack of ongoing communication was the most visible form of disconnect according to the participants. Mason suggested that it would be beneficial if the ACCJC had discussions with colleges to see "what we really want to achieve here and then see how those standards make that happen." In discussing the perception of disconnect by the ACCJC, Mark stated

I think they [ACCJC] feel like that the standards just have already taken care of all that but no, you've got to step in between where you have the conversation and close the loop about the standards that are accreditation outcomes. That needs to happen and that's not happening.

Addressing the disconnect between the ACCJC and the college, Rita noted There is a disconnect between the [accreditation] teams coming to visit the campus, and the reports, and the recommendations they make, and then the ultimate decision by the Commission.

All of the participants noted that the current college administration has made efforts to remove disconnect among institutional participants by being more inclusive and providing regular college-wide updates on accreditation related work. Since the college is part of a two-college district, the perception of disconnect noted by the participants was prevalent at the district level and the ACCJC. According to the participants, the ability to fully address the accreditation requirements becomes more complex in a multi-college district because individual colleges are held accountable for being in compliance while their college district is not. Smith noted that such a disconnection may minimize the efficacy of the work being produced by one college because of how compliant or noncompliant the college district may be. When asked what amount and kind of feedback is exchanged between the college and the ACCJC, Earnest gave an example of the type of feedback exchanged:

I have to say that when I went to their [ACCJC] meeting...regarding their new standards in April, down in San Diego... it was a complete waste of time [because

most people there had questions]...people there wanted some real information [from the ACCJC representatives]. For example, we [institutions] really wanted information on what this quality focused essay was about because it's a huge part of the new expectations and it was one bullet point on one slide and got 5 minutes. We were not allowed to really ask a lot of questions. When they [ACCJC] were done with their presentation, they merely had time for four questions and that was about it. Twice they had very dismissive [answers]...when [the ACCJC was] asked that can you give us an example of 'going beyond mapping student learning outcomes?' And the response from the presenter was 'well nobody's asked you to do that, where are you getting that, that's not something we ask. And the fact is it's question #36 on our Annual Report. And the presenter didn't even know that. And everybody else in the room knew it.

While most of the participants noted several disconnects between the ACCJC and the college district, all the participants expressed a keen interest for them to close the loop of information and feedback. Julie noted that the college would benefit from including more faculty, staff, and administration in accreditation activities and sharing more specific and ongoing information about accreditation. Roy suggested that the ACCJC should close the loop of feedback and information with the college by providing guidance on how to address specific areas of improvement. All the participants expected a consistency of information received from the ACCJC and the college about accreditation.

Punitive. Much of the underlying conversation in the focus group revolved around the punitive nature of the ACCJC towards the college. Most of the interview

participants also addressed this sub-theme. Because most of the participants held the perception that the accreditation standards and the ACCJC provide little to no clarity, and perceive disconnect at the college district and the ACCJC level, the participants stated that they found the ACCJC to be punitive in how it responds to the college. Mark noted

I think it's particularly odd that the agency that is so focused on student learning outcomes being meaningful and assessable does not give those institutions their accrediting specific outcomes that are meaningful and assessable in the process. In other words, it becomes entirely punitive rather than educational and I think that the negative example they [ACCJC] are setting is part of the issue that they have so much trouble with compliance in that part of the ACCJC in the Western area.

Addressing similar a concern, Jenine noted that the self-study process that encourages institutions to be reflective and self-critical in their performance has also resulted in further sanctions by the ACCJC. Ann found it odd that the ACCJC does not guide institutions to develop specific outcomes that are meaningful in their accreditation process.

The college's most recent follow-up report to the ACCJC focused on building evidence for student learning outcomes. However, the general consensus among the participants was that while the work was necessary to maintain college accreditation, it was stressful. When asked how the participants got involved in the accreditation related activities on campus, one faculty member noted that she has worked for the college for

the past 19 years but her interest in accreditation only grew after the college had been on a cycle of sanctions and warnings in recent years. Jenine noted

To be honest, the Commission seemed to be making up some things as necessary and it made a lot of people mad at the campus and that made sense and some of the things I was hearing were sanctions that did not make as much sense. It's just hard to see that connection sometimes and the punitive nature is huge.

Mark found the ACCJC to be punitive and inconsistent in its disposition of "self-reflection and self-improvement" through the self-study reports. Mark added the ACCJC has set up an environment that is punitive rather than educational, thereby making the reporting process more difficult for institutions.

In responding to the question about the general levels of trust among people towards each other, most of the participants noted that the trust has improved within the campus but there is no trust between the ACCJC and the college. Ann noted that the general feeling on campus is that "the ACCJC is looked at as the enemy" and "we're very weary of them, we perceive them as not on our side."

As noted earlier, the college has a decade-long history of frequent administration and leadership changes along with ongoing changes in the structure and functionality of the college. However, all the participants noted that the health of the college has improved dramatically within the last 2 years, largely due to a new and inclusive leadership set by the new President and the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Accreditation Liaison Officer. The punitive nature of the ACCJC positioned by most of the participants could be in part due to an unstable cycle of leadership at the

college for several years. The punitive nature of the ACCJC was expressed by most of the participants who found the ACCJC unapproachable in addressing and resolving any concerns of the college.

Tedious process. All but two said the accreditation related activities process was tedious and cumbersome. Because the college has undergone several different leaders within the last 10 years, most of the participants did not find the processes for meetings and committees about accreditation work efficient or fully functional. Tarek noted that until the last 2 years most people on campus did not want to get involved in the accreditation work because of the unstable structures and processes of the committees. Angela found the accreditation work to be “labor intensive because how much it adds to our other work responsibilities.” In the focus group, when asked how the process of interpreting and applying the ACCJC standards was working for the college, Mason noted that when key individuals on campus are more involved in the accreditation work than their jobs, the level of organizational efficacy is compromised somewhere.

When asked what the participants understood by the standards, Mason noted that addressing the standards is tiresome, partly because no permanent solutions were used to address those problems and they had to be re-addressed at a later stage. Noting the problems with the tedious process, Julie stated, “So it’s like a whitewash, a cover-up, a whitewash. And some things were effective but there was a lot of stuff that wasn’t. It’s kind of like cleaning up the mess.” In response to the degree of scope and pervasiveness of the current efforts with the new standards, Angela stated the standards would only make a meaningful difference to the students and the institution if the institutional

stakeholders take ownership of the accreditation process and it is not imposed upon them by the ACCJC.

However, all the participants noted that the current leadership's effort to successfully shift the mindsets of the "naysayers" at the college to get involved in accreditation related work. All the participants noted that the current college administration is more transparent and accountable in representing staff, faculty, and administration in each of the accreditation committees than any of the previous administrations at the college. While the participants perceived the application of Standard IB as a tedious process, most of the participants provided alternative ways to address the standard more effectively.

Roadblocks. Most of the participants noted roadblocks, or internal obstacles between the college and the college District. While I did not specifically ask questions about the relationship between the college and the college District, many of the participants shared their perception and experience with dealing with the District. As noted earlier, the college is part of a multi-college district that is governed by the Chancellor at the college District and a Board of Trustees. Several participants noted that gaining information related to accreditation was difficult from their district because of complexity of their relationships. Roy noted that while the bureaucracy between the college and the college district has slowed the course of any change, the institutional stakeholders have to "keep plugging away at things we know are important."

Smith noted that the ACCJC holds the college accountable for proving that that they are doing “certain things” but the college’s Board of Trustees “is not held to that level of compliance,” which further creates internal roadblocks. Jenine stated

I would say that Standard IV [Governance] has vagueness in getting information, and the biggest roadblock is the Board. People have largely been good about getting us information we need. Seems to be consistently a district issue.

Ann stated, “One of the biggest problems we have is the communication with the District.” Similarly, most of the participants found the internal roadblocks as one of the biggest obstacles to fully interpreting and applying the ACCJC standards.

Summary of theme of negative perceptions. Negative perceptions were identified as the first major theme with six sub-themes: frustration, no clarity, disconnect, punitive, tedious process, and road bocks. All participants shared varying degrees of the sub-themes. The negative perceptions are related to this college’s environment of scope and pervasiveness that are broad, and directly affect compliance and organizational effectiveness. Even though the sub-themes are a connotation of negative perception toward the ACCJC and the college District, all the participants held deep commitments to student success and a promising outlook for the college.

Relevance

Relevance was the second prominent theme that emerged from my analysis of the data. An acknowledgement from all the participants in the focus group and the interviews was that the accreditation process needed to have relevance for them, students, and the institution. Most of the participants expressed their passion for working in higher

education and having a keen desire for the accreditation process to be meaningful for all. Despite the intensity of the accreditation process expressed by most of the participants, all of them wanted to understand “how we can improve it and make the process itself meaningful.” Ann noted the importance of making the accreditation process meaningful because that way “we make accreditation a part of our own, rather than this being imposed upon us by somebody we don’t trust.” All the participants agreed that regardless of which accrediting agency oversees colleges, there would be considerable accreditation work to do. To this end, Roy suggested that the institutional stakeholders should pay less attention to their fears of the accrediting agency and more attention to the work that has meaning and meets the ACCJC’s requirement.

Julie suggested that bringing relevance to accreditation work would help people involved in accreditation activities because they would not “have to spend so much time hunting and tracking down, you know gathering all this information” and be more effective. Mason noted

Besides the programs, if we don’t do a good job we lose students, regardless of compliance. By stepping up, everyone can do something. When instructors are not being trained in the right way, and the technology isn’t there, students aren’t going to come here. I wanted to make a difference even though it took me a long time. If you get involved, it’s going to help everyone and the college.

The participants shared a clear sense of urgency in wanting to make a positive change at the campus and many of them noted that they were motivated and inspired by the current leadership of the college to advance the workability of the institution. Mark

noted that the institutional stakeholders should take a self-reflective approach to the needs of the college, not what the ACCJC needs.

When asked what formal channels of communication are shared on accreditation, all the participants noted that the level and amount of formal communication has significantly improved within the college. Several participants noted that the Vice President of Academic Affairs/Accreditation Liaison Officer routinely visits various accreditation committees and meetings on campus and provides weekly updates on accreditation. Priya noted that when ongoing communication is shared about accreditation, more people are tuned in to the current efforts on campus regarding accreditation, which creates more relevance for everyone and dispels gossips. Ann noted that the difference in just working on accreditation work and having relevance to that work is the sense of ownership. Ann added

As long as we're not relating to the standards as insignificant or unimportant to our institution, they will make a difference. I think the difference is ownership. If we own this process it'll work. But if we keep thinking this is imposed upon us and we're burdened, we're not gonna work very well.

Several accreditation reports since 2010 show the college's commitment to develop a dialogue with institutional stakeholders on organizational effectiveness.

All the participants acknowledged that creating relevance in their accreditation work was important because they felt a strong sense of ownership of the work being produced for ensuring the quality of education for students and the institution. For example, Ann suggested that more faculty need to participate in accreditation related

activities, such as serving on committees, to improve the communication, structure, and performance of the organization. She added, “there needs to be a change in the perception of how we operate. It has to reach the critical mass for enough people to get excited and involved and inspired to get things moving.” Echoing a similar thought, Earnest suggested

So it’s making everybody aware. And when people are more aware, the good in me feels that they want to improve. Improvement comes from risk-taking and people aren’t willing to take risks unless there’s a level of trust, and that’s where we think we’ve made some big strides. It’s like it’s okay to fail and I don’t think that’s been the case. But that’s the cultural norm that’s really hard to change.

While Priya suggested “I think we need a funding formula to make informed decisions” Mason’s thought was, “you need to have shared participation along with shared governance.” Thinking along the same lines, Smith suggested, “I think it’s more effective to have primary leads be taken by faculty because of faculties broader involvement on campus.” Ann noted

I would like to see the standards just built into the organizational structure. For example, the questions in the ACCJC guides, those can be built into the program review templates, the committee work, the senate, and administrative meetings. It can be built in so that those questions are constantly being answered.

Summary of theme of relevance. All of the participants expressed a strong sense of meaning to working on the accreditation standards. Specifically, the participants noted that having a sense of ownership would allow the institution to more clearly and

articulately interpret and apply the standards because those standards would have a clear relevance and a meaning to them, their students, and their institution. Most of the participants agreed that the institution is making efforts to strengthen the relevance of accreditation standards so more people on campus can begin to relate to them and help the institution interpret and apply them more effectively.

Integration

I identified integration as the third major theme in the data. Based on Etzioni's (1961) theory of organizational environment of scope and pervasiveness, integration implies embracing the different components of an organization in which the organizational stakeholders are inversely related to their degree of participation in organizational activities. The social environment (scope and pervasiveness) of an organization relates to the number of activities that embrace all participants or alienate some of the participants in the articulation of the organization. The college shared many activities related to accreditation with organizational participants that are broad in scope. The college's annual Professional Development Days are an opportunity to share updates and current work regarding accreditation with the entire campus, along with trainings and workshops related to accreditation activities. The college recently adopted a Tri-Chair model and each group is assigned to one of the four standards. Three individuals, each representing members of the staff, faculty, and administration, chair the Tri-Chair committees. A primary purpose of the Tri-Chair committee members is to prioritize accreditation related activities and build successful liaisons with different segments of the college to seek and share information.

All the participants shared a need to better align the data and processes to improve the overall structure and unity of the college. The participants saw the integrating data and processes as a necessary step towards creating relevance for the work they do and success for their students and the institution. For example, Jenine noted

You have to find the balance in self evaluation honestly, and not try to cover things up. Yet, not put yourself up for roses...on one hand it's trying to fit the letter of what they're [ACCJC] saying what the institutions are only gonna do well if they extract what will help the institution and then the compliance.

While most of the participants noted that the internal processes regarding accreditation have improved at the college, a few participants acknowledged that more improvement is needed. For example, Earnest noted, "we are looking at ways to leverage monies for student success and equity. But everybody has to realize that 45% success rate is not good." Julie noted that, "some [accreditation] committees are clearly not being tied into the functions of the college." The functionality and reporting structure of the accreditation committees was identified as a crucial area requiring further improvement. Aligning the work of accreditation committees to the mission of the college was identified as another area of improvement. An aspect of integration, as identified by all the participants, was how to make apparent the work that was being accomplished. Ann noted, integration is about "connecting all the dots to see how we're doing things." There was a general consensus among the participants about a need to improve the internal processes and standards of the college to positively influence student success.

When asked what is the most critical part of institutional effectiveness process for the college and to them, integration was a primary theme for all the participants. Ann stated, “I think what’s really critical is the actual integration of all of our processes.” Angela noted that accurately assessing the student learning outcomes would close the information loop and provide “opportunity for true improvement.”

Responding to the same question, Jenine noted that while alignment of data and processes is important, so is the alignment between the college and the District because when all the different parts of an organization are combined into a whole it provides “continuity and improvement.” Mason noted that a more integrated process for accreditation would create wider involvement of stakeholders. Integration also correlated to the concept of organizational environment. Etzioni’s (1961) organizational environment theory states the more people that are included in organizational activities, the broader the scope and pervasiveness of the organization is. I used this definition to listen to the participants’ responses to the research question, but it was not used as a priori code.

Ann noted that integration would help create a focused direction while providing a balanced approach for improvement and growth. Ann added

People sometimes think improvement means growth; it’s not necessarily the case. You can take something and fine tune it and make it better but growth is another issue. I think they have to balance what is best for the students. And keeping up with the changes in the world. We need to think what are we providing students that they cannot get elsewhere. That’s a huge question.

There was consensus among the participants about aligning the different elements of accreditation related processes and activities for their efforts to bear meaningful outcomes. The participants shared a commitment to the institutional quality and to the accreditation process by integrating the different parts of the organization combined into a whole for accreditation work.

Summary of theme of integration. Integration was seen as a useful step by the participants for the college to successfully interpret and apply the accreditation standards. Participants also related integration of processes and data, as well as including more organizational stakeholders in the accreditation activities to improving the overall organizational health of the college. Alignment of different parts of the accreditation activities such as program review and student learning outcomes was seen as positive integration of data and processes to advance the success of students and the institution.

Efficacy

I identified efficacy as the fourth and final major theme. In relation to organizational environment, efficacy implies the ability to produce desired results increases when the scope and pervasiveness of the organization is broad. The scope of the college was wide-ranging because the participants articulated the importance of their involvement in accreditation related activities that represented a broad spectrum of organizational stakeholders.

The pervasiveness of the organization is broad because the organization provides several activities (such as Professional Development Days, all-college meetings, and accreditation committees) in which all organizational stakeholders are invited and

included. Most of the participants in the focus group and interviews were directly involved in one or more accreditation activities and processes concomitantly. Mark noted that an adjunct faculty member played a lead role in addressing one of the four standards (Standard IV – Governance), more than the administrator or staff member on that Tri-chair model. Ann suggested

Information channels of communication are always around. People talking to each other, sending emails, sitting to talk about things. I think one of the problems with that is that ‘we’re in trouble, this is bad, we’re at war,’ and I think that’s changing. One of the things that I see is that with the pressure coming off, people are being receptive. I think that dialogue is changing a little bit, not being under the sanctions gives us time to breadth, think about the future. But I think we need more communication, both formal and informal but it can’t just come from the town down, it has to come from all the constituents.

Focus group and interviews revealed that all of the participants sought to enhance a better understanding of Standard IB for their work to be meaningful and effective. Organizational stakeholders who were not directly involved in accreditation related activities had opportunities to review and provide feedback and input to the accreditation documents and reports. It was apparent that the current leadership of the college had set the norms of wide participation and involvement in accreditation activities.

Overall, the participants perceived compliance as a way to remain more effective in the development of organizational performance and student outcomes. When asked what has been the institution’s effort to gain their involvement in institutional

effectiveness activities, most of the participants noted that there is a model for involvement and improvement that did not exist in the past. Almost half of the participants in the study had volunteered for the accreditation related activities in order to help create a culture of evidence, involvement, and improvement. Mason stated

I spent many years doing my job, doing not much else. I got to the point that things were happening that were disturbing to me. I was like what are these people doing. I want to be on the inside rather than outside [the accreditation work] to affect change. I learnt a lot, researched a lot, trying to find the rational.

The college's history shows an ambiguous pathway for leaders to garner the support of organizational stakeholders and their involvement in fully addressing the accreditation standards and compliance. This resulted in multiple sanctions and probations for the college by the ACCJC in the past several years. The focus group and interview participants markedly described their experiences with this turbid history.

Earnest stated

We had a very contentious report filed in 2010 and also the mid-term report filed in 2013, in that many people felt that both of those reports were not a true reflection of what was going on at the college at the time. Particularly 2013, I heard criticism that it was sort of too positive, too Pollyanna, and didn't expose things that needed to improve. And there was a lot of controversy around writing of the 2010 report, in that, the perception is, and I wasn't here so, it's a strong perception that after it had sort of been written, one person went in and completely re-wrote it.

The participants noted that the arrival of a new administration has considerably improved the organizational health and established trust. Ann stated that the prevailing organizational environment has a “flow of energy that is really in the right direction.” Julie stated that the current administration has improved the general levels of trust among people and made a positive difference on campus by making sure that people are included in college activities related to accreditation.

Earnest noted that most recently the college administration charged all college deans to meaningfully address a fundamental question about efficacy: What do you do to influence student success? Mark reported that such findings aim to outline goals and strategies for the work that will emerge from the efficacy exercises.

While most of the participants agreed that student success is measurable, Mark noted that building a pathway for student success is the right way to go because “for most students, success occurs years and decades after they leave the institution.” Earnest noted that the most critical aspect to improving the organization is “institutionalizing what we can really do to increase student success and really using data from program review to inform what’s not happening.”

All the participants noted that the understanding and application of Standard IB should directly or indirectly relate to the efficacy of student and institutional performance. In other words, institutional effectiveness and student success is a homogenous outcome for all the institutional stakeholders. Similarly, the ACCJC’s published expectations of the accreditation standards aim to enable CCCs to identify variables of continuous improvement, quality assurance, and educational effectiveness

(ACCJC, 2012). Most recently, the California Community College Chancellor's office created a new pathway for the CCCs to develop a broad range of activities such as professional development activities, identifying best practices, program improvement, etc. to address issues of student success and the effectiveness of the institutions' organizational environment (CCCO, 2016). Since a normative organization's compliance structure is closely related to scope and pervasiveness, or organizational environment (Etzioni, 1961), there is evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of the college and its compliance structure would improve over time. All of the participants expressed a strong affiliation to their work at the institution and to improve student success and institutional performance.

Summary of theme of efficacy. Efficacy is the fourth major theme identified in the data. All the participants identified efficacy as interrelations of intended results among the different elements of an institution: organizational stakeholders, students, and the institution. Accordingly, the participants identified Standard IB as a model to build congruent relationships for student success and organizational performance of continuous involvement and improvement.

Summary

In Chapter 4 I have presented the analysis of data and results. The perceptions of one community college's stakeholders are examined regarding compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the ACCJC. Participants had the opportunity to provide rich descriptions about their experiences with accreditation through a variety of questions on compliance, accreditation standards,

ACCJC, and institutional effectiveness. I analyzed several sources of data to identify four main themes: negative perceptions, relevance, integration, and efficacy. The participants identified negative perceptions of compliance in relation to accreditation. The resulting suggestions by the participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB was to create relevance or meaning in the accreditation work, integrating the different elements of the accreditation processes and data into a whole, and cultivating efficacy for student success and the college.

The chapter also included an exploration of the compliance structure at the college, especially the use of power, and the organizational environment. The framework of Etzioni's theory of organizational compliance and environment was used in the analysis of data. The analysis of data supported Etzioni's theory. Based on the evidence, I perceived the college to be using normative power to address compliance and Standard IB. The degree of scope and the pervasiveness of the college were broad. As posited by Etzioni, I perceived the scope and pervasiveness of the college to have the potency to improve the effectiveness of the organization and its compliance structure.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. In this chapter I provide a summary of the findings of the exploratory case study, as well as my interpretations based on the theories of organizational compliance and organizational environment for organizational effectiveness developed by Etzioni (1961) and empirical literature.

Summary of Purpose and Findings

This study was conducted because the ACCJC has issued a high number of sanctions to almost two-thirds of the colleges in the CCC system, which has ensued in a growing debate on accreditation among many stakeholders throughout the CCC system (Theule, 2012). I used a qualitative, single-site, exploratory case study approach to answer the research question: What has been and is one community college's perception of compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission?

I collected multiple sources of data to answer the research question. I collected data through a focus group, semistructured interviews, and document analysis. Using constant comparative analysis, four main themes emerged in the participants' perception

of compliance and the application of Standard IB on institutional effectiveness as defined by the Commission emerged: *negative perceptions, relevance, integration, and efficacy*.

The research question and the conceptual framework of Etzioni's (1961) theories of compliance and organizational environment were central to the process. The theme of negative perceptions (with six sub themes: frustration, no clarity, punitive, disconnect, tedious process, and roadblock), reflects a combination of Etzioni's (1961) theory of compliance, in particular, the use of power, as well as two aspects of organizational environment: scope and pervasiveness. The complexity of the negative perceptions addressed: frustration, no clarity, and disconnect with the ACCJC and the college district, the punitive nature of the Commission, and internal roadblocks and the tedious process of accreditation work experienced by the participants. Analysis of the data revealed that while the participants held negative perceptions of compliance and the ACCJC, they sought to develop relevance and integration of data and processes in their accreditation work. The participants also identified measurable ways to increase the efficacy of Standard IB and its success for students and college compliance.

The scope and pervasiveness of accreditation related activities are broad and inclusive of institutional stakeholders I interacted with. The college and the ACCJC rely predominantly on normative powers (Diede, 2009, RP Group, 2011) to gain acceptance of their directives and operations.

While there was a significant emphasis on the positive role of the new leaders for the direction of the college, four themes (negative perceptions, relevance, integration, and efficacy) were identified in the wake of the accreditation challenges facing the college.

Because of the college's long-standing history of high turnover of leaders and ongoing sanctions with the ACCJC in maintaining accreditation, the college district has much work to do to remove the internal roadblocks or obstacles such as access to pertinent information, bureaucracy, funding, and resource decision-making for accreditation.

Interpretation of the Findings

In Chapter 2, research was reviewed regarding U.S. accreditation and the evolution of standards, recent changes in the culture of accreditation, importance of accreditation, and the use of institutional effectiveness as an accreditation standard. In this section, I highlight how the findings of the exploratory case study support or do not support the previous research and theory. I organized the pertinent interpretations according to the sections in Chapter 2.

Accreditation and the Evolution of Standards

Eaton (2010) and Frawley (2014) both found that accreditation remains a largely constrained alliance for higher education institutions and its stakeholders. The negative perceptions held by all the participants at the college highlighted several concerns with the ACCJC and the accreditation standards. Foremost, the participants identified the frequency of sanctions placed by the ACCJC on the college over the past 7 years and their corresponding negative impact on the college's effectiveness. Patel (2012) noted a similar disconnect of perception of compliance by the ACCJC between the sanctions imposed that called for effective measures of outcomes and what was locally perceived to be effective measures of student learning at each California community college.

A range of frustration was evident from all the participants about the ACCJC and the punitive nature of the Commission toward the college. Most of the participants found the accreditation activities to be frustrating and stressful and the process tedious. Fawwaz (2008) and Moltz (2010) both noted the frustration that is prevalent between the Higher Education (HE) stakeholders and their accreditation agencies. When compared to Kemende and Hardjono's (2009) research on participants' experiences with mandatory accreditation, the results showed that an increase in the intensity of accreditation work resulted in an increase in institutional participants' workload, stress, and insecurity.

Jenkins (2011) found that community colleges often lack a well-coordinated effort to address the accreditation standards. A consensus existed among the participants about the lack of clarity in interpreting and applying the accreditation standards that has estranged the coordination between the college and the ACCJC. The participants saw their involvement in the accreditation work also strained by internal roadblocks to access information necessary for accreditation reports. Added to this obstacle was the college's functional model of survival that resulted in a high turn around of presidents and other administrative leaders and multiple sanctions by the ACCJC over the years.

Etzioni's (1961) compliance theory provided pertinent perspectives on the use of normative power, scope, and pervasiveness found at the college. While Etzioni's (1961) normative compliance existed at the college, participants viewed the role of the ACCJC to go beyond the normative power to one that employs coercive compliance. The general consensus among the participants about the ACCJC seems to reflect a dual compliance structure: coercive compliance and normative compliance. This perception was widely

represented in the negative perceptions held by the participants who found the ACCJC to be punitive in its actions and disconnected with the institution. Since the college did not have an effectiveness model until recently, the institutional stakeholders lacked a pattern of interrelations among the different aspects of the organization, which would make it most effective in maintaining compliance.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2015) recently published a report on accreditation and noted

Over the past several years, numerous system constituents have raised consistent concerns regarding various aspects of the accreditation process and the performance of the accrediting commission [ACCJC], especially in the areas related to transparency, collegiality, and consistency. This task force finds little evidence that the accrediting commission has the ability or willingness to address these concerns (pg. 9).

Most recently, the California community college's governing board, the Board of Governors, passed a resolution to replace the ACCJC with a different accrediting commission (The Sacramento Bee, 2016). As Bardo (2009) and Broom et al. (2013) noted, the evolving changes in accreditation continue to reinvent the HE institutions.

Frawley (2014), Hoffman (2013), and Mori (2009) identified a contention of power between the federal government and the accrediting agencies to mandate HE institutions to demonstrate institutional outcomes of effectiveness and quality improvement.

Participants noted such a contention of power by the ACCJC and found that the mandatory outcomes undermine the quality of student and institutional performance. The

discernible negative perceptions held by participants at the college are partly attributed to the complexity of accreditation in higher education. These perceptions explain the lack of congruence at the college between the interpretation and application of Standard IB and the published expectations of the ACCJC.

Recent Changes in the Culture of Accreditation

Just within the last decade, the role and scope of accreditation has undergone both disruptive and transformative changes in U.S. higher education. Etzioni (1961) hypothesized that most educational organizations demonstrate normative compliance structures. As theorized by Etzioni, the college represented a normative compliance structure. Normative power typically relies on the power patterns of normative control (leadership and rituals) of institutional participants who are highly committed to the institution. Etzioni's (1961) scope and pervasiveness are recognizable at the college. The scope and pervasiveness of the college have shifted from being narrow (mostly due to a high turnover of organizational leaders) to now being broad. The degree of scope of the college is evident from the intensity and commitment among the participants in college activities that signifies their increased involvement in the organization related to accreditation. Pervasiveness of the college is also broad because of the degree of involvement of all the institutional stakeholders in accreditation related activities.

Over the last decade, the ACCJC has faced a wide range of concerns from CCCs for moving away from a collegial peer review process to one that is inconsistent, non-transparent, and uncooperative (CCCCO, 2015). As the CCCCCO (2015) recommended,

the college should develop a channel for freely communicating its concerns to the ACCJC through the chancellor's office.

More recently, the CCCCO found the ACCJC to consistently fail to meet the ideal attributes of an accrediting agency (CCCCO, 2015). The ACCJC is also facing federal sanctions for being non-compliant with several standards with the Department of Education. As such, the leaders within the CCC system are considering replacing the ACCJC with another accrediting agency (The Chronicle, 2015). Despite the negative perceptions held by the participants towards the ACCJC and their difficulty in fully interpreting and applying the accreditation standards, all of the participants sought to find meaning and relevance in addressing the accreditation work. The institutional stakeholders would benefit from formulating benchmarks of best practices in effective accreditation processes.

Forsyth et al. (2011) and Sandmann et al. (2009) both found that building engagement in accreditation related activities is a challenge for most HE institutions. Given the difficult history of the college of high turn around of leadership and ongoing sanctions by the ACCJC, a sense of ownership was unmistakable among the participants. Several participants even provided concrete ways to make meaningful changes to the accreditation process at the college and to create relevance to their work. The participants suggested improving the coordination and communication between the college and the college district as one of the ways to build internal unity and structure for accreditation work. Sandmann et al. (2009) research findings showed a positive link between engagement practices and accreditation. The college is in a position to develop robust

practices to meaningfully address compliance but needs more engagement and dialogue among the internal stakeholders.

Participants in the focus group agreed that a change in the perception of how the college operates and addresses accreditation is needed. Brittingham (2008) stated that regional accreditors should allow institutions to develop novel models of effectiveness while safeguarding the institutional objectives. While better alignment and structures are needed at the college, it was evident that their prevailing work on accreditation has the potential to engage an increasing number of institutional stakeholders to advance their contemporary role in accreditation.

Importance of Accreditation

Head (2011) noted that aligning the different elements of an institution is pivotal in fully addressing the accreditation standards. A resounding agreement among the participants was that integration of data and processes is an important accreditation related activity for the college. The participants noted that integration not only helps identify the dimensions to be measured and assessed but also helps conceptualize the meaning or relevance of their work. This effort could be part of the college's strategic planning efforts, as it would provide the institutional stakeholders' a broader framework to measure institutional effectiveness. As Seymore (2011) noted, a strategic planning framework has the ability to help the institutional stakeholders to critically analyze their mission, purpose, and learning outcomes.

Oden (2009) noted that a focus on meaningfully addressing the accreditation standards while integrating different elements of an institution provides a realistic

opportunity for institutional stakeholders to learn about their institution's less obvious characteristics. While all the participants agreed that integrating the different aspects of the organization were important to gain a better sense of institutional compliance, some of the participants showed eagerness to look beyond mere compliance to developing newer ways to evaluate organizational effectiveness. As theorized by Etzioni (1961), the higher the scope and pervasiveness of organizations, the more effective would be their outcomes. As such, the scope and pervasiveness of the college is also closely associated with its compliance structure. Given the college's current focus on developing and measuring student learning outcomes, the participants emphasized the need for better communication about accreditation among different constituents as part of integrating data and processes.

Crow (2009) and Sandmann et al. (2009) both suggested that HE institutions should create linkages, coordinated activities, and engagement within an innovative and interpretive framework for accreditation work to be meaningful and fully integrated into the institutional processes. Part of the integration process identified by the participants at the college was to better align the outcomes for the students and the institution. Such an integrative model also has the potential to help institutional stakeholders to develop a novel model of organizational effectiveness through self-regulation.

Similar to Craig's (2010) experiences with accreditation at one university, all the participants agreed that the college's current leaders have been successful in making a gradual shift in perception among the institutional stakeholders regarding the accountability demands of accreditation and aligning the teaching and learning practices

at the college. These efforts speak to the commitment of institutional stakeholders and accreditation leaders at the college who seek to attentively learn, change, and improve organizational systems and processes in the wake of newer challenges in HE.

Use of Institutional Effectiveness as an Accreditation Standard

Etzioni (1961) identified scope and pervasiveness of the organizational environment to be closely related to an organization's compliance structure and its effectiveness. Setting the norms for the number of activities, both within and outside the organization is a fundamental criterion for any organization to become high in its scope and pervasiveness. The ACCJC has published and updated rubrics on institutional effectiveness as a way to guide CCCs to fully address the accreditation standards (ACCJC, 2013). However, the participants found no clarity in interpreting and applying Standard IB and found the typical communication between the college and the ACCJC to be poor. Grossman's (2014) research study focused on the degree of utilization of the ACCJC rubrics and their perceived impact. The results showed that further clarification is needed on the standards. While the interpretation and application of Standard IB was identified as having little to no clarity along with a slow process to measure the outcomes, the participants in this study showed clarity in the intended outcomes for the students and the college. Overall results indicated that the participants agreed that efficacy should be used as a baseline intended outcome for Standard IB and the other three standards to improve the outcomes for the students and the college. The participants also sought to better understand the efficacy of Standard IB for their work to be more meaningful or relevant and to integrate the standard with the other three standards. The

college's administration has taken the first steps to improving the general levels of trust among the people and has shared broadly the accreditation work and related activities.

The scope and the pervasiveness of the college are broad. In other words, the environment of the college has the ability to encompass accreditation related activities that involve all stakeholders. If such efforts are garnered towards a more collaborative approach, the institutional stakeholders have the potential to advance the current momentum to better identify and document the institution's performance, both for compliance and for self-improvement.

To summarize the interpretations of the findings, Etzioni's (1961) normative power existed at the college because of the high degree of scope and pervasiveness in embracing the institutional participants and articulating its social environment. The ACCJC appears to reflect a dual compliance structure: coercive compliance and normative compliance. All four themes were evident in the literature review. *Negative perceptions* of Standard IB were evident in the evolution of accreditation standards. The *relevance* of accreditation related activities and accreditation standards were identified as one of the most recent changes in the culture of the college. *Integration* of accreditation data and processes was identified as an importance threshold for the college in addressing the accreditation standards, unifying different elements of an organization into a whole. *Efficacy* was identified as a baseline intended outcome and purpose of institutional effectiveness as an accreditation standard. The theme of *negative perceptions* may be attributed to the evolution of the other three themes of *relevance*, *integration*, and *efficacy* for interpreting and applying Standard IB.

Limitations of the Study

A primary limitation of the study is the missing perceptions of the ACCJC staff and commissioners regarding their accreditation experiences. While the participants at the college had the opportunity to voice their experiences, this study did not include the experiences of the ACCJC staff and commissioners due to the highly charged nature of the relationships between the ACCJC and the CCCs. Another limitation of the study was that data were obtained from only one research site; I chose one community college in California out of 113 CCCs. The community college I chose was one of two colleges governed by a college district. While it would have been possible to choose both colleges for my research study, my focus on one community college allowed me to gain richer and deeper descriptions of the institutional participants' experiences regarding accreditation and to better understand the phenomenon under study.

Another possible limitation of this study was that the college had just started a new semester at the time of conducting interviews and focus group at the research site. Since the participants represented staff, faculty, and administrators, it is plausible that some of the participants were preoccupied with work during a typically busy time of a semester. It is therefore possible that some of the participants may not have been able to provide a holistic perception of their experiences regarding accreditation.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this exploratory case study, I have outlined four recommendations for future research.

Although Etzioni's theory of organizational compliance and organizational effectiveness was introduced in the 1960s, it has significance in its application in the existing social environment of HE. For this study, I relied on the types of power used in organizations and two constructs of organizational environment – scope and pervasiveness. Future research could include other variables of Etzioni's organizational environment such as cultural integration, cohesion, distribution of charisma, and other correlates of compliance.

The role of accreditation and its impact on the future of education continues to evolve. Future research should focus on the dynamic nature of accreditation that goes beyond the brick-and-mortar institutions to online and distance learning modalities of teaching and learning and their outcomes. Future research is needed in this area because of the growing presence of technology in education that will encompass a more global presence of different stakeholders and international benchmarks or standards for accreditation.

The various concepts and models of institutional effectiveness should be further researched to develop a better cohesion of its interpretation and application in HE institutions. Given the highly charged nature of the relationship between the ACCJC and the CCCs, it is imperative for HE institutions to identify more nuances of accreditation that may impede or advance the success of students and HE institutions.

Implication for Social Change

The contentious debate surrounding accreditation remains elevated in U.S. higher education. At the heart of this debate is the dilemma faced by many CCCs for not being

able to successfully interpret and apply the accreditation standards without receiving sanctions from the ACCJC. Standard IB is an overarching goal of the other three standards and has the potential to help CCCs develop congruence between the interpretation and application of the standard and be in full compliance. This case study could be used as a guide to address Standard IB and strategically plan for an institution's outcomes. In addition, this study could inform the institutional stakeholders of prevailing obstacles in fully addressing the accreditation standards. Given the scarcity of research in accreditation, this case study provides a rich understanding of one community college's perceptions regarding compliance and the application of Standard IB as defined by the ACCJC. Understanding the prevailing perceptions of compliance and the interpretation and application of Standard IB could prompt meaningful discussions in the college in fully addressing Standard IB and sustaining a compliance structure. As such, several suggestions made by the participants in this study could be used as innovative approaches to develop a model of effectiveness and other novel ways to keep the momentum in addressing accreditation for compliance. The themes of *negative perceptions*, *relevance*, *integration*, and *efficacy* drawn from this study may be applied to community colleges in general and other accrediting agencies in developing and sharing college feedback to the Commission. The rich descriptions of participants' perceptions of compliance provide an applicable understanding of how institutions can better align their accreditation work with their Commission's documented expectations.

Conclusion

The evolving nature of accreditation standards represents newer challenges for HE institutions. This case study focused on one California community college regarding the institutional stakeholders' perceptions of compliance. While the college's use of power typifies a normative compliance structure suggested by Etzioni (1961), the perceptions held by the institutional stakeholders brought to light several negative perceptions of compliance and the ACCJC. Added to this analysis is the organizational effectiveness of the college that was assessed based on Etzioni's (1961) organizational environment constructs of scope and pervasiveness. It appears that the scope and pervasiveness of the college are broad and have the potential to garner a meaningful momentum to fully address the accreditation standards. However, the prevailing climate afforded by the ACCJC and the negative perceptions held by the institutional participants present challenges to the college in fully interpreting and applying Standard IB.

The college is in a unique position to develop a positive momentum for maintaining accreditation and fully addressing the accreditation standards because its scope and pervasiveness are broad. The institutional stakeholders are deeply committed to the institution and student success and want their accreditation work to be relevant and meaningful. As such, it is important for the current leadership to encourage innovative approaches to addressing the accreditation standards and maintain compliance. Building on the social capital, an area the college is already positioned to tap into could create a culture of helpfulness, innovation, and sustained success that would further broaden the

scope and pervasiveness of the college, which would directly impact compliance. Given the college's history of high turnaround of presidents and other administrative leaders, such an approach would allow the college to sustain its momentum for compliance regardless of the key stakeholders' entry or exit locale. Building a sustainable structure that provides internal alignment of coordinated support as well as external collaboration with its accrediting commission and other colleges within the system would provide the college a greater momentum to build on the understanding and application of Standard IB as well as relevance, integration, and efficacy in its accreditation work.

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Appendix A: ACCJC Standard IB

**ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES
Western Association of Schools and Colleges****Accreditation Standards***(Adopted June 2014)***Standard I: Mission, Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness, and Integrity****Introduction**

The institution demonstrates strong commitment to a mission that emphasizes student learning and student achievement. Using analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, the institution continuously and systematically evaluates, plans, implements, and improves the quality of its educational programs and services. The institution demonstrates integrity in all policies, actions, and communication. The administration, faculty, staff, and governing board members act honestly, ethically, and fairly in the performance of their duties.

B. Assuring Academic Quality and Institutional Effectiveness**Academic Quality**

1. The institution demonstrates a sustained, substantive and collegial dialog about student outcomes, student equity, academic quality, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement of student learning and achievement.
2. The institution defines and assesses student learning outcomes for all instructional programs and student and learning support services. (ER 11)
3. The institution establishes institution-set standards for student achievement, appropriate to its mission, assesses how well it is achieving them in pursuit of continuous improvement, and publishes this information. (ER 11)

4. The institution uses assessment data and organizes its institutional processes to support student learning and student achievement.

Institutional Effectiveness

5. The institution assesses accomplishment of its mission through program review and evaluation of goals and objectives, student learning outcomes, and student achievement. Quantitative and qualitative data are disaggregated for analysis by program type and mode of delivery.
6. The institution disaggregates and analyzes learning outcomes and achievement for subpopulations of students. When the institution identifies performance gaps, it implements strategies, which may include allocation or reallocation of human, fiscal and other resources, to mitigate those gaps and evaluates the efficacy of those strategies.
7. The institution regularly evaluates its policies and practices across all areas of the institution, including instructional programs, student and learning support services, resource management, and governance processes to assure their effectiveness in supporting academic quality and accomplishment of mission.
8. The institution broadly communicates the results of all of its assessment and evaluation activities so that the institution has a shared understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and sets appropriate priorities.
9. The institution engages in continuous, broad based, systematic evaluation and planning. The institution integrates program review, planning, and resource allocation into a comprehensive process that leads to accomplishment of its mission and improvement of institutional effectiveness and academic quality. Institutional planning addresses short- and long-range needs for educational programs and services and for human, physical, technology, and financial resources. (ER 19)

Appendix B: Focus Group Guide

Focus Group Guide

Good morning! My name is Ruby Sodhi and I am doctoral student at Walden University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group today. As I mentioned before, I am interested in examining the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) at one community college and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. So, I am interested in hearing about your role and experiences with accreditation and the ACCJC.

To begin, I would like for each of you to introduce yourself and describe your role at [Insert College Name], and describe your role in implementing Standard IB.

Sample types of questions:

1. What has been your experience in dealing with accreditation activities at your organization since 2002? (probes asked as necessary for follow-up)
 - a. When were you involved in the accreditation activities?
 - b. Describe your role in the process.
 - c. Describe your unit/department's role.
 - d. Did the planning and decision making activities of your college change after the implementation of the 2002 Accreditation Standards? If so, how?
2. What is your understanding about ACCJC's 2002 Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness)?
3. How do you perceive compliance in accreditation?
4. Why do you participate in accreditation activities?
5. Describe what, if anything, the _____ (educational institution) / the administration/ department chairperson/ accreditation committee has done to gain your involvement in institutional effectiveness activities.
6. What do you perceive is the most critical part of the institutional effectiveness process for the college and what is the most critical part for you?
 - a. How do you perceive the current efforts with the new standards?
 - b. What do you perceive as most critical to improving the organization?

- c. How should department chairs, deans and the administration be involved with improving organizational effectiveness?
7. Describe any obstacles, big or small, that you faced during the accreditation process.
 - a. How did you approach them?
 - b. Are they still present, and if so, how are you dealing them?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Good morning! My name is Ruby Sodhi, and I am a student at Walden University pursuing my doctoral degree in higher education. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. During the interview, I will be asking you the following questions and would welcome additional information on the topic at the end of the interview. I will be tape-recording the interview today and transcribing the notes later. I would appreciate your participation in reviewing this document and providing me information that accurately reflects your thoughts and opinions during the interview today.

As I mentioned earlier, I am interested in examining the congruence between the understanding and application of ACCJC's 2002 Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) at one community college in California. [Insert CC name] has released information related to the [Insert initiative name]. As such, I am interested in hearing about your role and experiences with college accreditation and the ACCJC.

1. What has been your experience in dealing with accreditation activities at your organization since 2002? (probes asked as necessary for follow-up)
 - a. When were you involved in the accreditation activities?
 - b. Describe your role in the process.
 - c. Describe your unit/department's role.
 - d. Did the planning and decision making activities of your college change after the implementation of the 2002 Accreditation Standards? If so, how?

2. How might you describe the relationship between the college and the ACCJC?
 - a. From your perspective, what is the typical communication between the college and the ACCJC? Can you give me an example?
 - b. What amount and/or kind of information or feedback the college and the ACCJC exchange have you experienced? What do you think is typical?
 - c. How do you perceive the flexibility regarding the standards between the college administration and the ACCJC?
 - d. How do you perceive the general levels of trust among people towards each other?
 - e. Are there conflicts between the ACCJC and the campus regarding standards that stand out for you? Can you tell me about them? How do you perceive the conflicts and friction between the college and the ACCJC?
 - f. How do you perceive the organizational health of the college?

3. Can you describe your experiences planning and implementing the organizational effectiveness initiative?
 - a. What are the formal channels for sharing information on accreditation? What types of information are typically shared in this way?

- b. What were the informal information channels? What types of information are typically shared in this way?
 - c. How was it determined how information would be shared? For example, was priority information always shared through a certain channel?
4. Describe the number of organizational activities carried out jointly by institutional participants.
 - a. Describe the frequency of organizational activities carried out jointly by institutional participants.
5. Describe the number of organizational activities the organization seeks to control.
 - a. Describe the extent of organizational activities the organization seeks to control.
6. What do you perceive is the most critical part of the institutional effectiveness process for the college and what is the most critical part for you?
 - a. How do you perceive the current efforts with the new standards?
 - b. What do you perceive as most critical to improving the organization?
 - c. How should department chairs, deans and the administration be involved with improving organizational effectiveness?
7. Describe any other obstacles, big or small, that you faced during the accreditation process.
 - a. How did you approach them?
 - b. Are they still present, and if so, how are you dealing them?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix D: Invitation E-mail

Introductory E-mail/Letter for Interview and Focus Group

Greetings:

You are invited to take part in a research study about the accrediting processes and institutional effectiveness at one community college. This message has been forwarded to you by the campus administration to protect your privacy. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) at one community college and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance. A researcher named Ruby Sodhi, who is a doctoral candidate at Walden University, is conducting this study. A small number of current, full-time faculty, staff, and administrators who meet all of the following criteria are invited to participate in this study:

- Current full-time employee [*confidential college*]
- Must have at least 1 year of prior experience with ACCJC accreditation

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to

- Meet with the researcher for one session of 60 to 90 minutes for an individual interview. During the interview, your responses will be audio recorded.
- Meet with the researcher to confirm that the data collected in the interview process accurately conveys your experiences and the meanings you assign to them.

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you may choose to change your mind anytime during or after the study. You may stop at any time. There will be no payment for your participation in this study.

All information provided by you will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. The researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. You will be provided with an approved consent form for your signature before any information will be requested.

Please feel free to ask any questions about this study. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail at xxx@xxx.com or at 000-000-0000.

Best Regards,

Ruby Sodhi

Appendix E: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of [Insert initiative name]. The researcher is inviting individuals involved in [Insert initiative name] to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called informed consent, which allows you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

A researcher named Ruby Sodhi, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of a community college's institutional participants regarding the congruence between the understanding and application of Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness) at one community college and the ACCJC's published expectations for compliance.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to

- ___ Participate in a maximum 90-minute face-to-face interview.
- ___ Participate in a maximum 90-minute focus group.
- ___ Participate in a 30-minute review of interview notes.

Note: Not all participation is required - just an interview or focus group would be acceptable.

Here are the main questions:

1. What has been and is the interaction between the ACCJC and the member college as represented in ACCJC documents and as perceived by the college organizational staff and faculty who have been key players in the accreditation process?
2. How do key players in the community college perceive the impact of the ACCJC Standard IB recommendations that indicate institutional effectiveness?

The researcher may contact you after the interview for clarification on the information you provided. You will be allowed to review the typed transcript of your interview through e-mail or in person and to contribute any feedback you may have.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Walden University or [Insert school name] will treat

you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomfort that can be encountered in daily life, such as being uncomfortable with a question. Being in this study will not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

Discussions that take place during the study could help the faculty and staff of the teacher preparation program to determine if additional changes are required in the program structure.

Payment

There is no payment for participating in the study.

Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Audio recording will be used for the interviews and will be transcribed by the researcher only. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure on a password-protected computer and in a password-protected cloud account. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail at xxx@xxx.com

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information, and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this e-mail with the words "I consent," I am agreeing to participate.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix F: Observation Form

Date: _____ Time: _____ Length of activity: _____ minutes Site: _____ Participants: _____	
Question 1:	
<i>Descriptive Notes</i> [Physical setting: visual layout]	<i>Reflective Notes</i> [Reflective comments: questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, interpretations]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of participants • Description of activities • Interactions • Unplanned events • Participants' comments (expressed in quotes) 	[Reflective comments: questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, interpretations]

[The researcher's observation of what seems to be occurring]	
Subquestions	

Appendix G: Concept Map

ACCJC: Accreditation

One Community College

Perception of Compliance Standard IB (Institutional Effectiveness)

Over a 100 codes led to 10 categories: Accreditation, Standard IB, Perception, Interaction, Communication, Impact, Institutional effectiveness, Key players, ACCJC, & Compliance

Categories and related themes:

Accreditation	Compliance	Standard IB	Accreditation
Standard IB	Interaction	Impact	Standard IB
Interaction	Accreditation	Communication	Perception
Impact	Standard IB	Institutional Effectiveness	Interaction
ACCJC	Communication		Communication
Compliance	Key Players		Impact
Institutional Effectiveness	Institutional Effectiveness		ACCJC
			Compliance

Themes

Negative Perceptions	Relevance	Integration	Efficacy
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Sub-themes

Frustration	
No Clarity	
Disconnect	
Punitive	
Tedious Process	
Roadblocks	
Etzioni's Organizational Compliance	Etzioni's Organizational Environment

Appendix H: Level II Categories that Resulted from Preliminary Categories

Level II Categories	
Frustration	Institutional Effectiveness
No Clarity	Negative Image of ACCJC
Tedious Process	District Challenges
Student Success	Prioritizing
Meaningful	Vague
Disconnect	Self-Improvement
Alignment	Intense Process
Improvement	Pressure
Integration	Sense of Ownership
Punitive	Distrust of ACCJC
Balance	Cumbersome Process
Roadblocks	Accountability
Constant Change	Inconsistency
Communication	Continuous Improvement