Presidential leadership and strategic planning: A case study

by

Annette D. Hough

B.B.A., Davenport University, 1998
M.B.A., Davenport University, 2001

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2021

abstract

This study explored how a community college president used strategic planning concepts to advance an institution's completion agenda initiatives. The research method was a qualitative single case study design. Keller's (1983) academic strategy served as the conceptual framework to conduct the investigation. Four research questions guided the investigation: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons, internal or external, that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components? The study sought to identify institutional strategies and practices used to advance the completion agenda within the selected community college. Participants shared ways the college president communicated and incorporated stakeholders in the planning efforts. Eight significant emerging themes emerged from the analysis of data: values, leadership, external factors, internal factors, data, student focus, board of trustees, and competitive situation. According to the participants in the study, all eight of these factors contributed to the strategic planning strategies of the community college president's planning process. The results of the study revealed evidence of a participatory strategic planning effort where all stakeholders within the organization were engaged in the strategic planning process. The findings also suggested that the president's strategic planning approach engaged a comprehensive communication strategy with student-first priorities to establish institutional goals.

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Approved by:

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the community college leaders who came before me and the leaders who assisted me on this dissertation journey and encouraged and motivated me along this educational path.

Dr. Curtis Ivery, Chancellor of Wayne County Community College District, thank you for being a visionary leader who allowed me to be a part of the Motor City Detroit Michigan cohort in the Kansas State University Doctorate Educational Leadership program. I am forever grateful.

To my mother, Alice Simmons: who passed away in 2009, I acknowledge your loving spirit of never giving up when things are difficult, always having a teachable spirit being open to learning new and exciting things along the way.

To my husband, Terone Hough: thank you for supporting me through this dissertation journey. To my children: Dr. Candace Black-Cooper, Alicia Black, and Nicole Black. To my grandchildren: Taylor Holley, London Arnold, and Leah Arnold, I appreciate your understanding when I had to miss a few special family outings. I genuinely love you all.

To Dr. Christine McPhail, Dissertation Chair: thank you for your leadership, guidance, and scholarly knowledge. You have taught me lessons that I could not have anticipated learning along this dissertation journey. Thank you for your support and educational wisdom.

To Dr. Irving McPhail, may he rest in peace. I am forever grateful for his leadership approach to strategic planning. To the Kansas State University dissertation committee members: Dr. Be Stoney, Dr. Debbie Mercer, Dr. Jason Kovac, Dr. Steven Gonzales, and Dr. Jerry Johnson, thank you for the encouraging words and educational support. To Dr. John Roueche and Dr. Margaretta Mathis: thank you for your encouragement during the dissertation

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my late mother, Alice Simmons, and the late Dr. Irving Pressley McPhail. My mother, Alice Simmons, always said, "Believe you can do it, and you're halfway there." Dr. Irving McPhail once said, "This dissertation journey will be challenging, but challenging does not mean impossible." To Dr. Christine McPhail for her impeccable leadership skills and supportive words of wisdom who all ways said, "Let's get it done."

To Dr. Wanda Hudson for her many encouraging words of wisdom and her Information Technology (IT) expertise, she motivated and helped me during my dissertation journey. To Dr.

Monica Wiggins for her cohort saying, "Nothing to it; but to do it." To Dr. Carolyn Carter, "Mother Cohort," who always said, "Come on, Annette, you can do this." To Dr. Harvey Dorrah, thank you for your patience, persistence, and positive attitude. It has been such a privilege to work with you. I am forever thankful. To the Motor City Cohort: Nahla Baaqi, Dr. Karow Gordon, Clarence Madison, Tynisha McGee, Omobonike Odegbami, Yusuf Sabree, Willie Sampson, Dr. Carolyn Carter, Dr. Monica Wiggins, and Dr. Oneka Samet. A special thank you for all you have done and for what you continue to do. Words cannot express my gratitude for all the support and constructive teaching you all provided.

Most of all, I would like to dedicate this study to my loving husband, Terone Hough. He always said that with God, all things are possible. He has supported and been in my corner one hundred percent. I would like to say thank you to all that helped me get through this journey and to those who inspired me never to give up. Thank you all for your love, patience, inspiration, and for taking this journey with me.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Change is constant in higher education. In response to the constantly changing environment, many institutions look for measures to focus on organizational structures or to redistribute systems and services as changes arise. Leading an educational institution has become more multifaceted and complex, and presidents who lead such institutions need to be aware of strategic planning processes to help manage their institutions, particularly during turbulent conditions (McNair, 2010; McNair et al., 2011).

Educational policies and systems must undergo updates and possible adjustments to transform institutional practices during the strategic planning process (Keller, 1983; Rowley et al., 1997). The efficiency of these within-institution planning practices is critical, and strategic planning can be a framework to assist presidents in managing the direction of the institution with detailed, focused attention to goals and objectives (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013; Rowley et al. 1997). With insightful analysis and discussion, management can decide on a creative strategic plan for a viable future, modifying it as new conditions arise (Keller, 1983).

A strategic plan must not be confused with everyday tasks as part of a job responsibility. For example, while helping a student to enroll in college may be routine and essential, this task typically does not fall within the strategic planning process. Keller (1983) introduced an academic strategy as a system for transforming the management of colleges and universities. He suggested that this type of academic strategy underscored a management approach that combines education policy and planning, focusing on a planning approach for an institution's direction and pursuing specific objectives for action. Today, the phrase academic strategy is synonymous with strategic planning, and college presidents' leadership styles have become more managerial and strategic than administrative (Keller, 1983). Hence, a well-developed strategic planning process

is what college and university presidents and senior leadership teams can use to move forward and to focus on aligning their institutions with a changing environment. Strategic planning is the single most significant contribution to organizational decision-making (Nevarez & Wood, 2010).

Educational researchers have suggested that most higher education uncertainties are prompted by external factors, such as state boards of higher education guidelines, economic recessions, demographic changes, or state policies and mandates (Baldwin, 2017). Strategic planning is continuous and comprehensive, not something addressed at a one-time retreat (Keller, 1983). Paramount to monitoring the strategic direction of a college or university is the need for each institution to have an active champion of proper management and planning (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013; Rowley et al.,1997). Many contemporary community college and university presidents still use Keller's (1983) academic strategy tenets to set the direction for the institution and to make institutional decisions regarding strategic planning.

On July 14, 2009, the Obama Administration launched the National College Completion Agenda, a broad-based reform movement designed to improve student graduation rates (Obama, 2009; Obama & Biden, 2010). The completion agenda became the focus of higher education institutions, philanthropic foundations, and policymakers to identify, through research, those institutional characteristics, and systems that contribute to improving student outcomes (Lumina Foundation, 2014). Accordingly, an abundance of community college completion initiatives emerged. Although considerable funds to support completion initiatives were already in place from the philanthropic community, the completion agenda focus for many higher education institutions was effectively strengthened by the National College Completion Agenda.

Simultaneously, calls to action issued by top community college organizations— including the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the Association of

Community College Trustees, and the Center for Student Success and Engagement, to name a few—promoted the completion agenda (McPhail, 2011).

For purposes of this study, the researcher selected Keller's (1983) academic strategy concept as a way to explore a college's strategic planning process toward advancing a completion agenda initiative. Research shows that areas of individual student interventions at colleges can contribute to improving student graduation outcomes (Obama & Biden, 2010) which are key components of the completion agenda. For example, completion agenda initiatives that were designed to promote student success included leadership's commitment, interventions focused on student success, greater use of data to improve programs and services, streamlined pathways to credentials and careers, and integrated student support services (Baldwin, 2017; Kilgore & Wilson, 2017).

Hinton (2012) stated that the costs of engaging in a flawed strategic planning process range from uninformed faculty, staff, and students, to a lack of vital resources and failed accreditation reviews, which can lead to an institution's loss of funding and prestige (Hinton, 2012). On the other hand, a comprehensively designed and executed strategic planning process enhances collaboration among colleagues throughout the campus (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013; Rowley et al., 1997). This study explored how a community college president utilized strategic planning strategies to advance an institution's completion agenda.

Problem Statement

During the 20th century, the benchmark for measuring community college success focused primarily on student enrollment while attention to student outcomes was secondary (Bailey et al., 2010). Over time, community college presidents were expected to report outcome data to different constituent groups. These data reports included, but were not limited to, student courses completed, pass rates, and enrollment levels by semester (Phillips & Horowitz, 2013).

Accordingly, redirecting a community college's focus to student achievement and success became an uphill battle (Baldwin, 2017).

Strategic planning has been studied extensively in business, industry, and higher education; however, few studies have focused on how leaders link strategic planning processes with student success and completion initiatives at their institutions. The completion agenda initiative's focus was designed to improve student graduation attainment (Baldwin, 2017). Therefore, the intent of this study was to review how a community college president's planning approach facilitated strategic planning strategies to launch a completion agenda initiative.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how a community college president used strategic planning concepts and strategies to advance an institution's completion initiatives at a Michigan community college. In this study, strategic planning was framed within the context of Keller's (1983) academic strategy elements. The six elements of this framework are as follows: traditions, values, and aspirations; strengths and weaknesses: academic and financial; leadership abilities and priorities; environmental trends, including threats and opportunities; market

preferences, perceptions, and directions; and, the competitive situation, to include threats and opportunities.

Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this inquiry were: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

Conceptual Framework

Keller's (1983) academic strategy was the conceptual framework that guided this study. Keller analyzed how colleges and universities shifted to a new management style that incorporated ideas from internal (campus) and external factors. An integrated planning model links vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making, and action (Auer, 2016; Hinton, 2012). These planning models can help shape and guide leaders in their strategic planning practices.

A strategic plan can serve as a framework to assemble ideas for the benefit of an institution. Strategic planning models are generally logical approaches for refining an institution's mission and vision and clarifying the shared values that guide a community college (Cohen et al., 2014; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; McPhail & McPhail, 2006). According to the authors noted above, a common component of these plans has been an institution's mission. Keller's (1983) academic strategy looked at a new management style that encouraged more ideas through a process that involved both campus leaders and external stakeholders.

Almost 40 years ago, Keller (1983) introduced his framework as an academic management approach that combined education policy and planning to formalize a strategic direction for colleges and universities. The researcher selected Keller's framework to guide this investigation because it is still relevant today; research from strategic planning experts has supported the strategic planning process appropriate for colleges and universities that aligns with Keller's framework and principles from business and industry. Over the years, Keller's framework has helped higher education institutions develop strategic plans to support planning objectives for action now and in the future. Figure 1 shows the six elements of Keller's (1983) academic strategy. A more complete description of the value and contribution of each pillar follows.

Figure 1

Keller's Strategic Planning Design for Transforming the Management of Colleges and Universities

Note. Keller, 1983, p. 152.

Traditions, values, and aspirations – Until these components are examined in the strategic planning process and documented in the strategic plan, the underlying mix of information on traditions, values, and aspirations makes evaluation unclear and imprecise (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013; Rowley et al., 1997). Therefore, a vigorous discussion must occur regarding these factors. In community colleges, the most treasured tradition is student access. However, a shift in focus toward student success and completion agenda initiatives has significant implications, evidenced in terms of governmental expectations and subsidies, program offerings, staffing, student admissions, and interventions required to help students succeed (Baldwin, 2017).

Academic and financial strengths and weaknesses – This part of strategic planning involves a qualitative evaluation of each educational offering using a rating scale to determine academic growth fields and which programs to trim, enhance, or discard (Bailey et al., 2015; Barr & McClellan, 2011; Keller, 1983). A commitment to student success requires investment in more robust student support. Lack of funding and college revenue suggests that internal reallocation can obstruct sustainable funding to meet this need (Baldwin, 2017; D'Amico et al., 2014; Massy, 2013; Rowley et al., 1997). The costs of higher education, combined with a greater demand for quality education, triggered a call to action among many state legislatures to place standards on academic programs and to incentivize public funding for higher education (Massy, 2013).

The leader's abilities and priorities to lead – The expertise, aptitude, and competence of the president's leadership style are essential characteristics for an institution's planning effectiveness. While trustees give final approval of the strategic plan, the planning initiative is led by the president. The plan's implementation is executed by other leaders – the provost, vice

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president of finance, deans, among others. Consequently, an institution's future cannot be left to chance and must plan to full measure. There must be a particular process for a leader who makes critical decisions on campus while keeping in mind that a college's well-being remains the foremost priority (Keller, 1983). The crucial factor for establishing campus-wide acceptance of the process is leadership. The institutional president plays a prominent role and provides campus wide legitimacy, importance, and urgency to the process (Rowley et al., 1997). This public role is critical for keeping the issue at the forefront and, as a significant college-wide problem, can be done best by a person in this position. This study examined the president's role in the development and implementation of an academic strategy.

Environmental trends: threats and opportunities – Institutional leadership must forecast the major trends and issues that may affect an organization as far out as possible by analyzing available, pertinent data and correlating it to program and service offerings to achieve the strategic plan's goals. A continuous forecasting model that evaluates the institution's strengths and weaknesses measured against external factors can aid to keep the organization relevant to students and stakeholders (Humphrey, 2005; Mintzberg, 2013). The environmental scans most significant for making strategic decisions include: (a) technological; (b) economic; (c) demographic; (d) politico-legal; and, (e) sociocultural (Keller, 1983).

Market preferences, perceptions, and directions – No institution can be all things to all prospective clientele. Hence, it is essential to discover a marketing niche – who the college serves and how it might serve better. Identifying the customer and market in the strategic plan will help to focus the institution and to refine the quality and scope of its programs and services, thereby establishing an attractive advantage to defend its role, value, and reputation to outsiders (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013).

Competitive situation: threats and opportunities – Central to devising an academic strategy or strategic plan is knowing where the institution stands compared to the competition and deciding what competitive position leadership strives to establish. Keller (1983) advised positioning the college based on one of three strategies: (a) overall cost, in which an organization provides excellent quality at a lower cost than competitors; (b) differentiation, in which an organization provides unique products or services; and, (c) focus, in which the organization delivers a specific product or service (Keller, 1983).

Aligning a strategic plan with the changing internal and external factors during the planning process may entail certain compromises when building on an organization's future. Keller (1983) noted that presidents point the way toward deciding an institution's academic future, one that is rationally grounded in the internal and external factors of planning realities, yet, dedicated to campus principals. A final strategic plan unavoidably involves compromises because of the involvement of specific key people or conditions, but compromise may not be reached based on power plays alone. A president needs to make frequent adjustments as internal and external conditions change by setting objectives and holding people accountable to the strategic plan (Keller, 1983).

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study may be used by practitioners to understand the complex issues surrounding a community college president's comprehensive strategic planning effort. For example, practitioners may use the study's findings to bridge the gaps between practice and policy or to link planning efforts to the institution's completion initiatives. Community college leaders may also use this study's findings as a framework to better understand how to engage stakeholders in the strategic planning process.

Assumptions

Three assumptions guided this study: the responses from participants interviewed for this study accurately reflected their professional opinions; participants answered the interview questions honestly and candidly, and participants had a sincere interest in participating in the research and had no motives otherwise.

Delimitations

The study focused on only one institution in the state of Michigan. As such, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other community college presidents' strategic planning practices. Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated that the research scope narrows a study by focusing on specific variables or a central phenomenon surrounded by specific participants or sites or narrowed to one type of research design.

Limitation

In conducting this qualitative case study, the researcher adhered to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 restrictions which included the community college participating in the study, which prevented the researcher from conducting face-to-face interviews with the study's 14 participants. The pandemic outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, China, and spread throughout the world, including the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). This impacted how the researcher collected the data for this study.

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Definitions of Key Terms

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The following terms are necessary to understand the research questions.

Academic strategy: An academic strategy approach that combines educational policy with planning to transform the management of colleges and universities (Keller, 1983).

Academic strategy is synonymous with strategic planning to chart an institution's role and objectives for action.

Community college, multicampus: A post-secondary institution located in a city whose branch campuses are found throughout the city or within the college's service district (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2019-2020).

Completion agenda: A broad-based reform movement designed to improve student college completion rates while preparing students to meet labor market demands (Humphreys, 2012).

Guided pathways model: An integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences informed by available evidence that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her or his point of entry through to the attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market (AACC, 2014; Bailey, 2017; Baldwin, 2017; Guided Pathways Resource Center, Tools & Resources for Colleges, 2019; Jenkins et al., 2017).

Institutional Effectiveness: The college's result is reaching or exceeding its measurable goals and objectives as defined and informed by its mission, vision, and external legal and accreditation expectations (Gellman-Danley & Martin, 2019).

Integrated strategic planning: A strategic planning approach that links vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a formal system for communicating organizational decisions, actions, and evaluations (Hinton, 2012; Mintzberg, 2013).

Strategy Planning Process: A method for describing how an institution will use available resources to achieve its goals while keeping pace with changing conditions (Keller, 1983).

Chapter Summary

This chapter opened with the background of the study and an introduction that mentioned strategic planning strategies for managing and transforming colleges and universities. The research problem was identified, and the rationale for how a president's planning strategy directs a community college was stated. An introduction to the issues and problems was followed by the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and definitions of key terms.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature focused on community college leadership and strategic planning. The literature review covers six major headings: (a) overview of academic strategy; (b) overview of strategic planning; (c) components of the strategic plan; (d) strategic planning barriers in community colleges; (e) strategic plan, leading, implementing and operations; (f) overview of the completion agenda; and (g) literature review analysis.

Chapter Three describes the study's research methodology, including the background into the problem, the study's purpose, the research questions used, the research design and a rationale for the design, research ethics, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Chapter Four presents the research findings. The chapter begins with an overview of the study's research questions and purpose, then presents participant interview findings by research questions, results of findings from the documents reviewed, a presentation of findings by the conceptual framework of Keller's (1983) academic strategy, emerging key themes and subthemes, a summary of emergent key themes, and a chapter summary

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings after an overview of the study's research questions, a review of the purpose of the study and how and why it was conducted, and

a discussion as to how findings were confirmed. The study's findings were compared to the

literature review from Chapter Two and a discussion of recommendations for further research.

The chapter closes with a discussion of the conclusions, summary, and the researcher's

reflections.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The literature review was organized around six major topics: (a) overview of academic strategy; (b) overview of strategic planning; (c) components of the strategic plan; (d) strategic planning barriers in community colleges; (e) strategic plan, leading, implementing and operations; (f) overview of the completion agenda; and the literature review analysis.

The literature was obtained from scholarly sources published between 1983 and 2020, included journals, books and e-books, professional publications, and dissertations mainly found in the Kansas State University Online Library (Figure 2). Keyword searches narrowed the research to capture needed information to add knowledge of best practices from experts in higher education. For example, a SAGE Full-Text Collection search included the following keywords: *academic strategy; administration; leaders; completion agenda; guided pathways; integrated; institutional effectiveness; on-time graduation; strategic planning;* and, *community college multicampus*. These terms provided a range of theoretical and research case-study information from which the researcher selected the most relevant research topics. Strategic planning practices focused on the operational development and implementation of planning process approaches. Figure 2 shows the various sources used to conduct the literature review.

Figure 2

Resources Used in the Literature Review

Overview of Academic Strategy

Keller (1983) observed that better management and an enhanced strategic planning model were essential to strengthening higher education management's focus on leadership practices. In this study, the researcher argues that Keller's traditional academic strategy can be used as a model to guide a community college president's strategic planning process to include starter initiatives such as the completion agenda. According to Keller, an educational strategy focuses on an organization's internal and external environment when examining its planning process to analyze making corrective-preventive action for a better future (Keller, 1983; Rowley et al., 1997). The phrase academic strategy is viewed as synonymous with strategic planning, a complex and continuous planning model for leading an institution (Keller, 1983). The strategic planning processes are the heart of the groundwork designed to help an institution advance its

strategic planning practices (Hunger & Wheelen, 2010). Thus, an academic strategy helps to focus on educational systems for crafting an institution's goals. The top-down approach for preparing a strategic plan has become an obsolete method, replaced with inclusion as the new norm for eliminating barriers and including stakeholders in planning outcomes (Keller, 1983). Throughout the organization, stakeholder commitment incorporates ownership during the strategic planning process (Mintzberg, 2013). Mintzberg noted that such involvement is essential to successful strategic planning efforts.

Historically, strategic planning helped leaders to identify an organization's strengths and weaknesses (Humphrey, 2005). Strategic planning generally is a logical approach to refining an institution's mission and vision and to clarifying the traditions, values, and aspirations as a guide for community college leaders (McPhail & McPhail, 2006). Strategic planning focuses on two critical areas of an organization's environment – internal and external factors. These vital components allow these strategies to formulate a flow to address the institution's critical needs (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013). Strategic planning requires a focus on environmental trends, threats, and opportunities to stay ahead of the competition and to respond to threats that might negatively impact the organization and, conversely, to opportunities that might benefit the institution. This strategy allowed for quick response time when handling threats or opportunities before competitors. Images and perceptions can make or break an organization (Bryson, 2018). Therefore, staying ahead of the external threats within the market could impact a leader's ability to lead an organization and to avoid negative external environmental perceptions.

Overview of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning models can be vital contributors to the planning process. The literature states that the phrase *strategic planning* is about shaping an organization's future (Mintzberg, 2013). The literature also suggests community college presidents involve stakeholders in their planning process to create a shared vision and to take ownership of college initiatives (McCaffery, 2004; Roueche et al., 1989). Overall, previous research supports the argument that the strategic planning process entails creating a shared vision among the organization's stakeholders concentrating on continuous planning strategies associated with getting people on board to create a planning environment to advance the organization (Bryson, 2018). Smith (2013) noted that strategic planning processes that respond to internal and external factors should align with the organization's resources.

Strategic planning models can be used to inform the community college president's approaches to formulate planning objectives for launching planning goals (Dooris, 2002-2003; McCaffery, 2004; Mintzberg, 2013). The literature emphasizes strategic planning models as an approach to add depth and insight to the strategic planning process, serve as the blueprint for making the strategic planning components fit together, and include essential stakeholders to keep the strategic planning process moving and on track (McCaffery, 2004; Mintzberg, 2013).

An examination of the literature on strategic planning revealed a broad range of models to guide the strategic planning process, including the AACC's Guided Pathway Model; Porter's Model; Kotter's Eight-Steps Change Model; SWOT Analysis Model; Burgelman and Grove's Strategy Model; and Hinton's Integrated Model (Bailey, 2017; Burgelman & Grove, 2012; Hinton, 2012; Jenkins & Cho, 2012; Kotter, 2012). These strategic planning models can be

essential tools to help community college presidents design and support their planning strategies and may also provide useful information to promote stakeholder engagement in strategic planning processes.

For example, the Guided Pathways Model is an integrated planning approach that can be used to support an organization's student success initiatives. Accordingly, researchers observed that planning models can be used to build coherently structured internal academic planning practices to guide each student effectively and efficiently through degree or credential attainment (Bailey, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2017).

Porter's (1985) model aligns with Keller's (1983) academic strategy when addressing external factors in the decision-making process to guide planning concepts of strategies that formalize the planning stages. According to Magretta (2011), Porter's model refers to the analysis of an organization's environment and the external factors of the industry. Porter's model suggested that any alignment with competitive forces can help to shape or streamline the planning process to solve contemporary organizational problems (Magretta, 2011). The fourth element of Keller's model (1983)—*Environmental trends: threats and opportunities*—describes environmental trends, threats, and opportunities that are relevant for higher education. As with Keller (1983) and Mintzberg (2013) noted that planning strategy is necessary to align the institution's goals with organizational goals, identifying required outcomes within the organization to overcome issues within the planning process (Keller, 1983; Magretta, 2011; Mintzberg, 2013).

Previous researchers observed that educational practitioners apply the business model of strategic planning to align with their institution's planning focus (Bryson, 2018; McCaffery,

2004; Rowley et al., 1997). Keller (1983) outlined how college and university leadership shift to a new management style that incorporates internal campus ideas and considers external factors within the strategic planning process. In terms of a unique management style, Keller (1983) argued that the planning process of incorporating a management approach is like putting "wine in old academic bottles" (p. 40). Keller suggested that external factors that impact an organization, such as financial deficits, cutbacks, and enrollment declines, required a new, changing management approach for college presidents. Therefore, the planning approach must be well thought out during the strategic planning process.

Many higher education institutions have used Kotter's (2012) eight-step change model as an approach to engaging stakeholders in transformational change. Kotter's eight-step change model noted cultural behavior and is known for its revolutionary way of thinking of change through cultural lenses, focusing on the values and beliefs of an organization's stakeholders. Kotter's eight-step change process targets stakeholders and encourages collaboration among leaders to promote an environment of excellence during the strategic planning process. Kotter also observed that making modifications to an institution's environment requires a thinking process that focuses on addressing barriers in a work environment. Kotter's change model involves creating a climate of change with a sense of urgency, establishing a guiding coalition, and developing a vision and strategy within an organization. Kotter's work is aligned with Hinton's (2012) integrative approach to planning, which was designed to engage and enable an organization's shared-vision approach by communicating the vision and empowering stakeholder actions within the strategic planning process.

Humphrey (2005) defined the SWOT analysis model—SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—to examine an organization's strategic planning techniques to identify internal and external factors to solve contemporary issues (Humphrey, 2005). Keller's (1983) academic strategy supports the SWOT analysis model to examine environmental trends, threats, and opportunities within an organization in his conceptual planning framework. Humphrey suggested the SWOT model emphasized assessing an organization's current position before introducing any new strategy. Humphrey explained the SWOT model is designed to guide leaders in evaluating and eliminating factors that could negatively impact an organization's upward movement (Humphrey, 2005). Burgelman and Grove's (2012) strategy model concurs with both Keller's (1983) and Humphrey's (2005) as the SWOT model relies on environmental scans to incorporate in the strategic planning process.

The strategy planning model of Burgelman and Grove (2012) also emphasizes consideration of external factors that may impact an organization during the strategic planning process. As with Keller's (1983) academic strategy model's focus on planning, Burgelman and Grove's model suggested a leader needs both to be aware of and to understand these external factors. An organization needs to focus on its customers, products, and industry requirements during the planning process and consider both external and internal factors in an integrated planning process. An integrated strategic plan is a clear path for organizational leaders to develop a shared vision in their planning efforts to facilitate the process of directing, leading, and guiding an institution into a well-organized unit (Auer, 2016; Hinton, 2012). These strategic planning models can help align and shape the focus of an institution's mission and vision and

adopt a shared vision approach to formalize planning practices (Boggs, 2003; Boggs & McPhail, 2016).

Components of a Strategic Plan

Strategic planning components focus on both internal and external factors – an organization's competition, external threats, and internal practices (Keller, 1983). The literature suggests components of a strategic plan within a community college include, but are not limited to: human resources; facilities; equipment; technology; curriculum and instruction; budgeting priorities; student services; and, student data to measure goals and objectives (Allison, 1997; Allison & Kaye, 2015; AACC, 2014; Bailey et al., 2015; Barr & McClellan, 2011). Therefore, components of a strategic plan need to establish where an organization wants to be in its mission and vision, values and guiding principles, significant goals, and objectives essential to the alignment of the strategic planning process (Bryson, 2018).

Mintzberg (2013) and Hinton (2012) noted that critical components within a strategic plan should include an integrated planning model. This strategic planning type is called the integrated strategic planning process (Hinton, 2012). Hinton suggested that using an integrated planning model can link vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible evaluation, decision-making, and action system. Supported by Auer (2016), these best-practice models indicate that planning strategy models can shape and guide an organization's planning focus, vision, and direction as it evolves to address institutional issues. To move to an integrated strategic planning process, college presidents may adopt a leadership style that encourages inclusion in an ever-changing environment. An integrated strategic planning process

encompasses decisions gathered from a shared pool of information (Auer, 2016; Hinton, 2012; Keller,1983).

An integrated strategic planning process can transform a colleges' academic strategy while helping to prepare community college presidents to face emerging challenges (Keller, 1983). For example, community college presidents can move an organization forward by addressing organizational barriers and creating a well-designed, integrated strategic plan that incorporates both accountability and organizational assessment (Hinton, 2012; Riel & Martin, 2017). Another part of the integrated planning process includes a shared-vision approach to the planning process. The integrated strategic planning process can help to ensure the alignment of people and the physical structure to address the college's planning structure (Auer, 2016; Hinton, 2012). Integrated strategic planning is key to overcoming challenges community colleges face during budget cutbacks and staff reductions, the uncertainty the arises from low enrollment, lack of resources, institutional silos, and managing institutional policy. According to Auer (2016), most college strategic plans do not include terms about the discontinuation of programs, such as *cease*, *sunset*, *end*, *quit*, *eliminate*, and *suspend outdated programs and certificates*.

Strategic Planning Barriers Within Community College

Organizational silos can be problematic if not addressed (Biggs, 2015). Hinton (2012) and Biggs (2015) viewed silos as barriers that impede an organization's progress. Biggs noted that institutional silos include the lack of shared knowledge, missed opportunities, delays in getting work done, duplication of efforts that waste time and can be costly, the decision having a contrary impact across the organization, and difficulty changing with the leader's direction. According to Massy (2013), community college leaders continued to watch their internal

planning process costs rise and struggled to manage their operational costs to deliver quality

education. These barriers could lead to communication breakdown within the organization. As a

result, organizational silos can negatively impact an organization when not handled timely

(Biggs, 2015). The literature reveals that a collective, integrated strategic planning process as a

framework would help reduce silos also uncover data stored in decentralized locations

throughout campus to aid in the planning focus (Biggs, 2015; Hinton, 2012; Sever, 2003).

Hinton (2012) observed that a shared vision is critical when integrating a system to

support a strategic planning strategy. She also explained that showing the integration between

planning and budgeting is essential to the planning process.

Conversely, the silo effect can stop the flow of strategic planning efforts in the

institution. Biggs (2015) suggested that silos are invisible barriers that can destroy an

organization's teams during the planning process. According to Biggs (2015), silos result in

chaos, toxicity, systemic failure, and dissension among team members. In response to this silo

approach, it suggests leaders adopted a shared-thinking planning approach, sharing goals to

achieve desired outcomes within the organization. Biggs (2015) further noted that established

goals created opportunities for leaders to eliminate silos within the organization, prepare, better

equip, and respond more readily to critical uncertainties. This less reactive approach safeguarded

and promoted successful leadership.

However, Biggs (2015) argued that departments leaders unintentionally develop silos by

withholding information from the broader organization. The withholding of such information can

impede meaningful conversations during department meetings, and, as a result, impede an

organization from reaching its goals. Mintzberg (2013) criticized this type of silo planning

process as the pitfall of planning when setting goals that eliminate an open planning process or a non-shared-vision approach. Accordingly, Hinton (2012) acknowledged that the silo effect contributes to a failed system and can plague unaddressed plans during the strategic planning process. Hinton (2012) supported Biggs' (2015) viewpoint that working in silos hinders the development of a shared vision impacting integration planning efforts. Porter and Kramer (2011) concur that colleagues' shortsightedness to an organization's values can also prevent implementing the organization's comprehensive strategic plan (Biggs, 2015; Hinton, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The planning process should provide a forum for institution-wide discussions to prioritize resource allocation for the benefit of all stakeholders (Auer, 2016; Keller, 1983). In institutions where planning is not integrated, Hinton (2012) suggested that operational planning usually means that divisions and departments develop their visions to incorporate working in a silo environment. Hinton noted that working in a silo organizational environment poses barriers associated with integrated strategic planning bringing about deficiency in internal communications.

Community college presidents have the challenge of aligning financial resources to improve systems that support student academic progress. The literature presented the need to integrate economic and budgetary considerations into the institutional planning process, guided by a shared planning approach (Auer, 2016; Haas, 2015; Massy, 2013). The lack of resources in non-essential areas and the redistribution of these funds to strategic planning help invest in the organization's preparedness to further their execution of strategic planning. This decision

communicates across the entire college and encourages employees to take full ownership of the strategic planning objectives (Bryson, 2018).

Strategic Planning Leadership, Implementation, and Operations

Leading and implementing the strategic planning process involves the execution of many tasks and engaging stakeholders within the organization to plan, implement, and operationalize the construction of the strategic plan (Bryson, 2018; Mintzberg, 2013). The literature shows a leader might recommend 30 to 40 well-known, well-respected individuals to represent college stakeholders, a diverse group to participate in planning councils or steering groups (Fusch, 2010, cited in Auer, 2016). With stakeholder involvement, the organization benefits from the inclusion of equitable opportunities and group involvement to incorporate a range of experiences during the strategic planning development process (Auer, 2016). The integration of strategic planning is critical to ensure the process functions operationally (Auer, 2016; Hinton, 2012).

Bryson (2018) stated that operational planning takes place at the departmental level. This planning method allows departmental staff to allocate resources that support their activities and to ensure an appropriate distribution process. Tactical planning is a part of the policy and procedure levels for effective management, budgeting, and assessment. The operational definition of planning includes formalized procedures and the existence of articulated results following an integrated system of decisions.

The leadership and the strategic planning process should align within the customized fit of a college's unique environment to inform a cohesive alignment with its culture and practices. This leadership and the strategic planning process align Mintzberg's (2013) philosophy with Keller's (1983) and Hinton's (2012) integrated planning methodologies: a strategy-making

process that is informed, integrative, and responsive to planning practices in an organization's environment that should promote a strategy that encompasses the following questions during the planning process:

- Is strategy-making merely a process of planning?

- Should strategy always be planned, never expected, or sometimes planned?

- Should strategy relate to planning in some other way?

Mintzberg (2013) spent considerable time explaining what planning is and why it occurs, and in identifying planners who occupy roles other than a chief executive officer. The planner serves in a specialized department with little responsibility for line operations. The chief executive officer's position is to coordinate the planning processes, develop the strategic plan, and move it forward. Accordingly, planning staff serve a supporting role to line managers and are responsible for keeping the planning approach functioning.

Mintzberg's (2013) strategy formation used the concept of schools to define how strategic planning may be operationalized. These schools were: (a) design school; (b) planning school; (c) positioning school; (d) cognitive school; (e) entrepreneurial school; (f) learning school; (g) political school; (h) cultural school; (i) environmental school; and, (j) configurational school. For illustration, the planning school allowed for the chief executive officer's participation in sharing his or her thinking in a formal setting, which moved the design school's conceptual ideas to a formal process. The positioning school focused on modifying content to fit the information into actual strategy communication across the organization. The cognitive school viewed the formation of strategy from the human sense by understanding the organizational leader's

mindset. The entrepreneurial school depicted strategy-making as the creative process of a strong leader.

Finally, the learning school found that strategies emerge in a shared-learning process. Mintzberg's (2013) strategy formation model teaches leaders how to address issues and to obtain order within the organization during the planning process. Mintzberg's (2013) planning model identified how to enlist unwilling planners in resolving the organization's fundamental issues. These planning models were the technical design school model strategies formed by the planner's efforts to convene preparation gatherings. Such planning gatherings are formed by community college leaders in their planning meetings, usually called brainstorming sessions or strategic planning meetings.

According to Bryson (2018), strategic plans must be tailored to fit the situation. Bryson explained that viable strategies and plans need to be politically considerable, technically and administratively workable, and legally and ethically justifiable – the same characteristics described in Mintzberg's (2013) planning school model. According to Humphrey, (2005), these characteristics also help to identify the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Humphrey (2005) explained that leaders could examine the *strengths* and *weaknesses* (SW) of the internal organization and compare them to the external *opportunities* and *threats* (OT) by evaluating an organization's operation.

The environmental and configuration schools helped to shape strategic planning to align internal and external forces within the organization planning process (Mintzberg, 2013). Mintzberg argued that technical and operational strategies formalized a way for an organization to communicate within itself. He also cautioned that within the context of planning, the planner

might experience conflict and exploitation of power in the process. Based on an analysis of the functions of Mintzberg's different schools, it is likely the political school was placed to manage the competition. Additionally, the political school impacted the collective, cooperative dimension of the strategy process or the cultural school.

In comparison with the entrepreneurial school, most American corporations used a planning style Mintzberg (2013) called the planning-programming-budget system. This system leads budgeting and resources to adapt future planning to determine principles and standards and embraces a planning model for resource allocation and distribution that communicates its vision, beliefs, and values throughout the institution. Community college presidents have the challenge of aligning financial resources to improve systems that help to support student academic progress (Barr & McClellan, 2011).

Simultaneously, state and federal governments began tying higher education funding and regulatory oversight to accountability measures (Ewell, 2011). Most post-secondary institutions compete for extremely limited resources to support their student population's needs (Auer, 2016; Baldwin, 2017). A strategic plan in alignment with financial resources can help to allocate and apply educational support services and programs (Barr & McClellan, 2011; Massy, 2013). When communicated across the entire college, this decision can encourage leaders to take full ownership of strategic planning objectives. According to Baldwin (2017), aligning funds to student support services can help to improve institutional practices to further student success.

Overview of the Completion Agenda

The completion agenda received national attention during President Obama's administration when he challenged higher education institutions to produce an additional five

million graduates by 2020 (Kilgore & Wilson, 2017; Obama, 2009; Obama & Biden, 2010). In 2019, approximately 39 million students graduated with a college degree in the United States. Among the degrees conferred, 989,000 were associate's degrees. Yet, despite the number of higher education institutions that launched completion initiatives during the Obama era, community college graduation rates continued to lag (IPEDS, 2012-2020). In response, accreditation oversight of community colleges outcomes increased, and any validation of what was working concerning the assessment of student learning outcomes had not propelled completion rates (Baldwin, 2017; Humphreys, 2012).

Baldwin (2017) focused on the challenges community college leaders face to improve their institution's completion agenda. Community college traditions help to support student access, and today, these traditions help to simplify the completion agenda focus on student success. McPhail's (2011) article, *The Completion Agenda: A Call to Action*, suggested strategic changes in institutional policies and practices. The procedures and best-practice strategies from McPhail's article called attention to community college completion initiatives. McPhail's work demonstrated how completion initiatives emerged as a primary focus of higher education student success advancement.

In the following years, community college reforms suggested guided pathways to student success models (Bailey, 2017). According to Bailey (2017), the guided pathways model is an overarching framework for institutional transformation. The guided pathways approach draws on the experience of the completion initiative design and is embraced by many community colleges as the required intervention for student success. The guided pathways model emphasizes restructuring the student services to include individualized plans for all students to help them

navigate course registration, completion, and on-time graduation. The guided pathways model is a structural way to ensure that students of all abilities have access to structured services to navigate an overwhelming assessment and admissions system, select courses, attend classes, utilize support services, and earn a college credential. The guided pathways model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success, and its components include structural improvements that impact the urgency of improving the overall student-focused college environment, including:

- Measuring attendance

- Equipping classrooms with up-to-date teacher stations and smartboards

- Increasing the ratio of tutors to student enrollment, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math courses

- Limiting the use of outdated instructional materials in courses

- Approving professional development for staff and faculty

- Enhancing management and union relationships

- Ensuring all administrators, staff, and faculty understand student support services

Today, the completion agenda continues to be an essential initiative in community colleges across the country (Baldwin, 2017; Kilgore & Wilson, 2017). Through a guided pathways model, students have a better chance to progress toward program completion (Bailey, 2017; Baldwin, 2017; Wyner, 2014). The coherent structure of the components of a guided pathways model is required in the institutional support system for all community college

stakeholders to provide an effective retention and graduation intervention system to help all students succeed (Bailey, 2017; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). As community college leaders work to improve their institutional support systems, research shows that successful planning encourages leaders to utilize strategic planning processes to close gaps in practices that impact students' goal-setting process, learning experiences, and technological advancements (Bailey, 2017; Baldwin, 2017).

These methods can help produce data to close community college gaps within the planning process through strategies that bridge a college's value and mission. The literature shows that to help close these gaps, these factors ultimately influence and advance a college's institutional practices, and many community colleges continue to respond to the call-to-action for improved completion rates that support student success (Bailey, 2017; Kilgore & Wilson, 2017). For example, community colleges may improve student career readiness by applying a stackable credential model for completed diplomas, degrees, credit, and non-credit courses, and certificate programs (Ganzglass, 2014; Hirsh, 2018; Humphreys, 2012; Kelly & Schneider, 2012). Stackable credentials improve student success, help students to achieve better course completion rates through course rubrics that emphasize communication and analytical skills, strengthen economic mobility for career-ready students, and enrich collegiate academic and career program standards (Ganzglass, 2014).

According to Ganzglass, when implementing an effective student improvement plan, stackable credentialing must support educational and career programs by removing institutional silos and cultivating student success initiatives. The literature noted that this approach intends to graduate more students and eliminate the cafeteria model known as the status quo, allowing

students to choose from an abundance of disconnected courses, programs, and support services. Students often have difficulty navigating these choices and make poor decisions about which plan to enter, what classes to take, and when to seek help, which leads many students to drop out of college altogether (Bailey et al., 2015). Baldwin (2017) recommended supportive institutional practices to address community college advancement of the completion agenda. To illustrate this point about advancing the completion agenda, Bailey et al. (2015) argued that, in some cases, the student intake process was outdated and confusing. The confusion was associated with students and staff being unsure about who handled student intake or the admission process, which conflicted with the college practice of degree attainment. Duplication of efforts confused advisors and admission staff, leading some students to enroll late or not at all (Bailey, 2017). A second outdated process was course scheduling, which required attention from the college president and cabinet leaders as a vital component in college planning goals.

Humphreys (2012) focused on course scheduling processes and suggested an outdated scheduling process can contribute to the randomness of times when students can or cannot take courses and, by extension, make or break a student's chance to graduate in a reasonable timeframe. Other issues in the scheduling process included course sequencing that failed to align with language in the official course catalog and conflicts with programs offered in printed class schedule booklets.

While these mechanical processes were not part of the strategic plan, restructuring was necessary to update policies that impact procedures in multiple areas, including technology, academic departments, and college-wide communication systems. In other words, when the scheduling process is outdated and the structured scheduling process is broken, Humphreys

(2012) suggested community college leaders include a scheduling implementation process that closes student enrollment gaps. Targeting gaps in student success goals within the institution's support services may provide a more precise road map for completing a college degree (Bailey, 2017; Baldwin, 2017; Humphreys, 2012). Consequently, research shows that students and staff cannot depend on a loosely guided pathways approach to increasing graduation rates unless all systems are coordinated, synchronized, and aligned with institutional practices related to the completion agenda (Bailey, 2017; Baldwin, 2017; Kilgore & Wilson, 2017).

Adelman's (2013) *Searching for Our Lost Associate Degrees: Project Win-Win at the Finish Line* described the challenges community colleges face in documenting teaching and learning outcomes. The Project Win-Win Initiative helped community colleges to review transcripts of students who had left the institution without a college credential even though they had sufficient college credit to earn a certificate or an associate's degree without their knowledge. Additionally, the initiative helped community college leaders to confront tension regarding compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act guidelines and protecting student privacy concerning transcripts as college representatives were unsure if they could reactivate a student's record or notify students without violating their rights. The National Student Clearinghouse and the Institute for Higher Education Policy helped institutions to navigate their data to promote student records accuracy. Given the initiative, the Clearinghouse, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, and higher educational institutions aligned their data policies to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act regulation for sharing student records, helping to clear up past poor record-keeping practices. The community college presidents were committed to improving college access and success by setting alerts in a tracking

system to notify college personnel and students at least six months before being on track to graduate protocols (Adelman, 2013).

Not only did Project Win-Win address setting alerts for tracking a student success system, but the AACC Pathway Project also incorporated pathways for student success. The AACC Pathway Project provided insight into how colleges are planning and implementing guided pathways based on student outcome data. According to the AACC's guided pathways model based on CCRC's research, these colleges have committed to redesigning programs and support services for all incoming students (Bailey, 2017). According to Jenkins et al. (2017), the need to track data became a key factor in effectively tracking student progress. The literature supports such measures as decision-making data that identifies students' learning outcomes. The data obtained from the guided pathway's approach is a key factor that tracks the improvements of whether a student is completing and attaining a degree or certificate.

Literature Review Analysis

The literature shows that the differences between accounts of strategic planning are largely those of definitions, strategies, and the extent to which these strategies are implemented. For example, the literature suggested that s*trategic planning is the process of setting goals, deciding upon actions to achieve these goals, and mobilizing the resources needed to take action* (Rowley et al., 1997). *The literature review revealed* there is little evidence that community college presidents *describe how institutional goals guide the strategic plan that advances the completion agenda (Baldwin, 2017).* The literature review also revealed that strategic planning models are generally logical approaches for refining the mission and vision and clarifying shared

values that guide the community college (Bryson, 2018; Keller, 1983; McPhail & McPhail, 2006).

Further literature highlighted that a standard component of strategic plans should be an institution's planning priorities. Keller's (1983) work on a new management style encourages more ideas through a planning process from campus leaders and external stakeholders. Keller's (1983) academic strategy guided the present study. The literature described Keller's (1983) academic strategy model as a transformation strategic planning model to fit the organization. Many business model components described in the literature review were not significant for education (Rowley et al., 1997). Most business models focus on tangible profits associated with exchanging goods and services.

However, many educational entities use the strategic planning model approach to set their institutions' direction for responding to change while adjusting to their campus norms to tailor the plan to a unique fit (Mintzberg, 2013). The literature suggested that strategic planning must be continuous, and it is the best method for transforming a community college to respond to ever-changing internal and external environmental factors. Research suggests that presidents must have an intimate knowledge of their organization, values, and leadership (McPhail, 2012; McPhail & McPhail, 2006). Formulating a strategy is completed by utilizing a conceptual framework to help assemble an institution's academic strategic plan (Keller, 1983).

Analysis of the literature on the completion agenda identified different models for improving student success (Baldwin, 2017). Different approaches to address student success deficits were found in the literature, and these are reflected and discussed in the studies reported

in the literature review. The literature review suggested that community colleges struggled to capture strategies to map student progress from enrollment through the end of their program (Bailey et al., 2015). The completion agenda also challenged institutional leaders to find strategic ways to improve student learning outcomes, including increasing graduation rates (Baldwin, 2017; McCaffery, 2004; McClenney, 2013; Obama, 2009). The literature shows little evidence of how leaders integrate completion initiatives into their strategic planning process to obtain student success.

The research suggests that strategic planning and the completion agenda are important for today's community colleges and that further inquiry is needed in these areas (Obama, 2009). The purpose of this study is to explore how a community college president utilized the strategic plan to advance the completion agenda initiative at an organization. In the literature, a more comprehensive inquiry was needed to explore how institutions connect strategic planning processes to advance completion agenda initiatives. *Thus, the purpose of* this qualitative study is to explore how a community college president uses strategic planning strategies to advance the completion agenda initiative. The literature gap suggested little attention is given to strategic planning associated with student attainment or the completion agenda; community college presidents place student enrollment as the primary focus, while attention to student outcomes was secondary (Bailey et al., 2010).

Chapter Summary

The literature presented in this chapter highlighted the overview of strategic planning synonymous with academic strategies following the strategic planning practices. The chapter began with a discussion on strategic overview, procedures, and planning processes. The

educational strategy followed an in-depth examination of strategic planning focus, highlighting

strategic planning components. The chapter's additional content focused on internal or external

issues and barriers to strategic planning in community colleges and implementing the strategic

plan. Finally, the chapter closed with an overview of the completion agenda initiative and a

literature review analysis.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct the study. The methodology was a qualitative case study. This method allowed the researcher to collect direct quotes and in-depth inquiry from interviews that described the participants' experiences from their perspectives (Yin, 2013). Data also was collected from a review of the documents relevant to the participating community college as they related to the strategic planning process and the completion agenda.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the background of the study and the problem statement. After a review of the purpose of the study and research questions used in this study, the chapter continues with a discussion of the research design and its rationale. The remainder of the chapter described information on the population and sample, site information and selection, data collection procedures, data coding and analysis, ethical considerations, and credibility and trustworthiness.

Background and Problem Statement

Throughout the history of strategic planning, strategic planning methods were developed, designed, and utilized by business and industry. As far back as the 1960s and 1970s, businesses recognized the importance of strategic planning management techniques (Rowley et al., 1997). Almost 40 years ago, Keller (1983) introduced a strategic planning management approach for use by higher education leaders to help guide their strategic planning strategies. Keller's academic management framework, combined with education policy and planning, can help to guide community college presidents with their strategic planning strategies to include the organization's planning practices. Since then, strategic planning experts' research has supported

the strategic planning process appropriate for colleges and universities that aligns with the business industry principles and Keller's framework.

During the 20th century, the benchmark for measuring community college success focused primarily on student enrollment, while attention to student outcomes was secondary (Bailey et al., 2010). Yet in non-business institutions, particularly colleges and universities, strategic planning management techniques were not applied to their institution's initiatives (Keller, 1983; Mintzberg, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore how a community college president used strategic planning concepts to advance an institution's completion initiatives. This case study sought to identify the strategies a community college president facilitated during the strategic planning process to launch a completion agenda initiative at a community college in Michigan. In addition, the study sought to explore a holistic approach to how the community college president utilized the planning efforts of the college stakeholders and community involvement to help reach its strategic planning goals.

Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this inquiry were: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

Research Design and Rationale

This study used a qualitative, single case study methodology using an exploratory method with in-depth, open-ended interview questions to obtain a rich description of participant experiences in a holistic approach (Yin, 2013). This qualitative inquiry approach allowed the 14 interview participants to provide a detailed narrative of their experiences from their viewpoints centered on the methodology as an empirical research method, using Keller's (1983) academic strategy as a conceptual framework. This case study explored how a community college president linked completion initiatives to strategic planning efforts.

The research procedures of Yin's (2014) approach allowed the researcher to focus on a single holistic study within a bounded system. Yin defined a case study as an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon or event set within its real-world context. This single holistic case study allowed the researcher to obtain inquiries in understanding the participants' experiences in a real-life context.

Yin suggested a case study approach design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer 'how' and 'why' questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon being study; and, (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. According to Creswell (2012), placing boundaries by time and place on a case can prevent a researcher's attempt to answer a question that is too broad or a topic that has too many objectives.

This qualitative approach allowed a form of inquiry that afforded an in-depth picture of a community college president's strategy to advance completion agenda initiatives at a community college. This interview method allowed the researcher to collect direct quotes and in-depth

information from interviews that described the participants' experiences from their perspectives (Yin, 2013). This design also allowed participants to provide elaborate narratives on their responses.

Population and Sample

The population for the study were leaders and faculty members employed at a community college in Michigan. Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals based on their assignments at the college and their functional roles within the institution (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016). For example, the characteristics of the sample selected to participate in the study were 11 executive officers and 3 faculty members. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym code consisting of a president, three strategic planning committee members, three president's cabinet members, three faculty members, and four at-large members.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Before collecting data from human subjects, the researcher obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative certificate on November 4, 2018. The study was conducted during the 2020-21 academic year.

To arrange the interviews, the researcher first requested from the president's administrative assistant the email addresses of prospective participants. The researcher then sent an email invitation to prospective participants, describing the purpose of the study and specifics of the interview process and inviting them to participate in the study with an attached consent form (Appendices A and C).

Site Information and Selection

This Michigan-based, multi-campus community college was established in the 1960s with the approval of voters in nine local school districts. The community college is a

comprehensive, fully accredited, public, two-year college with an enrollment approaching 10,000 students. The college offers certificate programs in more than 20 areas of study and associate degrees in business, health care, human and public service, technical occupations, and business. The college also provides a quality experience for students preparing to transfer to four-year institutions following graduation.

The criteria for selection of the site consisted of the following: (a) the institution is a public, suburban, multicampus community based in Michigan; (b) a chief executive officer with prior experience working in several other institutions within the state; (c) an institutional strategic plan had been recently developed and has a valid date (2020-2022); and, (d) the institution's strategic plan focused on improving student achievement with the assumption that more students will earn a quality credential or transfer to a four-year college or university.

Data Collection

The study used two primary sources of data collection: Interviews and review of documents.

Interviews

Data collection sources for this study included interviews with 14 participants using 17 open-ended questions (Appendix B). With each participant's consent, interviews were recorded for transcription. Further, the researcher took notes during each interview and wrote salient points following the interviews, a process of reflection used during data analysis during the coding process. Transcribed interviews, the researcher's interview notes, and reflections, and email communications with participants were considered data sources with respect to the interview participants.

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom software videoconferencing and audio recording technology. Zoom was used because the college's COVID-19 protocols, in compliance with the CDC's social distancing mandate, prevented face-to-face contact (CDC, 2020).

The researcher used a semi-structured, 17-interview-question process to collect data directly via Zoom such that participants could elaborate on their responses and provide their in depth narratives (Appendix B). The 17 interview questions were aligned with the research questions and the conceptual framework of Keller's (1983) academic strategy (Figure 1) and in alignment with the study's focus in compliance with Roberts and Hyatt's (2018) research technique. The semi-structured, 17-question protocol assisted the researcher with an understanding of the participant's lived experiences in a real-life context (Yin, 2013).

Lincoln & Guba (1986) noted that, in a qualitative research study, the researcher is the research instrument used to collect and make sense of the data. The researcher's instrument administered was an interview tool conducted online digitally and virtually via Zoom meeting.

All 14 interviews were conducted through Zoom in 60-minute intervals. Before interviews were arranged, the 14 participants returned the signed consent form to the researcher. Upon receipt of a signed consent form, an interview date and time was arranged with each participant and a follow-up email was sent containing the Zoom interview link and the 17 interview questions (Appendix B).

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher informed each participant that an interview transcript would be forwarded such that each participant for a process known as member checking. The member checking process allowed participants to examine the post interview transcription for accuracy and to make any corrections to the transcript. Transcripts

forwarded to participants included a transcription verification agreement, acknowledging the participant's agreement—or changes—to the study's transcript (Appendix D).

Document Review

In addition to the interviews, three relevant documents were retrieved from the community college's website for review, including the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; the college's Annual Report for fall 2020; and, the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan.

Document review provided an overview of the institution's strategic plan and vital information to the strategic planning process. The document review involved three documents: the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; the college's Annual Report for fall 2020; and, the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. These documents provided an overview of the college's strategic planning process, goals, and direction.

Data Storage and Management

The researcher made a conscious effort to secure all files and data related to the study, including participant names and study-related documents. All digital and electronic data was stored on a password protected hard drive. Printed and paper records were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office.

As required by Kansas State University, data will be held for at least five years whereupon printed records and files will be shredded and electronic data will be erased as follows: files on shared network drives will be deleted; files on a hard drive or USB flash drive will be deleted using drive-wiping software to ensure data cannot be recovered; and, all emails to and from participants will be permanently deleted and erased.

Data Coding and Analysis

For purposes of coding, interviews were manually transcribed into themes and categories to analyze the sorted interview data (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2013). To describe this process, after the interviews were transcribed, the researcher used the theme identification technique method that involved reading through the raw data from the written text. From this process, the researcher identified information from different responses to group the data into meaning across the established data set. An inductive approach was used to analyze the data using Yin's (2014) five-step approach: 1) compile the data; 2) disassemble the data; 3) reassemble the data; 4) interpret the data meaning; and, 5) summarize and explain the data. Step one consisted of compiling the data to develop groupings. Step two required reassembling the data to reduce and eliminate invariant themes of the phenomenon. Step three required reassembling the data and clustering core themes. Step four required checking patterns against the interview transcripts, study notes, and document reviewed to interpret the meaning of the data. Finally, step five required summarizing the data into an individual structural description of the experiences.

Saldaña's (2016, p. 98) seven-step data analysis approach allowed the researcher to integrate the data in seven phases as follows: (1) prepare and organize the raw text data using an intelligent transcription method, transcribing every word but making an interpretation to exclude pauses, potentially clearing up the grammar in a summary format; (2) use Hyper Transcribe software to transcribe the video voice into written text form; (3) read the written transcribed data derived from the participant's perspective; (4) organize the data in the first and the second coding cycle to begin grouping data into meaningful themes; (5) categorize the themes that communicated an action in the data to determine how they fit into the coding framework; (6)

analyze the meaning of words that fit the coding framework, identifying which themes came up the most and organizing them into a significant category; and, (7) cohesively present the significant categories of findings based on the structural coding method (Figure 3). Regarding step 2, Hyper Transcribe software provided a digital means to manually transcribe voice data into written text with speed-control. As a result, interviews were transcribed at a manageable pace of line-by-line transcription.

Figure 3

Steps in the Structured Coding Process

Step 1 – Prepare and organize the raw text data using an intelligent transcription method
Step 2 – Use Hyper Transcribe software to transcribe the video voice into written text form
Step 3 – Begin reading the written transcribed data derived from the participant's perspective
Step 4 – Organize the data in the first and the second coding cycle to begin grouping the data into meaningful themes
Step 5 – Categorize the themes that communicated an action in the data to determine how they fit into the coding framework
Step 6 – Analyze the meaning of words that fit the coding framework, identifying which themes came up the most and organizing them into a significant category
Step 7 – Cohesively present the significant categories of findings based on the structural coding method

This data analysis method allowed the researcher to categorize and understand the data from participant responses (Yin, 2013). This data analysis approach helped the researcher to avoid speculation and overgeneralization of participant narratives and to develop descriptive contexts relevant to the data findings. The researcher was attentive to applying broader contexts of the data while remaining focused on each participant's content-specific, rich descriptions. It also allowed the researcher to develop from the 14 participant interview responses and documents reviewed a chart to capture a comprehensive view of participants' relevant narrative descriptions. In the coding process, the researcher used Saldaña's (2016) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* to establish a coding method to analyze the data. Analysis of the 14 participant's responses to the 17 interview questions helped determine the initial set of codes (Saldaña, 2016).

The interview questions aligned seamlessly with the research questions. All interviews were coded manually during the coding process. The coding process included sorting the data analysis and analyzing the interviews that allowed generated codes and themes for the researcher to organize and arrange into meaningful groupings into a significant category (Figure 3), answering the four research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Using the structural coding method was useful in the alignment of both the four research questions and the six elements of Keller's (1983) conceptual framework. Saldaña's coding approach helped to explain how to specify data, identifying and recording one or more passages of text or other data items. The steps were as follows: 1) each participant's responses were cut into strips per each of the 17 interview questions, and strip groupings were placed in a pile per participant; 2) data strips for the 17 interview questions were then sorted and organized, placing each participant's written response into large envelopes to keep organized; 3) the 17 interview questions per participant's responses

were then reviewed and aligned with the responses to the four research questions; a) meaningful themes relevant to participant responses were then obtained from the four research questions; b) meaningful themes from the three documents were then reviewed; and, finally, c) meaningful themes relevant to the participants' responses and the literature review were then obtained from the six elements of Keller's (1983) conceptual framework.

Alignment Corroboration of the Coding Process

After the data analysis was aligned with the structural coding process, documenting the narrative was necessary to help with the interpretation and understanding of themes derived from the data in corroboration with the transcript interview data narrative themes, documents received, and the literature review. Data coding involved developing categories to code each response to the initial interview questions and the transcripts and notes of the interviews using the interview questions. Completing a first and a second level coding process made it possible for the researcher to organize themes and to capture similarities among the data. The second level of coding was more interpretive, requiring the development of data summary sections that focused on pattern codes. Saldaña's coding scheme illustrated coding levels to help identify patterns and themes in a meaningful way to abstract the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Saldaña stated that a researcher must demonstrate coding arrangements to support an interpretation of the data (Figure 3). Creating a significant themes chart helped the researcher understand the data carefully, line-by-line, allowing the researcher to think about each sentence and the actual data interpretation. Next, the researcher collected meaningful data from the interview, putting narratives into a structural coding process to identify emerging, relevant meanings. Finally, in the analysis process, the researcher coded and interpreted the data sources based on themes found in the data aligned with Keller's (1983) conceptual framework. As a

result of this process, the researcher obtained 8 category codes and 24 sub-theme codes from the initial data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Research and educational organizations have IRBs to ensure that researchers comply with the Code of Federal Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2016), the IRB ensures that the research is conducted using ethical considerations and principles. The ethical considerations of this study were primarily addressed through the Kansas State University IRB process. The IRB approved this study and the associated methodology. In the IRB application, the potential risks to participants associated with this research were described as minimal as the researcher was asked in advance that interviews be conducted in a safe environment. Additionally, the researcher completed the mandatory training for Behavioral Research Investigators via the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. There were three main principles to which the IRB must adhere, according to the Belmont Reports of 1978 (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). They are: 1) study participants are respected, voluntary and informed consent is granted, confidentiality is maintained, and the right to decline the study are clearly outlined; 2) any risks or conflicts to participants are disclosed; and, 3) the researcher remained impartial and fair.

After receiving IRB approval on November 18, 2020, to conduct the study, semi structured interviews were arranged. The interview narrative was collected in a recorded zoom meeting to obtain data from open-ended interview questions (Appendix A and B). The researcher contacted participants using email addresses provided by the study's executive assistant of the community college institution. An explanation of the study and its purpose was explained to the participants on the consent form (Appendix C). The organization and the participants were made

aware that the study would be confidential, and participants' anonymity would be maintained. Anonymous data involves removing any identifiable characteristics from the data set to avoid the potential identity of the participants and the organization in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher assigned pseudonyms to each participant (Table 1). The researcher received signed consent forms from all study participants, indicating voluntary participation from each. Informed consent is used in studies to ensure subjects understand what it means to participate in a research study and to decide whether they want to consciously or deliberately participate. The researcher requested signed consent forms in advance from each participant, protecting participants from any harm and avoiding any deception in the research. The researcher asked interview questions related to each participant's perspective in the strategic planning process (Creswell, 2012; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2013).

Confidentiality of Participants and Description of Participant Codes

This section introduces the assigned anonymity of the alphabetical and numerical codes of participants, their positions in the study's community college, and their functional roles. Participants included a president, three strategic planning committee members, three president's cabinet members, three faculty members, and four at-large members. Participant description codes are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Description Code Profiles

Participant Position	Functional Role	Alpha / Numeric Code
Executive	Decision making	EXE-1
Vice president, compliance	Strategic planning Committee	SPC-1
Executive director of development	Strategic planning committee	SPC-2

Board plan and grant development coordinator	Strategic planning committee	SPC-3
Vice president, finance and business	President's cabinet	CAB-1
Executive vice president, enrollment and campus operations	President's cabinet	CAB-2
Director, diversity, and inclusion	President's cabinet	CAB-3
Foundation development	Faculty	FAC-1
Provost of allied health	Faculty	FAC-2
Head of the department of economics	Faculty	FAC-3
Vice president, campus planning and operations	At-large	LAR-1
Director of student retention and completion	At-large	LAR-2
Associate dean of student experience	At-large	LAR-3
Dean of student success services	At-large	LAR-4

The researcher protected the participants' anonymity by assigning both alphabetical and numeric codes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The 14 participants' description codes include: EXE-1 identified as an Executive; SPC-1 identified as Vice President of Compliance; SPC-2 identified as Executive Director of Development; SPC-3 identified as Board Plan and Grant Development Coordinator; CAB-1 identified as Vice President of Finance and Business; CAB-2 identified as Executive Vice President of Enrollment and Campus Operations; CAB-3 identified as Director of Diversity and Inclusion, FAC-1 identified as Foundation Development; FAC-2 identified as Provost of Allied Health; FAC-3 Head of the Department of Economics, LAR-1 Vice President of Campus Planning and Operations; LAR-2 identified as Director of Student

Retention and Completion; LAR-3 identified as Associate Dean of Student Experience; and, LAR-4 identified as Dean of Student Success Services (Table 1).

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In this study, the researcher employed two types of data source approaches to establish trustworthiness that included interviews and document review. Trustworthiness for the study was sought through triangulation and member checking, (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), credibility establishes trustworthiness. In the member checking process, participants were allowed to review their transcripts and provide feedback for accuracy, establishing credibility as part of the researcher's member checking commitment. The researcher individually emailed each participant, attached their post-interview transcript, and gave participants 48 hours to review their written transcript for accuracy (Appendix D). Therefore, these multiple data sources were obtained and triangulated to provide credibility during the document review data collection process. The triangulation concept involves various data sources and is necessary for a qualitative research study to corroborate data for review (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher established these strategies of trustworthiness in this qualitative research, which included member checking and triangulation in the collection of data.

Member Checking

Member checking, used primarily in qualitative research, ensures data quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Member checking is also known as participant verification during the data analysis process and it helped the researcher to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the participant's responses. The researcher committed to this level of verification during the data source collection process. During member checking, three participants noted a few sentence corrections to their post-interview transcripts, and the changes were incorporated into the transcript. One

participant made revisions to what was captured and communicated, another revised how a college program was spelled, and another participant changed what he meant to say versus what was captured. The remaining 11 post-interview written transcripts were not returned with corrections or revisions (Appendix D).

Triangulation

While quantitative methods gather data by using interview questions, checklists, and other measuring devices, qualitative researchers collect data by examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants (Creswell, 2012; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2013). In this study, data triangulation data was verified to establish the credibility of the case study evidence using two different data sources: interviews and document review (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher retrieved three relevant documents from the study's community college website which included: the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; the college's Annual Report for fall 2020; and, the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. This provided the researcher with documentation of the institution's written strategic plan official records. This method of qualitative research credibility was the best data source to triangulate participants' responses. Triangulation allowed the researcher to have a trustworthy foundation for the findings and knowledge contribution (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

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Chapter Summary

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Chapter Three provided a detailed discussion of the methodology that was used to conduct this inquiry. The chapter began with the study background and problem statement and a restatement of the purpose and the study's research questions. The chapter continued with the research design, the rationale for the design, population and sample, pseudonym site information, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis and coding, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents findings from the analysis of data collected. The chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions, the six elements of Keller's (1983) academic strategy, and the community college documents reviewed for this study. The remainder of the chapter includes the following sections: characteristics of the participants; presentation of findings by research question; presentation of findings aligned with the conceptual framework; presentation of findings from the analysis of document review process; and presentation of the emergent key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analyses. This chapter concludes with a summary and an introduction to Chapter Five.

Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this inquiry were: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Keller's (1983) academic strategy, of which the six elements are: traditions, values, and aspirations; strengths and weaknesses, academic and financial; leadership abilities and priorities; environmental trends, threats, and opportunities;

market preferences, perceptions, and directions; and, the competitive situation, to include threats and opportunities.

Documents Reviewed

For the document review portion of this study, the researcher reviewed three documents, each of which was retrieved from the participating community college's website. These documents included: the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; the college's Annual Report for fall 2020; and, the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan.

Characteristics of Participants

To ensure the anonymity of each of the 14 participants interviewed for this qualitative single case study, each participant was assigned an alphabetical and numerical code (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). These identification codes are displayed in Table 2 along with each participant's position and functional role within the community college. Participant description codes were established as follows: EXE-1 identified as an executive; SPC-1 identified as vice president, compliance; SPC-2 identified as executive director of development; SPC-2 identified as board plan and Grant development coordinator; CAB-1 identified as vice president, finance and business; CAB-2 identified as executive vice president, enrollment and campus operations; CAB-3 identified as director, diversity, and inclusion; FAC-1 identified as foundation development; FAC-2 identified as provost of allied health; FAC-3 head of the department of economics; LAR-1 vice president, campus planning and operations; LAR-2 identified as director, student retention and completion; LAR-3 identified as associate dean of student experience; and, LAR-4 identified as dean of student success services (Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Codes, Positions, and Functional Roles

Participant Codes	Roles	Functional Role
EXE-1	Executive	Decision making
SPC-1	Vice president, compliance	Strategic planning committee
SPC-2	Executive director of development	Strategic planning committee
SPC-3	Board plan and grant development coordination	Strategic planning committee
CAB-1	Vice president, finance and business	President's cabinet
CAB-2	Executive vice president, enrollment and campus operations	President's cabinet
CAB-3	Director, diversity, and inclusion	President's cabinet
FAC-1	Foundation development	Faculty
FAC-2	Provost of allied health	Faculty
FAC-3	Head of the department of economics	Faculty
LAR-1	Vice president, campus planning and operations	At-large
LAR-2	Director, student retention and completion	At-large
LAR-3	Associate dean of student experience	At-large
LAR-4	Dean of student success services	At-large

Presentation of Interview Findings by Research Questions

Participants shared their strategic planning experience within the organization based on interview questions that were aligned with the research questions. Analysis of the participants'

comments generated emerging themes and patterns which provided a rich, in-depth description of how a community college president utilized the institution's strategic planning efforts to advance the institution's completion agenda initiatives.

The four research questions that guided this inquiry were: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

The next section of the study presents participant responses to each of the study's 17 interview questions aligned with each of the study's four research questions. Each section begins with a list of the interview questions, research questions (Tables 4 through 7), and participants' responses by functional role (strategic planning committee, president's cabinet, faculty, and at large). A complete list of the study's 17 interview questions as they align with the research questions appear in Appendix B.

Interview Findings from Research Question 1

Interview questions (IQs) related to RQ1 and the institution's strategic planning process were as follows:

IQ1: Please tell the researcher about the strategies used to launch the completion agenda.

IQ2: Please tell the researcher how you connected the completion initiative to the strategic plan.

IQ10: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the completion agenda.

IQ14: Please describe the role other stakeholders played in the strategic planning process.

IQ15: How did you determine the role different stakeholders played in the completion agenda?

IQ16: How did you determine the role stakeholders played in the strategic planning process?

IQ17: Please describe the direct role you played in facilitating the strategic plan and the completion agenda.

Strategic Planning Committee Member Responses. In responses to the IQs related to RQ1, EXE-1 explained that, in the past;

> The strategic plan was limited to a shared audience within the organization. EXE-1 also said, "In three years, the strategic plan became shared with internal and external stakeholders in the college's strategic planning process." EXE-1 described being "open to listening to different areas to make the strategic planning process a shared effort." EXE-1 further explained, "In the planning process, communications were challenging to get stakeholders to understand the strategic planning process." EXE-1 said, "Communications became the key in the planning process.
>
> SPC-1 described the planning process by focusing on the goals of the board. SPC-1 stated, "The strategic planning process strategy includes the board's goals as the framework to guide the college's planning process." SPC-1 explained, "The college framework includes implementing the board goals and connecting the strategic plan to focus areas and initiatives with the academic direction of the

college." SPC-1 stated the strategic plan is the college's framework and involves all departments and divisions, including enrollment, retention, facility, human resources, marketing, and budgeting, among others. Connecting all these components involves the college framework to help direct the strategic planning process.

SPC-2 also said, "our board goals include strategic planning as a process." SPC-2 said, "The college's strategic planning process provides a laser focus on the student," and explained, "Understanding the role, we play in the organization will benefit the student population." Therefore, providing training for stakeholders to understand data measures through KPIs helps essential staff interpret data outcomes with a laser focus on students. Participant SPC-2 said, "the data matrix supported student services' efforts to ensure student needs are met."

SPC-3 remarked how the planning process placed the spotlight on students and stated, "The strategic planning process was to make the planning strategy a shared focus involving the contribution from all groups a participatory effort."

President's Cabinet Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ1, CAB-1 emphasized the use of data by describing how the scorecard method was used to track institutional measurements and outcomes as part of the strategic planning process. CAB-1 said, "The strategic planning process consists of tracking the transferring students for outcome measurements." CAB-1 went into a deeper discussion regarding data and explained, "These outcome measurements include the tracking of degrees awarded to students and tracking students who transfer to four-year institutions."

Of interest, CAB-2 expanded the conversation by describing the process. CAB-2 said,

"The strategic planning process involves open dialogue as a planning strategy." CAB-2 also said, "The college's strategic planning process is a living document." CAB-2 shared those aspects of strategic planning were mentioned in every employee and planning meeting agenda.

CAB-3 reinforced CAB-2's comments about employee engagement, stating, "Every department had to develop strategies that align with KPIs as a vital part of the strategic planning process." In addition, CAB-3 said, "Planning efforts that identified services required looking at best practices within other colleges and universities." These best practices include student success programs and learning outcomes aligned with a student's college goals. CAB-3 said, "These indicators address direct and indirect goals that were instrumental during the strategic planning process."

Faculty Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ1, FAC-1 described the inclusion of supportive services for first-year students in the strategic planning process.

FAC-1 mentioned the student-first focus helps to ensure the institution will "meet the students where they are." FAC-1 described how data guided the planning efforts. FAC-1 said, "We began by looking at five to six semesters of students' progress data, which shows those students' success over time." FAC-1 said, "connecting with students encourages them to stay enrolled in their courses by incorporating fun and excitement in the teaching and learning environment." FAC-2 described the strategic planning process as an academic focus to help students to complete their educational goals.

FAC-2 said, "We looked internally at the developmental course data." We discovered a few students' grade point levels fail below a seventh-grade level, implementing a unique developmental program, allowing any students below the seventh-grade academic level to experience taking classes at a community college.

FAC-3 described incorporating faculty feedback within the strategic planning process as relatively new. FAC-3 said, "Under the new leadership, the faculty's role in the strategic plan initiative allowed faculty to provide their strategic planning input." FAC-3 stated, "This strategic planning approach took faculty by an embraced and welcoming surprise."

At-Large Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ1, LAR-1 remarked on how the strategic planning process connected all institutional departments by communicating a shared vision, stating, "Re-enforcing communication is connecting people to the college's planning direction."

LAR-2 said, Of the five different areas in the strategic planning initiatives, the main focus is student success. This strategic planning process aligns benchmark outcomes of what we are doing well and what we need to change to meet our students' educational goals.

LAR-3 described the strategic planning process as mission-driven, stating,

We have monthly planning meetings to report plans to self-assess departmental progress using key performance indicators as the framework, reviewing college outcomes identifying what we need to improve or change within our internal daily practices is gathering knowledge from a bottom-up approach.

LAR- 4 described the strategic planning process as a process of goal attainment, stating,

The strategic plan created the why and how of what we do to serve our students. For example, goal attainment impacts the college's overall goal and connects value to our work when completing a task or goal. The 'why' is understanding the significance that the student is the priority.

Overall, these findings reveal how the college president led and demonstrated urgency during the strategic planning process. Analysis of the findings also reflected the president's

communication transparency process of reporting data according to each department's KPI

outcomes. Participants explained that KPI outcomes became the college practice, supporting

student services college-wide and providing the understanding needed to communicate the

critical planning components of student success. Throughout the interview process, participants

candidly answered the interview questions, providing their perspectives on the strategic planning

process and describing their experiences during college planning meetings.

Interview Findings from Research Question 2

Interview questions related to RQ2 and the president's facilitation of the strategic

planning process were as follows:

IQ2: Please tell the researcher how you connected the completion initiative to the

strategic plan.

IQ11: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the

strategic plan.

IQ13: Please describe your strategies for connecting the completion agenda to the

strategic plan.

IQ14: Please describe the role, other stakeholders, played in the strategic planning

process.

IQ15: How did you determine the role different stakeholders played in the completion

agenda?

IQ16: How did you determine the role stakeholders played in the strategic planning

process?

IQ17: Please describe the direct role you played in facilitating the strategic plan and the

completion agenda.

Strategic Planning Committee Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ2, EXE-1 described the president's method to facilitate the strategic planning process by incorporating strategic planning meetings, welcoming open dialogue, and sharing strategies among stakeholders to reach the college's goals. EXE-1 said, "The communications input has to take place to get the message across."

SPC-1 said, "The strategic planning process's primary connections were the KPIs linked to the college's performance outcomes alignment of goals creating a 'student focused' environment." SPC-2 described the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process as data-driven. SPC-2 said, "The college president has institutionalized data practices to create dashboards and provide the information that the student services side and the academic services need to make their program modifications for decision-making." SPC-3 said, "The college president took a deeper dive into the strategic plan to make it more consumer focused—student focused—instead of institutionally focused. Putting the focus back towards students resulted in strategic thinking."

President's Cabinet Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ2, CAB-1 described the president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process by aligning internal communication efforts and applying budget planning to put plans into motion to support student resources. CAB-2 mentioned this bottom-up, campus-wide undertaking entailed a collective effort, stating, "The president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process was a participatory effort. Everybody participated in the formulation of the strategic planning process." Consensus reached during planning meetings allowed staff to interject their opinions and to move the strategic plan forward. CAB-3 described the president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process, stating, "The first strategy addressed was understanding the college

direction. The second strategy was to determine what we have completed and evaluate the needs and accomplishments of the facilitation process."

Faculty Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ2, FAC-1 described the president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process, aligning departmental goals with college goals and including input from administrators, faculty, and staff. These goals address the college's critical areas in serving the student population and obtaining the data required to effectively measure outcomes. FAC-2 said, "The president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process of putting 'students first' in the infrastructure for sharing and communication helped faculty implement this goal." FAC-3 commented, "The president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process of connecting the organization's communication outcomes took 8 to 10 months to see the significance of those planning meetings."

For faculty, their direct role in the process re-emphasized and supported the strategic plan from start to finish, sharing teaching and learning strategies to positively influence student success.

At-Large Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ2, LAR-1 said, "The president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process identified people's roles and provided insight of where they fit into the plan, how the plan has put the plan into motion and moving the plan to the next level."

LAR-2 also described the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process. Areas of weakness within the strategic planning process included the challenge of getting the word out. LAR-2 said, "The president made a continuous effort to put the measure in place to capture the feedback during the strategic planning process at every level from the board

of trustees, administrators, staff, faculty, and the student population." LAR-3 described the

president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process through the use of internal

planning committees to identify goals to be implemented in the planning process. In addition,

LAR-4 said, "The president's strategies for facilitating the strategic planning process of

'Together is Better' rang true with many conversations." LAR-4 commented on the many

conversations, including follow-up and department leader's commitments, understanding

learning improvements through the use of student data, and setting college-wide goals. LAR-4

shared, "These were common practices at the college, examining the intervention on the college

policy that enhanced student's learning environment."

Interview Findings from Research Question 3

Interview questions related to RQ3 and the institution's completion initiatives were as

follows:

IQ1: Please tell the researcher about the strategies used to launch the completion agenda.

IQ2: Please tell the researcher how you connected the completion initiative to the

strategic plan.

IQ7: Please tell the researcher about the college's completion agenda and the elements of

the completion agenda.

IQ8: What reasons (threats or opportunities) contributed to the college's adoption of the

completion agenda?

IQ9: How did you determine that the completion agenda was the right direction for the

college?

IQ10: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the strategic plan.

IQ13: Please describe your strategies for connecting the completion agenda to the strategic plan.

IQ15: How did you determine the role different stakeholders played in the completion agenda?

IQ17: Please describe the direct role you played in facilitating the strategic plan and the completion agenda.

Strategic Planning Committee Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ3, EXE-1 stated the internal and external reasons that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives included, he said, "Increasing the communication level, encouraging others to share the vision, sharing information in good times and bad times, and putting people in the right position."

SPC-1 described the contribution of the launch of the institution's completion initiatives, by stating, "Completion is the college's framework, a comprehensive, integrated process; it is like peeling back the onion, everything aligned, and it is all focused on connecting to students and helping them complete their degree successfully." SPC-2 said, "The college's realignment of the completion initiative through a new college president's fresh eyes became the internal contribution to the institution's completion initiatives and implementation." SPC-3 shared, "During the launch of the plan, the institution created a cohort group designed to provide students with a sense of belonging. A goal implemented by the college's realignment is known as the 'big push,' a push toward student success."

President's Cabinet Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ3, CAB-1 described the internal and external factors that contributed to the launch of the college completion initiatives. CAB-1 said, "Our programs and budgeted resources align with what is needed to help students complete their educational goals from semester to semester, including the alignment of funding required for our student support services." CAB-1 gave an example of how the external impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to budgeting for software to help tutor students online.

Both CAB-2 and CAB-3 described another external factor that contributed to the launch of the college completion initiatives based on funding strategies put forth by the Michigan legislature related to student completion. In response, the college hired a director of retention and completion to meet these legislative goals and to learn how the college's efforts improve student engagement with the required services.

CAB-3 described the reasons, both internal or external, that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives. CAB-3 expressed the "Get it Done" program was instrumental in connecting students through a hands-on approach. This inclusion effort became a part of diversity efforts to make students feel a part of the college and to involve a diverse student population in various college activities.

Faculty Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ3, FAC-1 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives' launch. For example, FAC-1 said, "As a faculty and team player aligned with my values, accepting the direction of the plan resulting in easy buy-in. 'Together is Better is a phrase used as an optimist believing everyone can work together."

FAC-2 also described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives' launch. FAC-2 said, "The strategic plan I consider as a part of the completion agenda," adding, "Looking at student success from guided pathways, developmental education, built to improve student success, retention and completion all are a part of student success in the completion agenda." FAC-3 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives during planning retreats that focused on college priorities. FAC-3 said, "These priorities focused on critical initiatives that aligned with the priorities for the completion agenda, such as external factors while comparing and contrasting other colleges' best practices and strategies."

At-Large Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ3, LAR-1 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives' launch. LAR-1 said, "As a manager, the institution helped implement and communicate the college direction toward the completion agenda playing a vital role in involving staff on the importance of student first."

LAR-2 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the completion initiatives and described the importance of reviewing and gathering information as needed, stating, "Reviewing and gathering information provided strategies from data and created the opportunity to share results with staff members." LAR-3 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives' launch using "key performance indicator data and best practices, such as guided pathways, to determine and address support findings regarding updating the completion agenda supported student success."

LAR-4 described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives, incorporating a mentor program to help guide students

through their educational journey. In addition, LAR-4 shared, "Using a new Banner software system helped track student progress." Banner software incorporates early alert, enrollment, and academic features to help students navigate college services, provide the student with educational updates, keeping students informed of their progress. LAR- 4 explained how the community college president aligned both access and success to support the strategic planning strategies that contributed to the college's completion initiatives in the college's mission and vision. The findings explained the challenges of funding, preparing, and supporting student readiness and performance. These challenges addressed the KPI data reported by college leaders.

Interview Findings from Research Question 4

Interview questions related to RQ4 and Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components were as follows:

IQ3: Tell the researcher about the traditions, values, and aspirations of the college.

IQ4: Please tell the researcher about the process you used to assess the college's strengths and weaknesses.

IQ5: What approach did you use to assess the college's leadership abilities?

IQ6: What was your experience in identifying the trends, threats, and opportunities at the college?

IQ8: What reasons (threats or opportunities) contributed to the college's adoption of the completion agenda?

IQ10: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the completion agenda.

IQ11: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the strategic plan.

IQ12: What steps did you take to address the barriers and challenges faced?

IQ13: Please describe your strategies for connecting the completion agenda to the strategic plan.

IQ17: Please describe the direct role you played in facilitating the strategic plan and the completion agenda.

Strategic Planning Committee Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ4, EXE-1 said, "There were challenges in the communication process and conveying the strategic planning goals with all stakeholders." EXE-1 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy. According to EXE-1, the academic strategy included building a community and enhancing efficient information and services that aligned with the strategic plan. EXE-1 described the methods and tools used to convey strategic planning goals, including, "Being mindful of our values of being a student-focused institution, engagement of a shared value practice, the theme 'Together is Better,' and celebrating building on the future." EXE-1 explained this concept in every stakeholder meeting, including student meetings.

SPC-1 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy to how the college president shared the planning vision and created an environment in which college stakeholders knew the requirements and what needed to be done. SPC-1 stated, "It started with the college having conversations and planning sessions titled 'Together is Better.'" SPC-1 said, "Open dialogue is welcome and encouraged during the planning meetings." Many participants spoke about this strategy devising a strategic plan based on the collaborative input of all college groups and reviewing the plan to advance the completion agenda.

SPC-2 described the president's strategic planning practices at the forefront of the conversation with all college stakeholders. SPC-2 said, "The college president included in his strategic plan the importance to address people who were not on board." As with Keller's (1983) academic strategy, leadership abilities, and priorities were reflected in planning practices. SPC -2 said, "The college president has accomplished a lot in such a short time of hired."

SPC-3 described an environmental factor—COVID-19—in the context of Keller's (1983) academic strategy regarding environmental trends, threats, and opportunities. SPC-3 said, "There was a revised strategic plan given to all stakeholders within the organization." The plan included a rewrite of the old strategic plan that addressed the student's academic needs during the pandemic. SPC-2 said, "This plan consisted of what staff needed to know in the re-opening stages of the college during the pandemic." SPC-2 mentioned that the college's plan to re-open the school was very helpful. SPC-2 said, "The plan communicated the CDC requirements and standards needed to have a safe school environment."

President's Cabinet Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ4, CAB-1 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components of traditions, values, and aspirations. CAB- 1 said, "During the changing of the guard, the one consistent thing is the college's traditions, values, and aspirations." CAB-1 continued, "The college president remained focused on the student-first focus." Additionally, the president's strategic planning approach addressed a planning focus to involve all stakeholders with the messages "student first" and "Together is Better" as part of the value.

CAB-2 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components of leadership, abilities, and priorities. CAB-2 said, "The plan of moving in the same direction, having a common goal, open and continuous dialogue with faculty was

embraced." CAB-2 mentioned staff and faculty continued having opened dialogue regarding the college's direction. CAB-2 said, "This comes from making sure people understand that institution effectiveness is a team sport."

Finally, CAB-3 described how the strategic planning process reflected Keller's (1983) academic strategy components to include the barriers and challenges to a strategic plan. CAB-3 said, "Seeing the vision, receiving a play-by-play, helps to understand where staff aligns in the process."

Faculty Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ4, FAC-1 described the barriers in the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components addressing environmental trends, threats, and opportunities. FAC-1 said, "One barrier is having long-serving faculty and staff who may not be willing to buy in or feel like this is just another trip around the block." FAC-1 shared, "Overall, faculty are involved in the program designs, helping students pick an academic plan to finish." FAC-1 mentioned conveying strategies and measures by which students may stay connected during COVID-19. FAC-1 said,

"The college included online videos for the students to review and remain on track with their studies." FAC-1 also said, "The college set up Zoom phone appointments with the advisors for students to receive academic advising, during the COVID-19 pandemic."

FAC-2 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components involving competitive situations, threats, and opportunities. FAC-2 commented on the board of trustees and campus leadership's strategic planning process, stating,

"The board of trustees and campus leadership, faculty all play a role in student success and we know where we fit in the plan." FAC-3 mentioned that, for this reason, the college's strategic planning process continues to discover room for improvement. FAC-3 said, "Implementing a strategic plan is to embrace the room for continuous quality improvement."

At-Large Member Responses. In response to the IQs related to RQ4, LAR-1 noted the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy model's components of leadership abilities and priorities. LAR-1 said, "Putting action behind your planning efforts." LAR-1 also said, "Identify where staff fit within the organization."

LAR-2 described the strategic planning process in a manner that reflected Keller's (1983) academic strategy model's components of strengths and weaknesses, educational, and financial. LAR-2 said, "The leadership approach of consistently evaluating the structure of internal practices and policy are opportunities to improve our practices and program quality."

LAR-3 described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components of a competitive environment, threats, and opportunities. COVID-19 exposed the need for a change in instruction delivery, and staff embraced this change in the collegiate environment, which required a shift in planning and implementation. LAR-3 said, "This way of planning is not what we did in the past." The pandemic moved students from face-to-face instruction to a virtual setting, shifting online interaction among faculty and students.

LAR-4 explained the description of the strategic planning process also reflected Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components of market preferences, perceptions, and directions. LAR-4 said, "Students experience a qualitative perspective, with upward mobility of meeting student retention by servicing and listening to students' interests." LAR-4 said, "Quantitatively,

understanding students' enrollment measures and program outcomes are essential when assessing persistence rates." In addressing external and internal factors by workforce business measurements that have multifaceted components, LAR-4 said, "It involves looking at the completion agenda from all units."

Presentation of Findings: Document Review in Alignment with the Research Questions

This section presents the findings from the documents reviewed. Three relevant documents were obtained from the participating community college's website, including the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan; the college's Annual Report for fall 2020; and, the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. Findings are presented in alignment with each of the study's four research questions.

Document Review Findings from Research Question 1

Findings from the document review addressed RQ1—How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? The following section highlights the analysis of the document review process.

2020-2022 Strategic Plan. The document described the board of trustees' goals and priorities as a guidepost. According to the document, the college's planning process integrates the college's 18 initiatives in 5 key areas: student success, quality education, community impact, engagement, and resource management.

Annual Report for fall 2020. This document described the strategic planning process driven by affirming the college's mission, vision, and values. In addition, the report establishes student success as a priority.

Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. This document described the college's strategic planning process for moving the college forward. As described in the

document, the strategic planning process consists of building awareness of diversity and inclusion, providing training, and developing staff, faculty, and community members. In addition, the document described the collaboration between various departments to provide support, resources, and leadership toward diversity to create a positive learning environment.

Document Review Findings from Research Question 2

Findings from the document review addressed RQ2— How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? —as follows:

2020-2022 Strategic Plan. This document described the president's strategies to facilitate an ongoing strategic planning process. It described the president's strategic planning approach, which involved participants both internal and external to the college in making recommendations in the development of goals.

Annual Report for fall 2020. The document described the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process, using Sinek's (2016) "Together is Better" principle as the guiding strategy. The president incorporated a shared planning focus among both internal and external stakeholders involved with the institution to develop a completion agenda focus with significant implications.

Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. The plan described the president's strategies to facilitate the strategic planning process as a road map necessary to achieve the established goals of connecting and enriching students while providing communities with quality educational programs and services. The planning process fosters and models diversity, inclusion, and student success in an academic learning environment.

Document Review Findings from Research Question 3

Findings from the document review addressed RQ3—How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? —as follows:

2020-2022 Strategic Plan. This document described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives and retention plan. The document also described several new strategies to measure and build upon the launch of the completion initiative, including review and revision of the course schedule to ensure completion; establishing caseloads based on academic advising needs and aligned with the implementation of a guided pathways model; developing a procedure for submitting mid-term grades; revamping the early alert/student success connection system; ongoing review and modification of developmental course placement procedures; identifying and recapturing stop-outs (unenrolled students close to degree completion); developing processes to track student enrollment and course attendance; strengthening communication and support for students who drop out due to non-payment; and, integrating student survey data to identify and intervene with barriers to success.

Annual Report for fall 2020. This document described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives based on the value of placing students first. The completion initiative transformed the curriculum and strengthened student support services. The main focus areas included: retention; learning outcomes assessment; online learning; student success rates in developmental courses; and, student equity and support.

Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. The document described the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the institution's completion initiatives and excellence in student success frameworks.

Document Review Findings from Research Question 4

Findings from the document review addressed RQ4—To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components—as follows:

2020-2022 Strategic Plan. The document described that the traditions, values, and aspirations of the college mission as to enrich students' and community members' lives through quality educational programs and services, to foster a positive teaching and learning environment, and to engage in quality student success initiatives.

Annual Report for fall 2020. The document described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components.

Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. The plan described the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components of understanding leadership's role in fostering and modeling diversity, inclusion, and student success in a learning environment. The document described inclusivity as encompassing, but not limited to, race, religion, color, gender, wealth, height, marital status, veteran status, disability, national origin, handicap, gender identification, and age.

Presentation of Findings: Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

This section displays the findings aligned with the conceptual framework of Keller's (1983) academic strategy and results from participant IQs and the document review. Displaying

the findings from participant responses forms the presentation of emergent key themes and subthemes noted below.

The six elements of Keller's (1983) academic strategy include: 1) traditions, values, and aspirations; 2) strengths and weaknesses, academic and financial; 3) leadership abilities and priorities; 4) environmental trends, threats, and opportunities; 5) market preferences, perceptions, and directions; and, 6) the competitive situation, threats, and opportunities.

Presentation of Emergent Key Themes and Sub-Themes

Emergent key themes and sub-themes described how a community college president advanced the completion agenda in alignment with the institution's strategic planning practices. Participants' interview responses were analyzed using a two-cycle coding process and from which 32 themes emerged (Saldaña, 2016). These themes consisted of 8 emergent key themes and 24 sub-themes.

The eight emergent key themes were as follows: 1). Values; 2). Leadership; 3). External factors; 4). Internal factors; 5). Data; 6). Student focus; 7). Board of trustees; and, 8). Competitive situation. The 24 sub-themes were as follows: 1.1. Traditions; 1.2. Shared Vision; 1.3. Aspirations; 2.1. Priorities; 2.2. Communications; 2.3. Implementations; 3.1. COVID-19; 3.2., Funding; 3.3. Trends; 4.1. Practices; 4.2. Policies; 4.3. Outcomes; 5.1. Tracking; 5.2. Feedback; 5.3. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); 6.1. Resources; 6.2. Retention; 6.3. Enrollment; 7.1. Student Voices' Groups; 7.2. Internal Committees; 7.3. External Community Members; 8.1. Perceptions; 8.2. Strengths; and, 8.3. Weaknesses. Table 3 lists all eight emergent key themes and the corresponding sub-themes.

Table 3

Emergent Key Themes and Sub-Themes

Key Themes	Sub-Theme
1. Values	1.1. Traditions
	1.2. Shared Vision
	1.3. Aspirations
2. Leadership	2.1. Priorities
	2.2. Communications
	2.3. Implementations
3. External Factors	3.1. COVID-19
	3.2. Funding
	3.3. Trends
4. Internal Factors	4.1. Practices
	4.2. Policies
	4.3. Outcomes
5. Data	5.1. Tracking
	5.2. Feedback
	5.3. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
6. Student Focus	6.1. Resources
	6.2. Retention
	6.3. Enrollment
7. Board of Trustees	7.1. Student Voices' Groups
	7.2. Internal Committees
	7.3. External Community Members
8. Competitive Situation	8.1. Perceptions
	8.2. Strengths
	8.3. Weaknesses

The next section of the report describes the emergent key themes and sub-themes. The eight emergent key themes and corresponding sub-themes.

Key Theme: Values

Participants described how their values and the institution's values, traditions, shared vision, and aspirations aligned with the student-first focus goal of the college president's values, traditions, and aspirations. Study participants found values to be quite a heartfelt expression of caring and respect for their student population. In addition, participants demonstrated positive feedback of their teamwork focus and the commitment to work in an environment that encouraged professional growth. These contexts proved to be the participants' valid values expressed in their commitment and dedication to student success. This thematic finding of values explored by participants presented their genuine commitment in a light that revealed their true feelings in making sure students have what they need to succeed in college.

Sub-Theme: Traditions. Participants reflected on the community college's traditions. One participant shared how the college's traditions informed how s/he carried out college practices, making sure students have access to affordable tuition and services and that staff are provided with essential information to ensure student success. Other participants expressed an appreciation for the new president and the "student-first" focus as both an extension and continuation of the college's tradition. The college had only three presidents in its history, and the current president's predecessor led the college for 30 years. Each president exuded a strong vision and dedication to student experiences, and participants genuinely shared their praise for the college's direction under the new president's leadership.

The focus of the college's traditional environment for participants revealed how grateful they were to be a part of the new leadership. Participants indicated the college traditions built around the brand among student support services and continuous quality improvements in

education. Finally, participants expounded on the college mission as being long-standing and ingrained in the campus culture.

Sub-Theme: Shared Vision. Participants valued the college leadership's shared-vision approach guided by the newly hired college president's emphasis on a culture of openness. Both during and after weekly meetings, participants shared how they felt – that they were a part of the college's forward direction. The college president held many strategic planning meetings, not only with a limited, few essential workers, but among student and community groups to gather feedback on the college's planning initiatives.

Sub-Theme: Aspirations. Participants expressed rapid changes in the college's working environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. In discussing this finding, participants evaluated the college's response to COVID-19, collectively agreeing that the president responded to staff and faculty with a message of hopefulness and assurance of a safe work environment. Participants highlighted the college's COVID-19 response because it continues to guide student instruction and supportive services. Participants explained the college was off to a good start in the hands of the newly hired college president through the COVID-19 emergency plan, including incorporating essential staff in producing the college's long-term goals to ensure the institution's viability.

Key Theme: Leadership

The second theme, leadership, explained how experienced administrators related to the study and how participants found leadership ever-present. Participants described the abundance of guidance from the college president, holding in high esteem his leadership and communication abilities. Participants stated that leadership goals, which were present in every college meeting, provided a road map for the strategic planning process.

Sub-Theme: Priorities. Strategic planning priorities were presented across the college, making the document a living entity to carry out daily. Under the president's direction, a series of college-wide conversations called "Together is Better" were held. During these conversations, the president shared his vision and approach to understanding the planning priorities. In communicating these priorities, the president shared an integrated framework to convey the college's direction. Participants revealed that this approach maximized the impact of implementing the strategic planning process efficiently among college staff.

Sub-Theme: Communication. Participants remarked that the strategic planning initiative, communications were carried out multiple times at every level of the college. The college president's open-door policy for staff and students conveyed one such form of communication, and participants were encouraged and welcomed to enter at any time, even when presenting not-so-good news. Making himself available to participants revealed a welcoming openness from the college president.

Sub-Theme: Implementation. The college president introduced the COVID-19 strategic planning process for implementation, and participants described the barriers and challenges they faced in implementing the strategic plan. Participants expressed that many initiatives required faculty and staff to rethink long-standing internal college practices, leading to changes some participants found very hard. Many shared their reluctance to change or to look at things differently. By implementing the strategic planning process during the pandemic, participants shared they could not turn to old ways of thinking when most all daily operations changed under the pandemic.

Participants indicated being open-minded and not falling back on former internal practices out of comfort, the college increased remote access to student services and moved ahead with the strategic planning process. Recognizing student success as the institution share goals, participants embraced open-mindedness and new technology across the college.

Key Theme: External Factors

Participants expounded on the third theme, external factors, identifying external trends and threats at the college. Sharing experiences during campus-wide conversations helped to identify underlying trends and threats within the strategic planning process. In addition, participants shared researching other general trends and threats based on best practices in student success at other higher education institutions. Participants explained that researching other colleges helped to provide knowledge and insights into what is required to ensure the process of carrying out the college's completion initiatives for student population success.

Sub-Theme: Coronavirus COVID-19. Participants assessed the college president's leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants explained how the president's leadership reflected a proactive approach to the coronavirus threat and to the precautions required to ensure a safe work environment. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a virus first identified in Wuhan, China (CDC, 2020). On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease, COVID-19, with 'CO' standing for 'Corona,' 'VI' for 'virus,' and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as "2019 novel coronavirus" or "2019-nCoV."

The virus that causes COVID-19 most commonly spreads between people in close contact, generally within about sex feet (CDC, 2020). The CDC reported the first death from

COVID-19 occurred in the United States on January 21, 2020. As of this study in November 2020, the number of cases in the United States reached 9,105,230 with 229,932 deaths.

Participants said the college president's planning strategies in response to the pandemic included connecting the student population during the pandemic in much the same way the college provides students with multiple learning opportunities. The college offered student services through email, Zoom meetings, texting, website resources, and online chats. These services included important health information and management services, including counseling services for students experiencing depression or anxiety as a result of the pandemic. The college president's leadership approach provided a strategic plan to include sharing information with all college staff and students to answer how the college planned to move forward during the pandemic and to provide a safe working environment.

Sub-Theme: Funding. Participants remarked that a departmental funding and budget planning meeting was launched under the completion plan to identify the resources required for student attainment by each department. However, due to past practices of working in an environment of departmental silos, participants explained that this planning meeting posed a challenge to members in communicating their departmental needs and in sharing information with other department leaders.

The newly hired college president created a communication process that made it easier to work with all college department leaders and staff to communicate requirements in support of the strategic plan as it aligned with departmental initiatives. The president explained the planning strategies of a shared-vision approach that included all department leaders and staff members and encouraged department leaders' transparency during budget planning meetings.

Participants shared that receiving funds to support student success became their highest priority. The college president's planning approach built trust among department leaders to openly discuss requirements to support student success. Participants shared that budget planning allocated funds in support of the completion agenda and that budgeted line items for resources required for student success made it easier to put departmental plans in motion.

Sub-Theme: Trends. Participants focused on environmental trends and how a successful strategic plan charted the institution's future and made apparent the need for a contingency plan to address unforeseen circumstances. Participants explained no amount of forecasting could have predicted COVID-19; the pandemic became a game-changer within the college's structured strategic plan. However, one participant shared five areas—technological forecasting, economic forecasting, demographic forecasting, political-legal forecasting, and sociocultural forecasting— now included as part of his/her strategic planning process. These forecasting measures provided the support to help implement the pandemic response strategy among all college stakeholders.

Key Theme: Internal Factors

As for theme four, internal factors, participants described the technological changes to instructional and student support services. These changes impacted the strategic plan's technological structure. Participants explained how college services shifted during COVID-19 to online or telephonic formats. Participant reflections revealed a student approach focused on evaluating the revised internal practice structure and aligning with the institution's strategic plan to support the student population.

Sub-Theme: Practices. Participants expounded on the guided pathway approach to provide students with the necessary guidance and a more simplified support program to understand what is needed to complete a college degree. During COVID-19, technology played a

crucial role in connecting to the student population. Online learning included blended courses instead of face-to-face classroom instruction as all activities took place online.

Sub-Theme: Policy. Participants described broader policy changes for community colleges and the role of accreditation standards to ensure the institution met federal funding guidelines. For example, one participant indicated that the State of Michigan federal funding measures were reallocated based on the percentage of funding allocated to community colleges.

Sub-Theme: Outcomes. Participants reflected on the development and use of meaningful data assessments to refine how they both access and assess student achievement through KPIs, capturing learning outcomes as students advance on their educational pathway. Participants explained that these measures helped them to assess academic achievement using internal practices as their framework for student accountability and student success.

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Key Theme: Data

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The fifth theme, data, involved the use of data as a road map to achieve broader goals and to prepare students for educational success. Participants revealed that IPEDs' data identified the student body's demographics and its ethnically diverse makeup. In addition, using KPI data for college transfers and attracting former students—stop-outs—to the college proved invaluable in accomplishing other stated goals within the strategic plan.

Sub-Theme: Tracking. Participants described the use of student tracking measures to identify student enrollment and progress. Participants shared that the college exceeded its goals due to these tracking efforts while providing information on students in response to external demands for accountability with tangible measurements of student progress and institutional outcomes to align decision-making with educational outcomes. For example, remediation numbers track the number of students taking college-level courses after an intervention.

Sub-Theme: Feedback. Participants described opportunities for conversations and shared feedback among faculty, staff, and the student population. One participant revealed it was rewarding to discover and identify the college's threats and opportunities, engage in conversations with all employees and obtain feedback shared to help answer questions in support of teaching and student learning. The participant shared that employee feedback provided a helpful theme—Sinek's "Together is Better"— while creating strategies that aligned with the institution's strategic plan.

Sub-Theme: Key Performance Indicators. The college's KPIs helped to advance student success initiatives. KPIs provide a quick overview of student progress, college performance, student retention, and student completion rates with each data point designed to capture progress. KPIs provide helpful, precise data that drills down to every student demographic for inclusion in the college's data dashboard. In addition, participants explained that the dashboard portal allows essential staff access to the data for decision-making to help guide daily operations. For these reasons, participants shared the importance of trusting and managing the data and the use of data points to detect early alerts in striving for positive student outcomes.

Key Theme: Student Focus

The sixth theme, student focus, expounded upon each participant's experience with student success. One participant found that the college is committed to its student population and is pleased to support all students on their educational journey. Participants revealed they stand behind a quality education so that students may acquire workforce skills, obtain employment, and have an improved quality of life as a result of their community college experience.

Sub-Theme: Resources. Participants remarked on the college's chief obligation to offer high-quality services and programs for all students in a safe, welcoming environment. One participant expressed that student spend their dollars and resources to further their life aspirations and, in turn, the college must support the students, come together, and commit to providing help where possible toward student attainment and success.

Sub-Theme: Retention. Participants reflected on the facilitation and review of student retention data as part of the strategic plan. Participants described executing the completion agenda by gathering information, pulling the data together, disseminating data across college departments, and sharing findings in support of student success. Participants shared how data revealed what they were doing well and what they needed to accomplish toward the college's completion agenda goals. However, participants cautioned that looking at segregated retention data may result in one-sided outcome measurements. For example, participants shared that adjusting the course schedule posed a barrier to retention efforts due to a lack of course availability.

Sub-Theme: Enrollment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants explained that low enrollment served as a college-wide barrier and challenge. Participants stated that, in Michigan, many community colleges and universities experienced enrollment declines. However, participants also shared that the college president addressed these challenges. One participant described the college president pushing communication and dialogue, proving it was essential to keep the strategic plan front and center for all participants and to provide feedback during the enrollment planning meeting.

Key Theme: Board of Trustees

The seventh theme, board of trustees, explained the role of 18 board of trustee priorities as foundational to the strategic planning process. These 18 priorities focused on 5 key areas: student success, quality education, community impact, engagement, and resource management. These priorities are measured and tracked using focus-area targets, board metrics, and performance indicators in a continuous improvement model.

Sub-Theme: Student Voices Group. Participants described the formation of student group meetings to eliminate communication barriers among students, faculty, and staff. Student voices groups allowed students to provide vital feedback on their educational experiences and college leaders to receive input from students on the strategy to advance the completion agenda initiative. Students helped to eliminate barriers by telling their stories and communicating their interests. Participants revealed that these meetings provided essential information to answer the 'why' and 'how' of college operations from a student's perspective.

Sub-Theme: Internal Committees. Participants explained the college's internal educational advisory committee members shared planning strategies to support services required for student success, centralizing and reducing financial barriers for students to attain a college degree. In addition, the college provided student support services and training to connect students to an educational pipeline and to shorten the track to employment.

Sub-Theme: External Community Members. Participants expounded on the college's external community members' impact on the strategic plan to collect and better use data to obtain funding support from donors and foundation committee members.

The eighth theme, competitive situation, focused on the struggle for financial state funding and contributions from donors, and foundation grants to support student educational attainment. Further, participants explained how the lack of such funds at the local, state, and federal levels created barriers within the strategic plan, in efforts to promote student success.

Sub-Theme: Perceptions. The community's perception of local high school students is a vital part of the college's strategic plan and understanding these perceptions is critical to strategic planning efforts. Participants reflected on the college's perception of the local high school student population during course modifications and academic program offerings. Participants shared the perception that colleges and universities compete for good students and excellent professors, yet, the college's main priority is to help students along their educational pathways.

Sub-Theme: Strengths. Participants identified their involvement in the strategic plan as a strength in the college completion agenda initiative. Participants explained that incorporating the strategic plan as a process and a lived experience to both develop and implement a plan of approach helped them to actively work together toward a common goal. In addition, connecting people with a shared purpose, who work together and who understand the role and strength of data, further strengthens identified goals that support outcomes. The college's strengths and weaknesses were discussed in planning meetings where it was discovered that sharing the same message across the campus is a joint effort, fitting of the planning process motto "Together is Better."

Sub-Theme: Weaknesses. Based on learning outcome data, student unpreparedness was identified as part of the strategic planning process's weaknesses. Students enroll for academic

education and, for many, the community college is their first step. Student unpreparedness becomes a weakness in strategic planning outcomes as identified by KPIs. Participants revealed that learning outcomes measurements must align with the strategic plan's direction and unrelated goals and non-performing projects that do not align with the strategic plan must be eliminated. One participant revealed the college's strategic plan is mission-driven, and an open-access offering students, the opportunity to succeed.

Summary of Emergent Key Themes and Sub-Themes

The emergent key themes and sub-themes evolved from the analysis of participants' perspectives on their experiences in the strategic planning process to advance a completion agenda initiative at the institution. The following eight key themes emerged from the analysis: values, leadership, external factors, internal factors, data, student focus, board of trustees, and competitive situation—contributed to the strategic planning focus and such initiatives as data tracking, aligning services, and communicating the college's direction at all levels. Finally, the emerging themes of participants reflected Keller's (1983) academic strategy components of values, commitment, and external factors as key focus strategies of the planning process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings related to how a community college president utilized strategic planning to advance a completion agenda initiative at a community college. The topics covered in Chapter 4 included a restatement of the research questions, the six elements of Keller's (1983) academic strategy, documents reviewed, characteristics of the participants; presentation of findings by research questions; presentation of findings aligned with the conceptual framework; presentation of findings from the document review. The final discussion

in Chapter 4 was the presentation of the emergent key themes and sub-themes that emerged from

the data analysis.

Chapter 5 - Interpretations, Conclusions, Recommendations

This qualitative, single case study described the experiences shared by participants of how a community college president utilized strategic planning practices within the organization to advance the completion agenda initiatives. Chapter five provides an overview and the purpose of the study, the research questions, discussion of major findings, conclusion, major themes conclusion by research questions, implications for practice, the implication for practitioners and aspiring leaders, the recommendation for further research, summary discussion of the study's limitation, COVID-19, and researcher's reflections.

Overview of the Study

Chapter One introduced the topic, problem statement, purpose of the study, methodology, research questions, conceptual framework, the significance of the study, delimitation, assumptions, limitations, definitions of terms, and provided the organization of the study. Chapter Two provided the literature review and a literature review analysis. Chapter Three explained the research methodology, research design, ethical considerations, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and a summary. Chapter Four reported the findings of the study by the research questions, conceptual framework, documents reviewed, emergent key themes, and sub-themes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore how a community college president used strategic planning concepts to advance the institution's completion initiatives.

Research Questions

The four research questions that guided this inquiry were: 1) How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college? 2) How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process? 3) How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives? 4) To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

The study was conducted to explore how a community college president utilized strategic planning strategies to advance completion agenda initiatives throughout an organization. The study sought to identify strategies or institutional, internal practices used to advance the completion agenda within the community college. The results of the study discovered evidence of a participatory strategic planning effort where all stakeholders within the organization were engaged in the strategic planning process. The findings show that the14 participants were able to explain how the community college president used strategic planning strategies to advance the completion agenda initiative within the organization.

Critical Role of Communication

Analysis of the participants' responses revealed how communication played a critical role in the strategic planning practices of the college to promote the completion agenda. According to the participants, communication was a vital strategy in the college president's strategic planning process as the president involved all stakeholders in the planning process. The analysis revealed how factors in the college's mission, including its traditions, values, and aspirations, were discussed and used to inform the college's strategic planning processes. One participant

described the strategic planning process as one led by the college president's goals, reinforcing goals set by the board of trustees. According to the participants in this study, the college's strategic planning process was organized in a way that stakeholder groups were able to articulate their part (role) in the strategic planning process. The researcher gathered that stakeholder participation in the planning process enabled stakeholder groups to assess the college's completion agenda outcomes, including the board of trustees' goals to establish the college's framework for constructing strategic planning goals– to advance student success.

President's Use of Strategies

Participants described how the college president provided the strategies required to facilitate the strategic planning process within the institution. The strategic planning strategy's themes reflected the college's vision and focused on ensuring both student access and success. The findings suggested that both faculty and front-line administrators shared the same priorities and common focus on programs and services toward continuous student learning and academic enrichment outcomes. Nearly all participants observed the college president's planning priority of a student-first focus as a guide to the institution's core values in directing the strategic plan.

The findings revealed a distinct tendency among all 14 participants to use similar words to describe their perspectives on the college president's strategic planning processes such as the president held campus-wide conversations about the planning process and the president's planning process focused on strategies necessary to analyze and use data-driven KPI's to guide the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for student success.

Use of Data Metrics

The participants reported that a data matrix played a vital role in the strategic planning process and in allocating and aligning student support services. Measures in the data matrix

identified the resources required to advance persistence and transfer rates and to align services to support student success.

Openness to the Mission

Further findings revealed participants' genuine, heartfelt commitment to the college's mission, traditions, values, and aspirations was an essential guide to the strategic plan's success. Participants openly expressed their commitment to student access and success and their appreciation of the college's practices, values, and aspirations that both contribute and inform their role in the student-first focus college practice. Participants' perceptions of barriers due to the external factors included: the consequences of governmental directives and subsidy requirements; program guidelines and course offerings challenges; staffing issues; and, requirements that interfere with students completing their degree program.

Capacity to Lead

The findings explained how the college president cultivated his ability to prioritize and lead, a quality featured in Keller's (1983) academic strategy model. Findings from the study also revealed ways the college president shared his ability to lead with an understanding of what it takes to advance the completion initiative at the college. Participants shared ways the president communicated to college stakeholders' knowledge of the college's student population and the appropriate communication strategies required to obtain a college-wide, participatory effort. Participants explained the college president's understanding of the college culture and of working with students, staff, and the community. Keller (1983) noted these leadership abilities are key to allocating college resources in the strategic planning process to address any environmental threats and opportunities. Finally, participants discussed the college president's

leadership expertise, aptitude, and competence as essential to institutional planning effectiveness.

Perception of Trustees

Participants also explained the role of trustees' input on strategic planning goals in concert with the college president's facilitation. Participants discussed that planning initiatives led by the president and other leadership stakeholders, including the provost, vice-president of finance, deans, and principal faculty members, resulted in the full measure of institutional planning strategies. Participants explained their strategic planning perspectives on educational programs and student support services, their quality evaluation, the academic program's growth, and the determination of strategic planning strategies to trim or discard internal college practices.

The Scheme of Keller's 1983 Model

The findings revealed participants' perceptions that the strategic planning process of Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components are similar to the approach used by the college under investigation in this study. These findings on the president's leadership approach were also similar to those characteristics identified and reflected in Keller's (1983) academic strategy component on leadership abilities and priorities. The analysis of the data also revealed that planning strategies used by the institution helped to guide the student-focused goals found in the mission and vision statements at the institution. Each participant shared a common perspective of student success regarding completion initiatives and strategic planning processes. The researcher attributed this common understanding to the president's articulation of a clear message about the planning process.

Other findings revealed the completion initiative planning approach agenda was a participatory effort as revealed in participants' comments about their experiences during

implementation of the planning strategy. Participants described the leadership approach of the college as a bottom-up approach. Unlike a top-down approach, participants explained the president's trust in college stakeholders provided vital information required to implement and execute the college's strategic planning practices. The findings also described that the bottom-up approach supported the college's strategic plan with open and honest communication. Analysis of both the strategic planning committee participants and the president's cabinet committee participants' responses showed how the strategic planning process created an opportunity to change or update internal practices to reflect what is required for programs in support of student success. Participants described how the college utilized Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to help advance the student success initiatives. These KPI outcomes served as a guide, showing all that was required of the college's daily practice of accessibility ensuring student support services were being operationalized as internal practices.

Discussions of Findings Related to the Research Questions

This section of the study reviews the major findings based on the analysis of data collected from the participant's responses to interview questions.

Research Question 1

In response to research question 1, participants reported that the president promoted a student-first focus to include student involvement in the college's strategic plan. Analysis of the participants' comments showed that participants had a clear understanding of the college's strategic planning strategies as being at the heart of the planning focus to help advance the scope of the completion initiative. LAR-1 made comments about the strategic planning process that reflected Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components, leadership abilities, and priorities.

LAR-1 said, "Putting action behind your planning efforts makes the strategic plan a living document." Participants support the strategic plan as a living document and a continual process involving all stakeholders in the communication of the planning process forming a team effort. The college president's leadership priorities led to the creation of an environment of shared efforts to address environmental trends and threats that might impact a student's educational path. One participant stated that the college's strategic plan became a living document by reporting strategic planning outcomes in every planning meeting session. Participants' reflections revealed the president set the tone for the strategic plan to be a living document for all stakeholders to carry out.

Research Question 2

Participants' responses explained how the college's direction guided the facilitation of the strategic planning process and how the president's strategic planning strategies were applied in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on campus. Some educational policies and systems had to be addressed to transform institutional practices during the strategic planning process, supporting Keller's (1983) components of leadership abilities and priorities when applied to the institution's strategic academic plan. The environmental aspect of the pandemic prevented face-to-face instruction at the college, and the college president took leadership action, responding with a strategic plan that carefully considered stakeholders within the college environment. The president then revised the strategic plan to support requirements to provide a safe school environment as the pandemic ensued. Document review findings support participants' responses to the president's strategy and focus toward a "student-first approach."

Research Question 3

Many participants shared their experiences of how college planning focused on internal and external factors on the institution's completion initiatives. COVID-19 was an external factor that contributed to the president making adjustments to strategic planning practices. The document review confirmed that outside factors, such as state boards of higher education, economic recession, demographic changes, or state policies and governmental mandates, can impact planning strategies.

During the pandemic, the college made many changes to accommodate a safe learning environment. As noted in the literature review, leading an educational institution is a multifaceted and complex undertaking. However, this study concluded that the awareness of these factors impacted the strategic planning process and that the president's planning strategies made the necessary changes to address internal and external factors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the college president's laser focus on a student-focused approach was a priority in the strategic planning process, meaning the president's COVID-19 strategic plan addressed such factors as the college's technology infrastructure, student population needs, safe working requirements, program cost adjustments and funding, and federal policy adjustments – all modified as a result of the external factor of the pandemic.

Research Question 4

The participants revealed data that were similar to factors identified in Keller's (1983) academic strategy model of ensuring the college's traditions, values, and aspirations are presented in the strategic planning process. These similarities identified in the participants' comments that were aligned with the study's conceptual framework components in the planning process, included: (a) traditions, values, and aspirations; (b) strengths and weaknesses, academic

and financial; (c) leadership abilities and priorities; (d) environmental trends, threats and opportunities; (e) market preferences, perceptions, and directions; and, (f) the competitive situation, threats, and opportunities. Participants remarked how the college's previous president viewed traditions, values, and aspirations when compared to the new president's traditions, values, and aspirations, aligned with the college's vision and mission of creating a learning environment with a student-first focus. The literature supported similar community college traditions, values, and aspirations and revealed how a community college's president's traditions help to support student access, teaching, and learning in a college environment.

In this study, participants described how traditions helped to simplify the completion agenda initiative within the strategic planning effort. Participants explained how knowledge of traditions in the strategic planning process helped the college refine its mission and vision and clarified the traditions, values, and aspirations as guides for a student-first focus within the planning process. According to the participants, the college president laid out strategies in the planning process to help identify, designate, combine, and disseminate stakeholders' shared efforts during the college's planning process. The findings from the study concluded that communication is a critical factor in the initial planning of the strategic planning process to promote the completion agenda.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Literature

This section of the study presents a discussion of findings related to the major topics covered in the literature review in Chapter Two.

Overview of Academic Strategy

The reported college's strategic planning practices aligned with Keller's (1983) academic strategy model. For example, participants described strategic planning as an alignment of the

college's values, financial resources, leadership abilities to communicate, and internal and external environmental factors in the direction of the college's completion initiatives. Participants' perspectives show comparisons to the college president's planning strategy to formulate a communication flow that addressed the institution's critical needs.

The research findings suggested that the participating college's strategic planning process focused on two crucial areas: internal practices and the external environment. Based on the data analysis, the college's strategic planning process logically aligned planning strategies with the college's mission and vision while clarifying the traditions, values, and aspirations that guided planning strategies among the college's stakeholders. The findings suggested that the college continues to incorporate its traditions, values, and aspirations into its planning practices and confirmed that planning strategies continue to focus on external factors and threats that may impact student success.

Previous research and the findings from this study indicate that a college's traditions help to support student access. These traditions also help to simplify and advance the college's completion agenda initiative. At the participating college, participants reported that the strategic planning process examined the college's internal resources, practices, and values while identifying and addressing the institution's critical needs. The college evaluated critical needs by examining the external environment, addressing students' technology needs and requirements, and funding to support program costs.

Overview of Strategic Planning

Participants reported that they were knowledgeable as to the vital contribution strategic planning practices made in support of the college's academic completion initiatives. The data showed that participants' perceptions of strategic planning were aligned with how the college

president communicated the institution's goals and strategic planning strategies to the stakeholders. Participants' observations supported the notion that they fully understood the institution's strategic goals and concluded that the completion agenda initiative focused on student learning outcomes. According to the participants, the guided pathway approach and KPI data were efficient tools to drive strategic planning decision-making and to determine what was required to support student learning outcomes. Guided pathways provided an effective and efficient integration with the student success model.

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Components of the Strategic Plan

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Participants' responses showed their familiarity with the components of a strategic plan. These components included the mission, vision, and direction of organizational operations. According to participants' feedback, the collective, integrated strategic planning process helped to reduce campus silos and uncover data stored in decentralized locations throughout the campus, data that may aid in developing academic strategies. The community college president aligned the college's values and guiding principles to the goals and data objectives essential to the strategic planning process. Participants used KPI data to evaluate what works in the student population. The college president formalized the institution's practices by making the completion initiative a distinct component within the strategic planning process. Data guided the details within the strategic plan, including details related to human resources, facilities, curriculum, online instruction, budgeting priorities, computer equipment for students, and the technical support essential to meet strategies within the planning objectives. The alignment of these components can be critical to institutional strategic planning practices. Participants stated the college president communicated a well-developed strategic plan, revealing employee roles

and objectives as a part of the strategic planning strategy. An institutional staff structure must also be in place to address planning needs in a well-developed planning approach.

Strategic Planning Barriers Within Community Colleges

The external barrier of the COVID-19 pandemic created an unforeseen barrier to the strategic planning process. Other external barriers included a decrease in state budget cuts and a reduction in student enrollment during the pandemic. Michigan community colleges experienced enrollment declines due to the pandemic, yet, the college president took a proactive approach and developed a college pandemic response plan as part of the strategic plan. The college pandemic response plan was first instated on May 11, 2020, and updated on October 21, 2020. The pandemic response plan was communicated with all stakeholders and outlined several levels of safety to assure all college stakeholders. During the strategic planning process, campus meetings among staff served as a means to communicate the pandemic plan, ensuring students and staff remained in a safe school environment.

The pandemic response plan included several planning components to minimize social and educational disruption and to ensure the college's ability to continue core and critical functions during this crisis. The community college president communicated guidance to faculty and staff of the internal plan and identified specific resources to help individuals during the pandemics. In this way, the college president's strategic planning process strategies aligned with Keller's (1983) academic strategy model components, components which included strategies that focused on involving all team members in the communication and implementation of the strategic planning process.

Strategic Plan: Leading, Implementing, and Operations

Participants described how organizational silos were eliminated under the college president's participatory planning effort. EXE-1 stated that communication was a challenge during the early stages of developing the strategic plan, enough so that communication became an identified barrier in the planning process. EXE-1 shared that, when setting goals to align with strategic planning practices, the challenge was how to include the college leaders. Silos are invisible barriers that can destroy an organization's teams during the planning efforts. As a result, the college president applied the approach "Together is Better" as the forward-thinking process strategy to support the student-first focus planning goal. The planning goal achieved participation from all stakeholders within the organization.

Strategies used to create a voice among the campus leaders and to include all stakeholders formulated a shared approach to implementing successful leadership. Operational and tactical planning strategies became the approach to advance completion agenda initiatives as a part of the academic strategy. The shared approach of the college president's planning strategy formalized and integrated strategic planning efforts. Participants understood how operational and tactical planning is an essential component of completion agenda initiatives. The planning strategies were incorporated into weekly campus strategic planning meetings, and these meetings helped to provide an understanding of the college's policies and procedures that impacted student learning. These planning sessions also uncovered the organization's strengths and weaknesses and helped to align college policies and procedures with student support services.

Overview of the Completion Agenda

Strategic planning practices and the literature's completion agenda show little evidence of how leaders integrate completion initiatives into their strategic planning process. The literature

review suggested community colleges struggle to capture strategies to map student progress from when they first enter the institution to the end of their program. The strategic planning process outlined in this study is quite the opposite with a student-first focus and strategic planning goals and priorities consisting of 18 initiatives aligned with 5 key focus areas: student success, quality education, community impact, engagement, and resource management. Progress for the plan was measured and tracked using board metrics and KPIs.

The 18 initiatives in the strategic plan guided the completion agenda. The strategic plan included the college's traditions, values, and aspirations to ensure and provide all students with quality education and an opportunity to receive the guidance needed to earn a community college degree, credential, or transfer to a four-year institution. The designated goals ensure tuition and services are affordable and available to all students. Findings concluded that support for the college's staff through open communication is key to the strategic planning process. The strategic plan incorporated student success key areas, including retention, learning outcomes assessment, online learning, developmental course success rates, and student equity and support. Further findings support the college leadership's dedication to supporting all students on their educational journey.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Document Review

Aside from the participants' interviews related to their experiences with the president's strategies to advance completion initiatives in the strategic plan, three relevant documents were reviewed as they related to the strategic planning process to advance completion initiatives. The documents included the college's 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, the college's Annual Report for fall 2020, and the college's Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan. A discussion of each document follows in turn.

1. The 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, guided by trustee priorities, consisted of 18 initiatives aligned from 5 key focus areas: student success, quality education, community impact, engagement, and resource management. The document describes how student progress is measured and tracked using board metrics and KPIs. It outlines the 18 initiatives within the strategic plan that guide the completion agenda and that the president's strategic planning strategy consists of a student-first focus.

2. The Annual Report for fall 2020 presented a comprehensive strategic planning effort among all stakeholders under the direction of the college president. RES-1 referenced Sinek's (2016) book, "Together is Better," explaining how the book contributed to strategic planning by incorporating a shared vision. The planning strategy also incorporated a daily leadership focus in campus meetings, stating that, in the fall of 2020, the college president initiated more than 25 small group conversations with faculty and staff. During 2019, more than 300 faculty members, administrators, staff, and students participated in developing a new strategic plan to support student success. Participants explained how the organization prepared to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants responded heroically by working together to ensure the college incorporated health and safety within the organization. The college president also updated college policies to reflect online delivery of both classroom instruction and student services amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The College Diversity and Inclusion 2021-2023 Strategic/Tactical Plan exhibits the college's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Participants' responses reveal that the

4. college's open admission policies and support all students with equity and inclusion

   opportunities. The college president's strategic plan is committed to enriching the lives of

   students and community members through quality educational programs and services.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore how a community college president used

strategic planning concepts to advance the institution's completion initiatives. This study aligned

research questions with Keller's (1983) conceptual framework of an academic strategy model.

Research question 1 identified how participants described the college's strategic planning

process. Research question 2 explained how the president's strategy facilitated the institution's

strategic planning process. Research question 3 described the internal and external factors that

impacted the launch of the college completion initiative. Research question 4 revealed how

participants valued their college traditions and aspirations, as noted from Keller's (1983)

academic strategy components. The remainder of this section of the study outlines the major

conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data. Participants demonstrated a significant

knowledge of the college strategic planning process and expressed an understanding of how they

fit into their strategic planning process at the college.

The Major Theme Conclusions by Research Questions

This section of the study presents the major conclusions drawn from the analysis of the

data.

Research Question 1

How did the participants describe the strategic planning process at the college?

Conclusion: The participants described the process as one that focused on the engagement of all

stakeholders. According to participants, clear communication was at the forefront of the planning

process. Participants reported that they were able to articulate the president's vision and approach to the college's strategic planning process. Participants also described their experiences sharing the planning process and how the college president addressed the topic in every meeting. One participant explained how these meetings provided a play-by-play to strategic planning efforts among all college stakeholders. Another participant explained the strategic planning process was a bottom-up approach, and that every stakeholder knew his/her role and responsibility to reach the 18 strategic planning initiatives goals.

Research Question 2

How did the participants describe the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process?

Conclusion: Study participants described the president's strategies in facilitating the strategic planning process as comprehensive and inclusive. They appreciated the president's strategy of empowering the student population by facilitating campus meetings with students and by encouraging campus all campus departments to provide supportive services to students based on the KPI results. These strategies provided participants with an understanding of the strategic planning efforts as they contribute to the college's planning process.

Research Question 3

How did the participants describe the reasons (internal or external) that contributed to the launch of the institution's completion initiatives?

Conclusion: Study participants described how college completion initiatives applied to their internal practices and in response to the external threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants remarked that they embraced and understood the college's student-first focus and addressed students' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants shared the importance

of making sure students were provided additional resources during the pandemic in the form of scholarship opportunities for students in need of computers, textbooks, and that the college converted some departments to an online setting to address students' needs and concerns. One key internal factor was the opportunity for students to conduct conference calls with academic advisors. These initiatives focus on challenges that had a significant impact on student advancement in their programs of study.

Research Question 4

To what extent did the participants describe the strategic planning process to reflect Keller's (1983) academic strategy components?

Conclusion: Participants' perceptions of the strategic planning process corresponded with the conceptual framework of Keller's (1983) academic strategy components. Participants conceptualized their knowledge of how the college president aligned the strategic planning process with the college's mission and operations, thereby supporting the college's core business. Participants reported that they believed in the college's mission and vision, in a student-first focused approach, and in meeting students where they are to advance their educational goals. Participants' perceptions of strategic initiatives supported the traditions, values, and aspirations of the college and the college president's strategy to help advance student completion initiatives.

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Implications for Practice

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The findings from the study suggest that strategic planning matters and communication are essential. If an institution's goal is to promote a completion agenda, the findings from this study reveal the importance of clear goals and stakeholder engagement in the planning process will need to be obtained. The participants in this study revealed that by understanding and

valuing the work being documented in the strategic plan, all stakeholders will have greater knowledge of the goals during the planning process of the strategic planning efforts.

The findings from this study indicate that practitioners must demonstrate strong communication skills throughout the planning process; communication is vital. Throughout the planning process, practitioners are encouraged to hold regular campus meetings to provide open lines of communication, which will prove helpful when conveying how staff members fit in the strategic planning process. This planning practice can be extremely productive during the creation of the new strategic plan. The findings from this study also revealed the importance of the use of data in the strategic planning process,

For example, KPIs reflect what is needed for front-line administrators to foster student success and to increase the number of students who complete their courses, degrees, certificates, or transfers. Findings conclude the strategic planning process is a continuous, internal process. These findings explained how programs and services align with the college's strategic planning strategies as identified through the KPI data outcomes.

The participants in this study reported how stakeholders were connected to strategic planning efforts through the leadership and stakeholder engagement strategies provided by the college president. A practitioner may use the findings from this study as a guide to develop and sustain strategic planning processes where stakeholders can become more connected to each other and campus completion agenda initiatives by being involved with the strategic planning efforts. This study's findings also provide evidence that an effective communication strategy is critical for advancing the institution's strategic planning efforts.

Implications for Practitioners and Aspiring Leaders

Based on this study's findings, community college practitioners may benefit from strategic planning awareness training. For example, an institution may consider using the internal strategies of planning and data matrix to create a shared vision to discuss a departmental strategic plan in support of college goals. Participants in this study reported that outdated internal practices must be addressed or eliminated in order to develop opportunities for new organizational practices, growth, and opportunities.

Participants reported that effective strategic planning required a participatory approach to include all stakeholders. Leaders who are responsible for shaping or executing a strategic plan must refrain from using an organizational silo approach. For a strategic plan to be of benefit to an institution's planning efforts, findings from this study suggest it is good practice to create a strategic plan that incorporates engagement among all stakeholders.

Recommendations for Further Research

Developing a strategic plan for an organization can be highly complicated for new leaders, especially during a global pandemic. It may be beneficial to conduct a quantitative study to measure surveyed results of a larger group of institutional representatives. This type of quantitative study may examine factors that contributed to a surveyed analysis by planning percentages to examine the planning outcome that an organization developed. The implemented results could be measured by surveys measuring the action plan conclusion of the planning advancement of an organization's strategic plan.

Summary

This study was conducted to describe participants' lived experiences in describing how a community college president utilized strategic planning to advance completion agenda

initiatives. The study identified participants' perceptions and understanding of strategic planning

practices to advance the completion agenda. The study concluded that participants at the

participating college were aware of the college's strategic planning initiative as it was

communicated to them by the college president. Based on the review of the literature and the

findings from the study, it is likely that in the common decade, community colleges will continue

to engage in strategic planning efforts. The findings from this study suggest that effective

planning will be guided by clear goals, strong communication strategies, and full engagement of

stakeholders. These three areas are recognized by the researcher as needing concerted and

coordinated leadership from the president. Future training on the important strategic planning to

institutional effectiveness will help community colleges be prepared to advance maintain their

goal of promoting student success.

Discussion of the Study's Limitation: COVID-19

From this study, the COVID-19 pandemic was identified as an external factor that

contributed to a shift in strategic planning efforts to advance the college's completion initiative.

This external barrier, the pandemic, impacted not only the college, but the entire world.

However, the pandemic was not a game-changer that prevented the institution from moving

forward to advance the community college's completion agenda. Study participants reported that

the community college president reworked the strategic planning focus to include and support

COVID-19 safety strategies based on the global health requirements for workplace safety.

Further, pandemic planning strategies included guidelines for identifying alternative methods to

deliver services and class offerings institutionally. In addition, the college's alternative action

planning strategies consisted of cross-training among essential employees to create redundancies

for all critical staff and faculty functions. Also, during the pandemic, the institution's planning

strategies included measures within the college president's planning practices to incorporate the expectation of implementation among the essential staff and faculty through the use of multiple communication methods, including email, website, and phone.

Participants remarked that, throughout this planning process, staff and faculty were well informed of available services as well as services temporarily suspended due to the pandemic. Participants stated that job performance expectations, staff and faculty schedules, mechanisms to report absences and illnesses to supervisors, and all other relevant information on each department's specific operations were effectively communicated throughout the pandemic.

Researcher's Reflections

In this section, the researcher reflects on the impact of the study during the dissertation journey. I remember hearing a few leaders state the skillsets they learned during their dissertation journey and gained from writing a dissertation. The skillsets shared were: have good listening skills; follow the directions of your dissertation chair; and, preserve a teachable, open-mind approach to learning and completing your dissertation. As I reflect, I can truly embrace what was stated by these previous dissertation scholars.

Focusing on how I conducted the study, I like to add to that list additional lessons that impacted me as I completed this dissertation journey. First, I'd like to share a well-known quote by Myles Munroe, "Communication is the ability to ensure that people understand not only what you say but also what you mean." Second, strategic planning involves outlining an organization's purpose, goals, and the planning strategies necessary to accomplish these goals. After conducting my study, I learned that implementing a strategic plan within an organization can be easier said than done.

After interviewing participants, I found many vital components that incorporated an effective strategic plan in an organization. In this study, I learned how a college president used planning strategies to implement and execute planning practices to include all stakeholders to support student success. I had an opportunity to understand what is required and what makes for an effective strategic plan, and that main factor was communication. Strategic planning and leadership go hand-in-hand, including the process to customize the method to fit an effective communication process. Participants were very knowledgeable of the college's strategic planning goals and what it took to implement the planning goals. Participants shared the importance of the communication process at the college level and understood their roles in the strategic planning process and the requirements to execute the strategic plan. They shared various strategies and the critical focus of their strategic plan and their valuable vision of putting students first. The study revealed the strategic planning facilitation and how success came about from the college president's excellent leadership abilities to embrace communication and embrace a shared vision to include all college stakeholders. The study also revealed the importance of implementing a strategy consistent with a well-defined and understood plan among the college staff. The success stemmed from training and understanding the team effort required for a successful strategic plan.

As a result of this study, it would be my suggestion to others that strategic planning is not a method, a technique, or science – it is a commitment to bring about change. I learned a poorly executed strategic plan can be flawed in the planning process, posing barriers to uninformed team members in an organization. Conversely, a comprehensively designed and executed strategic planning process enhances collaboration among colleagues throughout the campus.

Lastly, my final advice on what I learned in this dissertation journey is not to give up, but to keep writing. However, after interviewing participants and observing their commitment to student success, I learned in this journey not to incorporate putting limits on myself and to always remember, "Nothing to it but to do it," knowing that a finished dissertation is a good Dissertation.

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Appendix A - Participant's Interview Protocol

Participant: _____

 Researcher: _____

Date, Time and Location of the Interview: _____

Interview Protocol

Interview questions will be used in the interview process. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested the interviewer take notes during the interview session during breaks between interviews.

Introduction: I'd like to thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, the purpose of the study explored how a community college president uses strategic planning concepts to advance the institution's completion initiatives. This case study looks at how a community college president facilitates a strategic planning process to launch a completion agenda initiative in Michigan. What we discuss will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. I will be asking you to review the transcription with the notes I make regarding my understanding of what you say.

Research Study Overview: The purpose of the study explored how a community college president uses strategic planning concepts to advance the institution's completion initiatives. I am interested in your perspective regarding strategic planning to advance the community college's completion initiatives. As the interview progresses, if at any point you need me to clarify something, you have a question, or you would like to stop the interview, please let me know. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Appendix B - Interview Questions

IQ1: Please tell the researcher about the strategies used to launch the completion agenda (RQ1, RQ3)

IQ2: Please tell the researcher how you connected the completion initiative to the strategic plan (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

IQ3: Tell the researcher about the traditions, values, and aspirations of the college. (RQ4)

IQ4: Please tell the researcher about the process you used to assess the college's strengths and weaknesses. (RQ3, RQ4)

IQ5: What approach did you use to assess the college's leadership abilities? (RQ2, RQ4)

IQ6: What was your experience in identifying the trends, threats, and opportunities at the college? (RQ3, RQ4)

IQ7: Please tell the researcher about the college's completion agenda and the elements of the completion agenda (RQ3)

IQ8: What reasons (threats or opportunities) contributed to the college's adoption of the completion agenda? (RQ3, RQ4)

IQ9: How did you determine that the completion agenda was the right direction for the college? (RQ3)

IQ10: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the completion agenda (RQ3, RQ4)

IQ11: Please describe any barriers or challenges you faced with implementing the strategic plan. (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

IQ12: What steps did you take to address the barriers and challenges faced? (RQ3, RQ4)

IQ13: Please describe your strategies for connecting the completion agenda to the strategic plan (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

IQ14: Please describe the role other stakeholders played in the strategic planning process (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

IQ15: How did you determine the role different stakeholders played in the completion agenda? (RQ2, RQ3)

IQ16: How did you determine the role stakeholders played in the strategic planning process? (RQ1, RQ2)

IQ17: Please describe the direct role you played in facilitating the strategic plan; and the completion agenda (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4)

Appendix C - Informed Consent Agreement

Research Title: Presidential Leadership and Strategic Planning: A Case Study

Researcher: Annette Hough

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this study was to explore how a community college president used strategic planning concepts and strategies to advance an institution's completion initiatives at a Michigan community college.

What will I have to do?

- 14 participants in this study received 17 interview questions by email to review. The participants had two days to review the 17 interview questions. After two days, the researcher set up an actual interview day and time to align with the participant's availability to accommodate the participant's schedule. The site for the study is in the state of Michigan.

- The procedure for the interview included setting the appointment up in advance. The actual interview occurred online via the Zoom session to answer the submitted 17 interview questions, which should not take longer than 60 minutes.

- Allow your interview to be audiotaped.

What are the benefits and risks? Is it private?

- There are no risks to participants in this study.

- All information collected for research is confidential.

Can I quit if I want to?

- Your participation in the interview and study is voluntary. You may choose not to complete the interview and drop out of the study at any time.

- Simply let me know that you no longer want to participate and all of your information will be destroyed and not used in the study.

Participant Agreement and Responsibilities

- I understand this study is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation.

- By signing this informed consent, I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understood this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Name: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D - Transcript Verification Agreement

Research Title: Presidential Leadership and Strategic Planning: A Case Study

Researcher: Annette Hough

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this study was to explore how a community college president used strategic planning concepts and strategies to advance an institution's completion initiatives at a Michigan community college.

Dear Participant,

Annette Hough, the researcher, has attached a written summary highlighted from our post-interview "Zoom" meeting. This notification reflects the verbal interview that affirms our conversation and ensures that the written summary accounts align with your reality. There is no need to respond should you affirm that the written summary meets your approval. Conversely, please communicate via email within 48 hours of receiving this notification; if you have any concerns. A "No-Response" after 48 hours will be an assumption of approval. Thank you so much for your time, sharing your strategic planning knowledge on the completion agenda.

_____ I approve of the interview highlights without changes.
_____ I approve of the interview highlights with noted changes.
_____ I do not approve of the interview highlights.

Please provide your signature below. If you are receiving this form electronically, type your name and date below.

_____ _____

(Signature of Research Participant)   (Date)

Return this form to Annette Hough by e-mail at annett2@ksu.edu.

Sincerely,
Annette Hough