COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE

AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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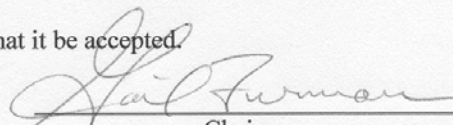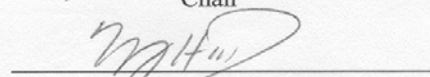WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
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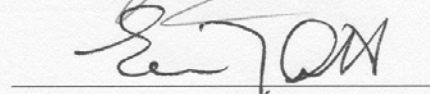To the Faculty of Washington State University:

    The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of AMY

ESTERHUIZEN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

                                                Chair

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students. Consistent with the purpose, this study used qualitative, phenomenologically-oriented research design and methods. Open-ended, qualitative interviews were used to collect data. Questions that guided the study were: (a) What is the nature of community college student government experience? (b) What is the perceived impact of student government experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students? (c) How does this experience benefit the community college student, the community college, the community, and others?

The overall experience of participating in community college student government was positive for the participants of this study. Community college student government provided an environment where participants developed through the relationships they experienced, their opportunities for travel, their connection to money and power, and the challenges they negotiated. The participants believed these experiences increased their self-confidence, and that the on-the-job learning that took place prepared them for later real-world work environments. In

addition, these experiences helped participants to develop people skills through which they asserted their newfound "voices." Participants believed the skills gained through their student government experience were of life-long value because the skills positively influenced their personal relationships, their community and civic involvement, and their professional and political effectiveness.

On the basis of these findings, it appears that community college student government engagement is beneficial to individual development and subsequent life experiences of students. The results of this study may be useful to higher education professionals in their efforts to be intentional when providing student development services.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children and future grandchildren,

in whom I hope to inspire an appreciation for life-long education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tanisha rushes from her class, Math Analysis 10, to a quiet room in the student union

building to practice her commencement speech with the coach of the Speech and Debate Club.

She has rehearsed this speech at least ten times. The coach will continue to assist her during the

four weeks remaining before commencement. When they finish practicing, Tanisha walks

through the student union and buys a lunch with the intent of retreating to her office for a quiet

moment. She scans the student union surroundings while exchanging casual greetings with

dozens of people. She notices that a student employee is cleaning the tables, the microphones

are set up for a candidate forum, and the Chess Club is hanging a banner to advertise their

upcoming competition. Tanisha stops a cell phone solicitor who is handing out promotional

materials to students. She explains the campus policy and sends the solicitor to the director's

office to obtain a permit. As Tanisha turns to walk up the stairs, a student falls into stride with

her, asking for a moment. The student points out that smokers are hanging around outside

doorways, impacting air quality surrounding the buildings, in violation of the college's posted

smoking policy. The concerned student wants to know, "What is going to be done about this?"

They agree on a meeting time later that day. Tanisha plans to listen to the student's concerns and

help her connect with the campus wellness committee. Tanisha enters her office, grabs her mail

and reviews it in the fifteen minutes she has to eat. Her next stop is the congress room where the

student government meets. She arrives there at the same time as Emily and Juan, and together

they prepare the representative's folders, organize chairs and tables, and double-check the

meeting agenda. Various club representatives, gallery members, and the guest speaker begin to congregate in the room. Tanisha greets them and answers questions as they settle into their seats. She takes her place at the head of the room, taps her gavel, calls the meeting to order, and proceeds with the formal business of the week. Tanisha is the Associated Student Body (ASB) president at a community college. Emily is the vice president, and Juan is the secretary.

This study will explore the experiences of community college students like Tanisha, Juan, and Emily, who are involved in student government during their community college years, and the impact of these experiences on their personal development and subsequent lives.

Research Problem

Community college graduates are likely to stay in their communities (Carnegie Commission, 1970). Thus community colleges are particularly interested in promoting students' development as persons and citizens who will benefit the community. Avenues for this development include student involvement in extracurricular activities and participation in student government.

Research has established a relationship between student involvement in out-of-classroom campus activities and student development (Kuh, Branch, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994; Astin, 1984). This involvement has been correlated with student degree persistence and satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1984). In turn, the development that individuals have gained through student involvement has been correlated with increased social and intellectual skills (Astin, 1984; Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005).

Community college students like Tanisha, Emily, and Juan, who choose to serve the larger student body as student government officers, do so within a context of both high exposure

and high expectation from others. Though many college programs actively train student leaders, these leaders also learn much about organizational skills, diplomacy, and collaboration from their direct experiences as student government officers (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005). Theoretically, the acquisition of these skills and others will enhance the participants' lives beyond college and its impact on student development and after-college life experiences.

However, while research has determined that involvement in out-of-class activities is correlated with student development, there is a void in research on the impact of participation specifically in community college student government. In particular, there is no extant research that has explored this topic from the point of view of the students. Therefore, a phenomenological qualitative approach is needed to build on current student development literature and to gain a broader understanding of the community college student government experience.

Background

Almost half of the undergraduate college students in United States attend two-year institutions (e.g., community colleges, technical colleges) (Horn, Peter, & Rooney, 2002). In Washington State, that number will translate to more than 300,000 students within the next decade (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2004). Characteristics of community colleges are accessibility (34 public community and technical colleges are located throughout Washington State as compared to 6 public four-year universities), open admission, low tuition rates, and responsiveness to community employment training needs (Higher Education, 1991; Community College Survey of Student Engagement [CCSSE], 2004; American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2003). Community college students tend to

remain in the community served by the community college, but they are diverse in educational goals and age (Carnegie Commission, 1970; CCSSE, 2004). Many students are older, attend college part-time, and juggle considerable personal and work responsibilities (AACC, 2000; CCSSE, 2004).

Student development and involvement research reveals that students develop through an investment of time and effort in any given activity (Astin, 1984). The literature reflects a relationship between student involvement in out-of-classroom campus activities and student development (Kuh et al., 1994; Astin, 1984). The level of a student's engagement correlates to their academic persistence and satisfaction with their college experience (Astin, 1984).

Student government activities are one way for students to become engaged outside of the classroom. Student government engagement happens both through leadership opportunities and through the activities and services student governments provide to the broader student population. Student governments build campus community through services and activities, act as a link between students and college administration, oversee student funds, and assure student self-governance (Williams, 2004; Terrell & Cuyjet, 1994; Center for Campus Free Speech, n.d.; Higher Education, 1985, 1996, 2003; Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Cuyjet, 1994). Involvement in student government influences student's development, in part, because it provides opportunities for intensive interaction with peers and faculty (CCSSE, 2004).

While there is research that establishes a link between student government experience and student development, there is a paucity of studies that investigate the links between *community college* student government experience and students' developmental outcomes.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students. The following research questions are addressed: (a) What is the nature of community college student government experience? (b) What is the perceived impact of student government experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students? (c) How does this experience benefit the community college student, the community college, the community, and others?

Research Methods

This qualitative study explores community college student government experiences of student officers like Tanisha, Emily, and Juan. A phenomenologically-oriented approach was used to conduct the study. Specifically, I used in-depth, open-ended interviewing techniques to allow the "voices" of former community college student government officers to be heard.

I selected 11 participants who had served as student government officers at one community college in Washington State. These individuals ranged in age from 33 to 65 and had served as student government officers during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Participants included eight men and three women. All but two were known to be Caucasian.

The in-depth, phenomenologically-oriented interviews with each of the participants lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. Some were conducted face-to-face, and some by telephone. Follow-up interviews were conducted with nine of the participants.   During the second interview, participants were asked to identify their ethnicity. The data from the interviews were analyzed both during and after data collection using Creswell's (1998) nonlinear process of memoing, breaking the data into text chunks, classifying, interpreting, and translating.

Significance of the Study

The study adds to existing literature on student development and the impact of campus involvement on the lives of individuals and makes original contributions to the literature specific to community college student leadership and development.

The results of this study may be useful to community college administrators, including student government advisors, who are interested in providing access to and maximizing the positive impact of these experiences for students. In addition, the findings will be useful to administrators of community college student activities by providing them with insight into how students perceive their student government experience, what beneficial skills were gained through such experience, what helped students develop those skills, and how those skills were used in students' subsequent lives.

Report of the Study

The report of this study includes five chapters. Chapter one provides an overview of the study. Chapter two reviews the literature relevant to the study. Chapter three describes the research methodology and methods. Chapter four provides an exploration of the themes that emerged from the data. Chapter five includes a summary of the study, discussion of conclusions and implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students.   In light of this purpose, this review includes literature pertaining to community colleges, student development, and student government. First, a brief review explains the development of community colleges as a response to the general population's desire for educational opportunity.   Next, literature on student development as a goal of higher education systems is summarized. Finally, the role community college student government experience plays in student development is explored.

Community Colleges in American Education

America's burgeoning desire for extended educational opportunities and the increasing demands placed on the education system at every level stimulated the growth of community colleges in the mid-twentieth century (Blocker, Plummer, & Richardson, 1965; Carnegie Commission, 1970; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), universities, four-year colleges, high schools, communities, and businesses all had an interest in the development of community colleges. Universities and four-year colleges wanted community colleges to teach basic level courses, allowing four-year institutions to focus more on research and professional development. High schools and communities enjoyed the prestige associated with having a local college. A local community college provided a source of civic pride as well as upward mobility for local professionals. Businesses supported community colleges "so that

they would have a ready supply of workers trained at public expense" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 9). The Carnegie Commission (1970) said:

> At the beginning of the century, there were only a few two year college students. By 1960, more than 600,000 students were enrolled in two year institutions of higher education and, by 1969, their numbers had grown to almost 2 million, including both full-time and part-time students. These students accounted for nearly 30 percent of all undergraduates and 25 percent of all students in higher education in the nation. (p. 3)

Today, 42 percent of the nation's undergraduates are enrolled in public two-year colleges (Horn et al., 2002). In Washington State, the combined system of 34 community and technical colleges projects a need "to expand enrollments by 37,500 by [the year] 2020" (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2004, ¶ 3) to continue to serve the state's growing population at the current level of educational opportunity.

Community colleges fill an important role in America's education. Dotted across the country's rural and urban landscape, they typically provide open admission and low tuition rates (Higher Education, 1991; CCSSE, 2004; AACC, 2003). They are responsive to community needs and serve "a diverse mix of students with dramatically varying goals, from earning a degree to receiving on-the-job training" (CCSSE, 2004, p. 2).

Roughly half of community college students are considered non-traditional as compared to four-year college students (AACC, 2000). Non-traditional students are older, attend college part-time, commute, often support families, and work off-campus jobs part or full-time (CCSSE, 2004; AACC, 2000). Students in the other half of the student population are between the ages of 18 and 22 years and are therefore considered traditional (AACC, 2000).

Additionally, many students choose to attend community colleges because of the institution's proximity to their home; therefore "community college graduates are more likely to remain in the community than four-year college graduates" (Carnegie Commission, 1970, p. 42), increasing the probability that some community college alumni either are, or will become, employees, clients, patrons, donors, or even members of the community college Board of Trustees. Since community colleges thus stand to be reciprocally impacted by the students they educate, they have a considerable investment in how students develop through their educational experience.

<div align="center">Student Development</div>

In their review of the history of the student development movement in higher education, Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) state that North American education changed in the early twentieth century when psychological theories of Freud, Jung, and Skinner regarding human development were applied to student development in colleges and universities. New understandings of how people develop launched a new breed of higher education professionals whose initial responsibility was to guide students through vocational decision-making. As the student development profession evolved, O'Banion and Thurston (1972) note that these professionals became "the doers confronted with the daily problems of admitting, enrolling, and enabling: they allocate financial aids, administer to health needs, place students on jobs, organize student activities, and test" (preface, ¶ 4), eventually taking on the "task of deepening and humanizing the educational experiences of…students…wanting desperately to know who they are and where they are going" (preface, ¶ 5). Contemporary student development professionals are assigned the task of fostering life skills development in students by translating "what the

institution values into behavioral terms for student life beyond the classroom" (Kuh et al., 1994, p.vii).

Today, college students are recognized as whole people with most of their lives taking place outside of the classroom. Tinto (1987) observes that effective higher education counseling programs are systematically linked to other campus programs and services, with a focus on the "whole student, not any one of his/her parts" (p. 153). Chickering and Reisser (as cited in Stage, Anaya, Bean, Hossler, and Kuh, 1996) propose that contemporary college student development professionals are "grounded in a concern for 'the whole student'" (p. 202). Similarly, Dolan (as cited in Monroe, 1972), maintains that students are "persons and citizens" (p. 156), "a student functions as a whole being" (p. 156), and, finally, that colleges can best cooperate with students through a perpetual recognition of their "real and total state" (p. 156). This holistic view recognizes that today's student is in college to gain knowledge, skills, and experiences intended to enhance their life beyond college, and, conversely, that students bring real-life perspectives into their college experiences. This view of students is particularly relevant to community college non-traditional students, who often balance significant outside responsibilities with college coursework.

Related to the holistic view of student development, it is now widely accepted that learning and development take place outside the classroom as well as inside. Kuh (as cited in Stage, et al, 1996) studied student development outside of the classroom. All subjects in his study reported personally meaningful changes in areas considered to be important outcomes of out-of-class experiences, including social and practical competence, critical thinking, reflective thought, self-direction, and sense of purpose.

Regarding the influences on student development, Astin (1984) theorizes that student involvement is key to student development, with involvement "more concerned with the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development (the how of student development)" (p. 301) and development being more concerned with outcomes or the *what* of student development. Astin conceives of involvement as the quality and quantity of time and effort a student invests in any given activity. His research shows that involvement is positively correlated with increases in student development. CCSSE (2004) data reinforces this claim by showing that the degree to which students' limited resources can be directed toward their higher educational experience impacts their academic persistence and satisfaction. "Research shows that the more actively engaged students are—with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they study—the more likely they are to learn and persist toward achieving their academic goals" (p. 3).

However, there are factors specific to community colleges that influence student involvement and development. These factors include the commuter and part-time status of students, the traditional dependence on part-time faculty, and the diverse mix of students who attend community colleges. Involvement at community colleges is particularly challenging because, as Astin (1984) warns, "Most (if not all) students are commuters, and a large population attend college on a part-time basis (thus they presumably manifest less involvement simply because of their part-time status)" (p. 302). An additional challenge to student involvement at community colleges comes from the tendency of such institutions to rely heavily on part-time faculty. Jacoby (2006) claims that even if the use of part-time faculty creates a high faculty to student ratio, part-time faculty often lacks both resources (e.g., time, office) and incentive (financial) to fully interact with students outside of the classroom.

Yet, community college attendance provides a unique learning environment related to the typically diverse mix of students. Pierson, Wolniak, Pascarella, and Flowers (2003), in their quantitative study of 3,840 students from 23 higher education institutions (e.g., public, private, four-year, two-year), state that "attendance at a two-year college had statistically significant, positive total and direct effects on [student] growth in Openness to Diversity" (p. 309) presumably because community colleges exposed individuals "to a broader range of racial and age diversity among his or her student peers. This in itself may have shaped an institutional environment that fostered growth in openness to, and appreciation of, diversity" (p. 316).

One way community college students can be enticed into engagement is through involvement in clubs and organizations. Studies show that student engagement outside of the classroom is actually cocurricular and develops students both socially and intellectually (Astin, 1984; Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005). Huang and Chang (2004) found that involvement in student clubs and organizations is positively linked with affective growth (e.g., self confidence, interpersonal skills), qualities "important to future career development" (p. 397). Additionally, they also demonstrated that "an increase in cocurricular involvement is *not* accompanied by a decrease in academic involvement" (p. 401); therefore "more campus involvement is better" (p. 403).

Baxter Magolda (1992) claims cocurricular activities intellectually develop students by fostering their perceptions of the meaning of their college lives. She suggests, "students' ways of knowing" (p. 204) evolve from absolute knowing, which assumes "knowledge is certain" (p. 204), through transitional knowing, which assumes "knowledge is only partially certain" (p. 204), to independent knowledge, which assumes "knowledge is uncertain" (p. 204). Baxter Magolda found that through involvement in cocurricular activities, students progressed from an

absolute paradigm, wherein they focused on adjusting to college, into a transitional paradigm of learning to function effectively in the world, while some students even evolved to an independent paradigm. Those who gained independent knowing "transcended the influence of their peers by discovering their own voices" (p. 211).

Another way students may develop through out-of-class involvement is by moving toward self-authorship. In a study of student self-authorship in relationship to provocative moments, Pizzolato (2005) surveyed 613 undergraduates at a large university. The study focused on important provocative personal moments, which related to future goals (e.g., entering into the family business, going to college), behaviors (e.g., substance use, body piercing), beliefs (religious), and relationships (e.g., marriage, moving out of home) and found that none of the students studied linked classroom experiences with provocative moments. Pizzolato (2005) says self-authorship is a valuable outcome of student development and involves an ability to simultaneously honor one's beliefs and values while allowing for multiple perspectives and then following through with "action congruent with such reasoning" (p. 627). Students' provocative moments were described as "experiences indicative of high levels of disequilibrium propelling them to reconsider their goals and/or conception of self with the intention of possibly acting on their reflections" (p. 629). Pizzolato concluded her report with the suggestion that higher education professionals help students develop their personal identities.

Logue et al. (2005) found that officers of large student organizations believed their officer experience to intensify their social and intellectual growth in a way that differed from the students who were simply members of the organizations. The student officers believed this difference was because they invested "differing levels of input and effort" (p. 403) into the organizations than the general student membership. The student officers' belief supports Astin's

(1984) theory that quantity and quality of time invested influences the developmental value of any given activity. Given these perspectives, student government experience, as a particular type of cocurricular leadership activity, would be expected to contribute to student development.

<div style="text-align:center">Student Government and Student Development</div>

Student governments provide a link between students and college administration (Williams, 2004; Terrell & Cuyjet, 1994). Williams, president of Prince George Community College, informed student leaders at a national conference, "All institutions have formal mechanisms for developing student leadership through student government….These formal student leaders are essential to the vitality of an institution. They communicate student needs to college administration and create opportunities for student engagement outside the classroom" (p. 1).

Student governments oversee a significant financial reservoir within the college's budget. They have an historical role in allocating self-assessed fees like service and activities fees, technology fees, and student building fees (Center for Campus Free Speech, n.d.; Higher Education, 1985, 1996, 2003; Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Cuyjet, 1994). These fees often pay for purchases (e.g., buildings, art, technology), activities and events, services (e.g., child care, tutoring), organizations (e.g., athletics, clubs), and the operations of the student government.

Student governments assist in building a college community through student advocacy and participation (Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Chambers & Phelps, 1994). According to a web-based discussion among student development professionals in the Council for Unions and Student Programs (http://www.ctc.edu/~cusp/, 2005), Washington State's community and technical colleges' student governments assure students' voice and self-governance regarding self-assessed fees, student affairs, and student activities (e.g., clubs, organizations, events,

lectures, civic services) and provide broad student learning outside of the classroom in academically complementary ways. Tinto (1987) believes such extracurricular opportunities enhance "the social and intellectual life of the institution—an outcome of some educational importance" (p. 156).

Student governments assist in college functioning and governance through providing services. Cuyjet (1994) says student governments traditionally provide a "portion of the cocurriculum that the college or university administration has been unable, unwilling, or less efficiently inclined to produce" (p. 86). In Cuyjet's survey of 389 students at 300 institutions, student governments most often provided the following services: acting as the official student body voice, running elections and surveys, appointing student representation for committees within the institution's administrative structure, activities programming, allocation of student assessed fees, recognition of student clubs and organizations, and building awareness (e.g., campus safety, multiculturalism, recycling).

How does student government experience in higher education impact student development? Astin (1984) states that, "Students who become actively involved in student government interact frequently with their peers, and this interaction seems to accentuate the changes normally resulting from the college experience" (p. 304). Student government leaders are responsible for and participate in the type of out-of-class activities that Tinto (1987) suggests "draw students…and faculty, together around a variety of common interests and needs" (p. 156), fostering engagement that is linked to student development (Astin, 1984; Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005). Through this interaction with peers and college professionals, student leaders grow intellectually and gain social and practical competence.

Student government leadership fosters intellectual growth. Baxter Magolda (1992) states that students who develop their ability as leaders, learn to operate from the independent paradigm. One subject from Baxter Magolda's study said, "It changes how I think about things, how organized I am, the way I see myself in relation to other people. It allows me to work on other skills—how well I communicate with people, organize things" (p. 210). Student government participation provides an environment in which to build competence that will positively translate into world outside of the institution. Kuh and Lund (1994) confirm that such involvement increases "practical competence (includes decision-making ability, organizational skills such as time management, budgeting, and dealing with systems and bureaucracies)" (p.15).

Studies that explicitly connect or correlate *community college* student government experience with students' developmental outcomes are non-existent. Yet, based on Baxter Magolda's (1992) link between leadership development and involvement in cocurricular activities and Kuh's and Lund's (1994) and Astin's (1984) insights into the intensified college experience for student government participants, it would make sense to expect that community college student government involvement would be particularly influential and would contribute to the student's development.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Community colleges educate almost half of America's undergraduate students, are responsive to community needs, and serve a diverse student body (Horn et al., 2002; CCSSE, 2004). Community colleges have a special interest in promoting student's development as citizens because two-year college graduates are likely to remain living in the vicinity of the college (Carnegie Commission, 1970). One way this development may be fostered is through involvement in extracurricular activities, like student government.

Student investment of time and effort through involvement in out-of-class activities positively correlates with student development (Astin, 1984). Student governments provide a link between students and the college administration (Williams, 2004; Terrell & Cuyjet, 1994), oversee student funds (Center for Campus Free Speech, n.d.; Higher Education, 1985, 1996, 2003; Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Cuyjet, 1994), provide for student advocacy and participation (Gold & Quatroche, 1994; Chambers & Phelps, 1994), and provide services (Cuyjet, 1994). Students who participate in student government interact frequently with peers and college professionals, positively impacting the students' social and intellectual development (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005).

Student involvement is positively linked to student development. However, there is a void in research on the impact of community college student government involvement on students' development and their subsequent lives. Therefore, this study attempts to provide base-line data for research on community college student government experience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of community college student

government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and

subsequent life experiences of community college students.   Specifically, this study took a

phenomenologically-oriented approach to exploring the experiences and perceptions of former

community college student government leaders.   This chapter describes the research approach

and methods used to conduct the study.

Methodology

 Since the purpose of the study was to explore participants' perceptions of their

community college student government experiences, phenomenologically-oriented, qualitative

methods were appropriate. Seidman (1998) advises that if the researcher's goal is to understand

the meaning of the experience for participants, phenomenological interviewing is the preferred

method of inquiry. Similarly, other methodologists point out that in-depth interviewing allows

the "voices" of the participants to describe and interpret their own lived experiences (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985; Murray, 1987; Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 2002; Gay & Airasian, 2003). As

Giorgi (as cited in Murray, 1987) states, the data then become "almost exclusively descriptive"

(p.35), and "the context of the experience is provided by the subjects, not by the researcher" (p.

35), thus, providing a way of "exploring the complexities of conscious life" (p.44). Additionally,

Seidman says the basic assumption of collecting data for phenomenologically-oriented research

is that the "meaning that people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that

experience" (p.4) and that the use of interviews allows participants to explore and reflect on the

topic within the "context of their lives and the lives around them" (p. 11). This is of particular interest to me because in this study, I sought to understand the nature of the community college student government experience, its impact on personal development, and any consequential ripple effects to the participants' subsequent lives, the community college, or the broader community.

Using Seidman's (1998) approach to phenomenological interviewing as a guide, I used focused, in-depth interviewing techniques that were designed to help the participants reconstruct their experiences in relation to the topic (community college student government experience) of study. The primary characteristic of this type of interviewing technique is the use of open-ended, nonleading questions. For example, I asked participants, "Tell me about your student government experience." By asking about their student government experience in general, I allowed the participants to define the important aspects of that phenomenon. (See the Interview guide in Appendix A). Further details on data collection are provided in the subsequent data collection section of this chapter.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

Site Selection

For the purpose of this study, I needed to identify a community college with a student government organization that included specific offices held by individual students. A rural community college in Washington State, which was in a geographical location accessible to me, was identified as meeting this criterion. The community college's vice president of student services gave me permission to conduct the study. The college president's office and the library were asked to provide access to public records that would be helpful in identifying potential participants.

The college was established over fifty years ago. It serves a community of 250,000 people and has a quarterly enrollment averaging 7,000 students. The student population is diverse, with more than 25 percent of the students of Hispanic descent. This institution is accredited by the Northwest Association of Colleges and Universities and provides transfer degrees, applied non-transfer degrees, certificates, and general education diplomas. The average classroom ratio is 22 students to one instructor.

The college has had an active student government since 1955. The student government is comprised of a congressional decision-making body that meets weekly and that represents the Associated Student Body (ASB) of the college. Voting members of the student congress are representatives from clubs, organizations, and the general student body. The student congress supports 18 active clubs, 11 services, 5 organizations, and special capital projects. Congress approves the annual allocation of a million dollar budget. Paid leaders of the student congress include an elected executive council (e.g., president, vice president, records officer) and a selected program board (e.g., two lecture programmers, two entertainment programmers, one student affairs programmer).

Participant Selection

Three criteria were used to select participants for this study. First, each participant had to have past experience as a community college student government leader. Second, it was preferred that each participant had been elected, selected, or appointed to what is the equivalent of the executive council of a community college student government, that is, as president, vice president, treasurer, or secretary. Third, each participant must have spent at least one academic year involved in community college student government. All of these criteria were met if the participant claimed to have been involved with community college student government in an

appropriate role for one academic year. Additionally, public documents were used, when available, to corroborate participants' claims of student government involvement. An effort was made to include a diverse mix of participants in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, student type (e.g., traditional, nontraditional, transfer, vocational), and number of years since community college student government experience.

I used purposeful and snowball sampling techniques to select participants. Purposeful sampling allowed me to choose participants who "have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 112) and who would be "thoughtful, informative, articulate" (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p.116). Snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) involved asking participants and community members to recommend other individuals who might meet the criteria of the study.

Potential participants were initially identified through review of the community college's public documents, including Board of Trustees minutes, student newspapers, and student yearbooks. A list of 75 names of potential participants was compiled. Contact information for the prospective participants was located through the telephone book, internet searches, and by showing the list to various community members. Showing the list to community members was particularly helpful, as it helped locate two of the female participants, who had married and changed their names. To select the specific participants, I worked through the list to find contact information and then called potential participants by telephone. Each person contacted agreed to participate. The first 12 participants contacted represented adequate diversity across ages, gender, offices held in student government, and the decades in which the offices were held; therefore, the selection process was terminated. Subsequently, one of the 12, who was in ill health, died before participating in the study.

Participants

Eleven participants were eventually selected. Nine of the participants had been executive council officers and two of the participants were student leaders who had held nonexecutive positions. The nonexecutive positions included one program (activity, event) coordinator and one freshman class president. However, six of the participants were multidimensional in their student government involvement, that is, their activities included club involvement, representation to the student congress, or the holding of several officer positions.

Of the 11 participants, three are female and eight are male; nine are Caucasian; and ethnicities of the remaining two are unknown. Their ages at the time of their student government experiences ranged from 18 to 36. Their ages at the time of interview ranged from 32 to 65 with three participants in their sixties, five participants in their fifties, one in their forties, and two in their thirties.

The participants' community college experiences spanned four decades (1960s through 1990s). Three participated in community college student government during the 1960s, four during the 1970s, one during the 1980s, and four during the 1990s. One participant crossed over two decades and is counted in both. Their student government service took place 11 to 45 years ago.

While students of the community college, two of the participants sought vocational certificates, six sought transfer degrees, one sought both transfer and vocational degrees, and two were undecided. At the times of the interviews, their educational attainment included five graduate degrees, one bachelor degree, three two-year transfer or vocational degrees, and two incompletes.

In general, participants are a successful group within their chosen professions. Six have risen to the top of their professions in medicine, business, civil service, and education. Three others appear to be successful entrepreneurs in marketing, business, and real-estate. Two are skilled technicians.

The participants mentioned four different student government advisors, though not all participants mentioned their advisor by name. Public records reflect that there were at least seven different student government advisors employed by the community college over the same four decades.

Participant information is summarized in Table 1. Fuller descriptions of each participant are provided through mini-portraits in chapter four.

Table 1

Participant Information

Name (Pseudonym)	Ethnicity	Gender	Age Today	Current Occupation	Decade(s): Student Government Position(s)
Randy	Caucasian	Male	40	Skilled Technician	1980s, 1990s: vice president, program coordinator, club representative
Brad	Caucasian	Male	55	Civil Servant	1970s: freshman vice president
Pete	Caucasian	Male	61	Retired Realtor	1970s: treasurer, club representative
Martin	Unknown	Male	33	Medical Professional	1990s: president
Ben	Caucasian	Male	65	Retired Educator	1990s: president
Jim	Caucasian	Male	62	Retired Skilled Technician	1970s: vice president, program coordinator, club representative
Chuck	Caucasian	Male	53	Business Owner	1970s: president, club representative
Kate	Unknown	Female	32	Marketing Manager	1990s: vice president, congressional representative
Gary	Caucasian	Male	58	Business Owner	1960s: president, freshman president, club representative
Nancy	Caucasian	Female	50	Medical Professional	1990s: program coordinator
Sue	Caucasian	Female	58	Educator	1960s: secretary

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual, open-ended, phenomenologically-oriented

interviews with the participants. The purpose of the interviews was to explore with the

participants their perception of their experiences and the impact of these experiences on their

development and their subsequent lives. This was done in an "attempt to understand the

meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan &

Bilken, 1998, p. 23), "based on the premise that the human experience makes sense to those who

live it" (Creswell, 1998, p.86). Therefore, the primary value of this type of study is that it allows those who experienced the phenomenon of community college student government to define its impact.

Interviews were conducted during the summer and through the late autumn of 2006. All participants were interviewed at least once, and follow-up interviews were conducted with nine of the participants. Interviews were oriented around two general questions: "Tell me about your community college experience," and "Tell me about your student government experience." These general questions encouraged the participants to reflect on the experiences that were easily recalled. These initial memories were then used as the basis for deeper reflection on their experiences and their impact. I referenced an interview guide (see Appendix A) during the interviews, but the guide was loosely followed as participants readily related their own narratives of their experiences.

Follow up questions were used to encourage more detail or clarification. For example, if a participant ended a response with a pause, I prompted with comments such as, "Tell me more about that." "Why?" and "Give me an example."

Interviews were conducted face-to-face (6) or via telephone (5). Of the six face-to-face interviews, one was done at the dining room table in the participant's home, one in a participant's private professional office, one in a commons area of a participant's private business, and three were in quiet study rooms at public libraries. Written and verbal permission were obtained from the interviewees to allow audio recording of the conversations. The audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions allowed for retrieval of the participants' own words as they discussed their experiences. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours in length.

Additional data were collected through the use of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was intended to confirm basic demographic information (e.g., age, residence, location of student government experience, age at time of student government experience, occupations). Additionally, the questionnaire asked participants to identify their level of volunteer and political involvement and their types of re-engagement with the community college. In the six face-to-face interviews, the questionnaire was completed at the end of the first interview. In the five telephone interviews, the questionnaire was sent (e.g., email, postal service) to the participants at the same time as the informed consent and in two cases the questionnaire was completed prior to the first interview.

Data Analysis

As Maxwell (1996) suggests, the data were analyzed both during and after data collection. Analysis during data collection prevented a build up of unprocessed data and allowed for using insights gained from each interview to guide subsequent interviews. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advise, this approach allowed me to pursue leads uncovered in interviews; generate notes (e.g., insights, connections, ideas, observations); compare data to relevant literature; play with concepts; and to speculate.

Analysis continued after the data were collected. Creswell (1998) describes this stage of analysis as a nonlinear process that includes: (a) filing data by text units; (b) fully exploring the data through reading, memoing, and reflecting; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting the themes uncovered in the data; and (d) translating the interpretation into a final accounting of visual imagery and text. I followed this general process to generate themes from the study's data.

Most of the mechanical processes of data analysis for this study were done electronically. Each participant's interview transcript was color coded and numbered by paragraph. Data units were then transferred from the original transcript and placed into thematic files. Some data units were placed into multiple themes. Visually, the themes became pages of different colored ribbons of data that revealed each participant's contribution, if any, to each theme.

The data within those themes were then reduced a second time. This second step stripped the data of connecting words (e.g., "and," "but," "to"), filler statements (e.g., "like," "uh," and partially repeated phrases), and ideas that were not specific to the theme and condensed the ideas in each theme into key words that the participants used in describing each theme's concepts. In this way, stories that had been placed into one or more themes were distilled into terms specific to each theme. Subsets within the themes were identified. The third step of data reduction was done by hand, simply capturing key words and concepts and tallying for frequency. Summary statements were then developed for each theme.

The summary statements were shared with both the study participants and other knowledgeable persons who could provide feedback on the developing analysis. Finally, in writing up the themes for this report, I returned to the data to select particularly vivid excerpts to illustrate the themes.

<div align="center">Research Validity, Ethics, and Limitations</div>

Validity

Maxwell (1996) defines validity as the correctness in the accounting of the research. Validity challenges in this study included potential researcher bias, self-selection of participants, and the distance of time between the participants' student government experience and this study. How were these challenges addressed?

Researcher bias can threaten a study's validity in both data collection and interpretation because the researcher is filtering the data through preconceived concepts. Ideally qualitative researchers begin without "preconceived notions" (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p.13), thus allowing the research story to emerge through the voices of the participants. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, "Inquiry is not and cannot be value free" (p.9) and that the qualitative researcher's values provide perspective (e.g., assumptions, theories, norms) to the research process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Seidman (1998) adds that through "in-depth interviewing, we recognize and affirm the role of the instrument, the human interviewer" (p.16) and acknowledges that the interviewer's skill and experiences can be assets in conducting the study.

As a community college student government advisor, I entered the study with preconceived notions about the student government experience. I understand that student government service is highly visible and believe that visibility to be influential on participants. My experience provided me an ability to pick up on subtleties within interviews and re-ask questions for fuller development of ideas. For example, during Randy's student government year, he ran weekly congress meetings of 70 people, and he also read the names of graduates at the commencement ceremony. He recalled the commencement name reading as his "worst speaking experience" and, conversely, running the congress meetings as the "funnest part" about student government. My experience with both commencement and student government stimulated probing questions that helped Randy clarify that his shyness was not a factor with running congress meetings because the parliamentary procedure skills he had learned as president provided him a sense of confidence.

My employment may have also impacted participants' disclosure of their student government memories. One participant did an internet search to discover my background prior to the interview. A second participant asked for my employment disclosure at the end of the interview. In both cases, the participants were given freedom to withdraw from the study or edit any comments they had made from their interview; however, both denied that my employment was of concern to them.

To address this validity issue of researcher bias, interviews were open-ended, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure that participants told their own stories, in their own words. Member checks were used. That is, participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their portraits and the thematic summaries. Feedback was solicited from a variety of people, unrelated to the study, who were both familiar and unfamiliar with student government. And finally, themes were compared to current research on community colleges, student development, and student government.

Participant self-selection is a validity challenge. Though I screened for diversity in age, type of degree pursued, and specific role in government experience, those who volunteered to participate may share certain characteristics, thus potentially skewing the data. Maxwell (1996) suggests staying alert to "particular sources of error and bias" and constructing ways to deal with them as the data unfolds (p. 94). Strategies to control the validity threat of self-selection in this study included triangulation, which involved obtaining information from as diverse a pool of participants as possible, and corroborating participants' responses against each other; re-asking the same participant the same question in different ways to assure similar responses; and comparison of data to current literature. Additionally, current and past student government

student leaders and advisors not involved in this study provided feedback, based on their experience, to the thematic summary statements.

Distance in time refers to the fact that all of the participants are former student government leaders whose experiences occurred anywhere from 11 to 45 years ago. This poses a challenge to validity because the memory of their experience may be blurred by additional life experiences. For example, they may have an inflated memory of their ability to run a formal meeting as a student government leader, when in actuality they perfected such ability through later professional experiences. This validity challenge was addressed through the use of open-ended, probing interview questions designed to help participants explore the memories of their student government experience more deeply and more accurately. I probed for specific examples of their experience intending to expose any inconsistencies in the data.

Considering distance in time as a validity challenge, I began to research literature on the topic of memory. I finally decided however, that the topic of memory could easily become a study in itself. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the technically accurate recollection of participants' experience is secondary to their perceptions about the impact of such experience. Full transcription of the interviews and member-checks additionally assured that participants' perceptions are accurately reflected.

Ethics

What are the ethical considerations for this study? It is possible that the data and findings could negatively impact the participants, other individuals mentioned, and the community college at which the participants' experience took place. However, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the study. All data were securely stored, and only the transcription assistant and I knew the identity of participants. In all presentations of the study, the research

site is unidentified and pseudonyms are used for the participants. In addition, each participant

was fully informed of the study prior to the interview. Each participant signed an informed

consent agreement outlining the study's purpose, the expectations of their involvement, and

potential risks.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is its narrow scope. It was conducted at one community

college, with only 11 participants. This study does not claim that the results apply to all

community college student government settings. In fact, input and feedback from student

government advisors at other Washington state community colleges reveals differences in

student government structure. For example, there are differences in the configuration of the

student congress as well as in the configuration and job descriptions of the executive council,

which would affect participants' experiences. The value of this study, however, is that it

provides narratives that span four decades of student government experience at one community

college, lending credibility to the analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students. As described in chapter three, data were collected through phenomenologically-oriented qualitative, open-ended interviewing. These interviews explored the questions: (a) What is the nature of community college student government experience? (b) What is the perceived impact of student government experience on personal development and subsequent life experience of community college students? (c) How does this experience benefit the community college student, the community college, the community, and others?

In this chapter the analysis of the data collected from the qualitative interviews is presented. First mini-portraits of the participants are presented to provide insight into their unique personalities, student government experiences, and subsequent life experiences. Pseudonyms are used and some information has been changed or omitted to protect participant confidentiality. Second, the themes from the data are organized into two main sections: The nature of community college student government experience and the impact of that experience.

The Participants

Randy

Randy greeted me for our interview at the public library door in the tie-dyed shirt he said he would be wearing. He is a medium-sized Caucasian man in his early forties. When I mentioned that he had an uncanny resemblance to a particular action-movie actor, he assured me

that I was not alone in my observation. Randy's dual occupation is a split shift, classified school district employee and househusband. Randy credited his job with the school district to his student government advisor's guidance. He admitted to being painfully shy, but I found him very friendly and anxious to help me fully understand his community college student government experience.

Randy attended the community college for a total of six years and came close to collecting three different degrees, but never did complete either a transfer degree or certificate. Still, he remembers his education at the community college as positive and anticipates returning to complete a degree later in his life.

Randy shared photos, from his early twenties, of his student government teams. He began his student government experience as a representative for a club, then as the elected student body vice president for a year. He fondly remembers that year because he enjoyed his student government co-leaders. Within the positive glow of the vice president year, Randy ran for student body president and won the popular vote. In celebration of the victory, his father made him a walnut podium, a gavel, and matching nameplate holders for the representatives to student congress.

During his presidential year, Randy admitted he worked with a group that he "didn't work as well with" and consequently "didn't have as much fun with," because the personalities within the team were much more self-serving in his view. Randy was a sergeant in the military reserves and his presidency was cut short when his unit was activated. While in active duty, his father died. The walnut podium was named in memory of his father and remains in use by the community college student government today.

Early in his student government experience, Randy was very optimistic and pictured himself as having a future in politics. He admitted to falling short of his "big ambitions," but sees the daily care of his children as worth the tradeoff. He was quick to share family pictures and brag about his talented wife. Though his student government experience provided him with the skills to be active in his professional union, Randy confessed to steering away from union work, and instead is the president of a local childcare consortium. Additionally, he puts his organizational skills toward coordinating and cooking for family gatherings of 50 people or more. His creative outlet of tie-dying clothing punctuates these family gatherings with flares of happy color.

Brad

Brad invited me to his home for the interview. When I rang the doorbell, a Caucasian man in his late fifties opened the door. In stature, Brad is tall and physically fit; in personality he is charming, warm, and welcoming. His wife was equally as gracious as she retreated to the background, allowing Brad and I to get to know each other. His home is beautiful, with all the trimmings reflective of an owner whose high-profile career as a public servant has been very successful. A tour through his home and our conversations indicated he was highly active in local and state volunteerism.

Brad's community college student government experience took place more than 35 years ago. At the time, he was a recent high school graduate. Though he remembered his community college experience as enjoyable, he attended the college because it was less expensive than the university and because circumstance did not allow him a choice. Brad took great care to make certain his own children were able to start and complete their educations at four-year universities

because he believes it is harder for students transferring from community colleges to four-year universities to break into established friendship circles of students.

At the community college, Brad served as freshman class vice president. The highlights he remembered about this experience were that he had such wonderful silk-screened campaign signs that people stole them; he tended to drink and party a lot; and his student government advisor was a large influence in his life. For years after his student government experience, he would make it a point to return to the college and visit his advisor. On one visit, he could not help but notice the advisor's student receptionist and, in fact, she later became Brad's wife.

Brad felt that his advisor was a role model for integrity and job enjoyment and had a way of saying things that appealed to young people: "He was just the kind of guy that saw you were hung over on a Monday morning and he would give you a hard time… Just the little message." Brad tried to emulate the positive qualities he associated with this advisor later on in his parenting, when influencing other young people who crossed his path, and in managing people throughout his career. "Leadership," "heroes," "positive reinforcement," "building self-esteem," and "supporting others in becoming the very best they can become" were constant themes in Brad's conversation about his life experiences.

Pete

Pete met me at the local library for his interview. He was impressed by the fact that I was on time and had the room ready for our interview when he arrived just minutes later. Pete is Caucasian, of medium build, and assertive in demeanor. He proudly told me that he is retired from a successful career in real-estate and therefore had the time to spend a weekday morning reflecting about his time in student government.

When Pete graduated from high school more than 40 years ago, he went to a community college on the other side of the state. His partying activities there caused his father, a prominent community figure, to send him to a university in England to learn "to be disciplined a bit." Two years in England and four years serving in Vietnam helped him to mature.

When he returned from his military service he attended his local community college for three quarters and then transferred to an out-of-state university. He was a married student while attending the community college. He was also a dean's list student, an active service club member, a humanities major, and a theater lighting technician.

He and a handful of his buddies, all older students, ran for student government because other students asked them to and Pete thought that by getting involved, maybe he "could do some good." As a 26-year-old community college student government treasurer, the younger students looked up to him. Pete said he felt "Like a big brother." He described his student government team's relationship with administration as excellent, because his team was older with "level heads," and also because a key administrator knew Pete's father.

Though a very social fellow, Pete prefers to work behind the scenes, leaving the limelight to others. He has a history of volunteerism, including prison and half-way-house work, firefighting, and coordinating races. He is retired yet remains an active volunteer with the community's largest annual tourism event because, "I am getting up there in age [and] I want to enjoy my life for me and my kids."

Martin

Martin was interviewed over the telephone. The secretary of his medical practice set up the interview one half-hour before his first appointment of the morning. After that first interview, Martin readily allowed a follow up telephone interview several days later. Because

ethnicity was not included in the demographic questionnaire for this study, and the interview took place by telephone, Martin's ethnicity is unknown. His phone personality was professional and assertive. It was apparent that Martin doesn't waste time by his desire to get immediately started with the interview. He efficiently filled the half-hour interview with everything he thought I would like to know or that I should know about community college student government.

Martin was active in student government for all four years of high school. Soon after his high school graduation in the early 1990s, he did several years of religious mission work. While on his mission, his family moved to a new community. When he completed his mission work, he reconnected with his family and enrolled at the local community college.

He shared his belief that "Higher education is part of our opportunity to continue to become what God wants us to be." The community college experience gave him "an opportunity to be acquainted with a lot of people and also make friendships that were really strong." Martin described that time in his life as a "real stepping-stone" where he was allowed to focus on studies and on his future. He intentionally sought out participation in student government and was happy that his president position also provided him a paid job at the college. He has fond memories of his student government peers and the advisor, and believes that his student presidency was successful because of the support of his leadership team.

After Martin left the community college, he continued his education at a four-year university. He did not seek involvement in the student government at this university because, though there were many positives in his community college presidential experience, there were several challenging incidents that caused him to lose interest in student government. Instead he

became involved in church activities and in volunteering and job opportunities related to his degree path, a pattern that he continues today.

Ben

Ben's interview was conducted over the telephone. During a second telephone interview, he identified himself as Caucasian. Ben is a retired educator and has spent all of his adult life working with young people. He was very approachable and willing to talk. However, his interview style was to wait for my guidance before taking the interview in a new direction. However, in the follow up interview, he was much more talkative and helped to fill in the details from the first interview.

Ben went to two different four-year universities before enrolling in the community college in the 1960s. His parents owned three farms in three different areas of the state and Ben worked on those farms during the summers and school breaks. When his parents moved to be closer to the farm in a city that also happened to have the community college, he followed.

Once there, he attended the community college for five quarters because he could live with his parents, it was less expensive than going to a university, and he was able to secure a sport scholarship. He describes his instructors, education, and experience at the community college as "good" and his peers as "very excellent students." His sport experience was "very successful" in that the community college team defeated four-year universities and claimed a national ranking because the team had "some quality people."

Ben's journey into student government happened because he had been a high school student body president and his community college friends encouraged him to run for office, so he thought, "What the heck?" Ben describes his year as student government president as "good," but hard to remember because the early 1960's were a "long time ago." He believes that running

student government meetings and coordinating committees was a confidence builder for him that "carr[ied] over well in education," because as a high school teacher and coach, Ben had "to work with lots of different people and parents and types of students."

Both his community college and teaching experience served to remind him that "kids from all different types of backgrounds" who maybe don't "have the skills or finances" can be successful. As an educator, he talked with a lot of kids about going to college and likes to think he mentored the students "who went on to the big schools." He also counseled his students to get involved in school activities, but he did not guide many toward student government because he believes that it is not "one of those things you seek out, it just kind of happens." In his retirement he continues to coach a high school sport team because he believes that if you can pull a kid into school-based activities, "then it might open their eyes and mind and they are going to go on and do something else."

Jim

Jim readily agreed to several phone interviews. Over the course of those interviews, I learned that Jim is Caucasian, 62 years old, retired from working in the energy industry, and now works as a part-time salesman for a large store. Jim thinks before he speaks, and, as an interviewer, I quickly learned to give him time to fully express his thoughts.

He went to the community college at two different times in his life; first after high school "and then ten years later going back and changing the Fs into As." After working and experiencing "hard knocks" and six years in the military reserves, he returned in an attempt to better his life. He ended up graduating from the community college with both a transfer degree and a vocational degree in engineering technology. He believes that the value of his two-year education is that it made him a better person, which is reflected in his children.

During his second time as a student at the community college he became involved in student government. He was originally a religious club representative, then he became the student government program coordinator, and finally he was elected as the vice president. As the vice president, he was also the student representative to the college's Board of Trustees, which allowed him the honor of sitting at the table with the Trustees during their meetings.

His student government involvement gave him "a jump start in politics of the world." Since his student government experience he has been active in politics in two different states. Through this involvement he has attended political conventions, been a campaign manager for a congressional candidate, served as a precinct chair, and sat on a county boundary review board.

In addition to providing him an interest in politics, Jim credits his student government involvement with two personal successes: student government helped him feel comfortable being involved with his children's schools because the experience helped him understand institutions, and student government helped him in his married life because it provided him experience in working with both males and females.

Chuck

Chuck owns a very successful company. He is a tall, early-fifties, Caucasian, flannel-shirt-kind of a man. An interview at his office, in the middle of the workday, found him wearing jeans. He admitted to liking "hands-on stuff" and "being there in the trenches seeing what is being done, instead of sitting in the office talking on the phone." When I was working with the data from his interview, Chuck stood out from the other participants because he regularly used my name throughout the interview. This thorough recognition of the other person in the conversation is probably one of Chuck's many appealing traits that keep him a formidable figure in both local and state volunteerism and politics.

Thirty years ago, at about the age of 23, he attended the community college. After one year of general studies, he decided to complete a vocational degree with the idea of owning his own business one day. He was a good student and had already finished calculus. Much of the vocational degree classes were easy for him, leaving him "a little bit of free time to do something else."

Chuck was the vocational program's representative to the student congress when his instructor and the student government advisor "coerced" him into running for student government president. His presidential experience was an introduction in how to not be "intimidated by…somebody that wields a lot of power," and how to "conduct somewhat of an orderly meeting and get something accomplished and get group consensus."

Chuck shared his belief that it is important to take a turn in helping to run organizations. Consequently, he has spent his adult life taking active roles in his professional association, regularly attending city and county council meetings to foster a cause or idea, and, in officership of a large service organization.

Kate

Kate's passion-filled voice filled the telephone and my whole kitchen during our interview. At age 32, she is both a mother and a marketing manager. She is highly inquisitive and wanted to know everything about how I found her, who I was, and what I was doing. By the end of the interview, Kate's questions led her to discover, to her satisfaction, that I was currently employed as a student government advisor.

Kate was the first person in her family to go to college. She started at the community college after high school because it was less expensive than attending a university. She worked both in the college's admissions office and served as student government vice president. She had

been in student government all through middle and high school. Though she didn't intend to get involved in college student government, she "just couldn't quite seem to keep…[her] hands out of it."

She started her community college student government experience as a student congress representative. When the vice president in charge of clubs resigned, she was voted into the position. Kate reflects that the vice presidency was not "difficult, but it definitely was a challenge." She felt that compared to high school, community college student government had a lot more structure and regulations. When she entered the vice president position, it was in disarray, and she spent a lot of the year bringing order to the functioning of the position so the next vice president could do a better job. Today, as a marketing operations manager, she continues with this philosophy by encouraging employees to leave a good foundation for those who will follow them, so the business can improve.

Her most profound experience at the college was being immersed in diversity both through the coordination of clubs and through her classroom experience. She met more people of "different religions, different sexual orientations, different colors, different races" than she had grown up with as a "little farm girl." Such diversity forced her to recognize the variety of life experiences people offer. As a marketing professional, her ability to honor diversity and uncover people's perspectives allows her the opportunity to "give them direction," "inspire them," and "to impact them."

Gary

Gary did a web search to discover as much about me as he could before our scheduled telephone interview. Apparently I passed the test because his voice came through the receiver sparked with enthusiasm and full of stories.

Gary is a businessman, but his real joy comes from volunteer and political work. He is always trying to "come up with ideas for fun stuff that people get a good feeling about." For example, he helped a service organization establish a Community Member of the Year Award when their original idea was to volunteer to paint crosswalks.

After his second telephone interview, Gary emailed me a picture of himself. He is Caucasian, 58 years old, and good-looking, with salt and pepper graying hair. A bushy mustache frames his smiling mouth and equally bushy eyebrows frame his twinkling eyes.   The picture causes me to imagine that within the next few decades, playing "Santa" will become a part of Gary's active community volunteerism.

Gary talked about the great, the good, the not so good, and the "colorful" regarding his student government experience. The great: In the late 1960s, Gary went to the community college fresh out of high school to gain career direction. He was offered a job through his involvement in a college club, thus fulfilling his goal. He has been a freelance professional ever since.

The good: A cute girl invited Gary into student government and he followed through. As the student government president he did "good things" by starting a yearbook, supporting fun social events, and improving student funds allocation. He was also involved in the college's athletics, a club, and the newspaper.

The not so good: His presidential campaign was "hardball politics," not unlike his political experiences within the real world. The student government elections included receiving threatening notes, character assassination, manipulation of the election process, embarrassment in the local newspaper, and attempted impeachment.

The colorful: The era of the 1960s brought a pocket of inner-city students with "metro values" to the college. They liked Gary, but talked about destroying the college: "When we burn this place down we are going to tell you so you can get out first." Additionally, a student government peer of Gary's had done time in prison and was again later arrested for armed robbery.

Nancy

Nancy is a medical professional who works sixty to seventy hours a week and considers that to be her way of giving back to the community. I awaited our interview in the patient waiting area of a very large medical facility. Nancy came out to greet me and to take me back to her office. She was wearing a skirt, clogs on her feet, and a beautiful sweater that she had knitted herself. She is 50 years old, Caucasian, and gives the impression of "Mother Earth" in both her looks and her welcoming personality.

Nancy was married, had four children, and had both a bachelor's and a master's degree when she entered the community college at age thirty-five. Family responsibilities kept her place-bound, so the community college was her only avenue for the professional retraining she sought. Though she is happy that she retrained, reflecting back on that time, she says, "The only thing I regretted and have always regretted is that I went to…[the community college]. I just think that people with advanced degrees should never go back to a community college. They just don't fit." Nancy perceived that her community college degree program did not encourage critical thinking. But, she qualifies, "The school itself I didn't have any issues with."

Nancy admitted that learning comes easily for her. After completing her vocational degree she worked full-time and continued her education through a second set of undergraduate and graduate degrees in her area of retraining. She attempted medical school but quit because it

was more disease-focused than patient-focused. She is considering making her next career quest to be university teaching.

Nancy went into student government because a peer asked her to. The leadership position also gave her the "opportunity to be on tenure committee," which she saw as her avenue to "promote change" in her degree program. She became an appointed student government program (e.g., activity, event) coordinator.

Nancy feels she had a positive impact on student events. Prior to her student government appointment, the student events were "fluff ball" and lacked educational value. She proudly remembers coordinating Black History Month and events that included issues like HIV and substance abuse awareness. Though she believed the administration viewed some of her programs as extremist, her student government team "planted the seed" for the college to become more open because some of her events, like "Gay Day," are still happening.

Sue

Sue and I met at the public library for our interview. She is a very tiny, Caucasian woman with a gentle handshake. She is also a 58-year-old teacher. Our meeting took place after the first day of back-to-school in-service and Sue was visibly tired. Still, she was polite and very willing to help me understand her community college student government experience.

When Sue graduated from high school, she moved to the big city with her sister and worked for a year. But she had dreamed of being a teacher since the third grade, so she started her dream by returning home and attending the local community college because it was affordable. She was nineteen when she became the student government secretary. The experience built her confidence because peers recruited her to run for office. She and her best friend at the community college became student government leaders together. For Sue, the

experience was all about the relationships with her student government peers, the students she represented, and the college staff and administrators.

Sue's community college and student government experience merged with similar comments: "I enjoyed the people I went to school with, just the give and take. I enjoyed the staff, particularly…the Dean of Students…I don't remember anything harsh about it. It was a very comfortable atmosphere. Small at the time I went. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Sue reflected that her student government experience is similar to her professional teaching experience. She stated, "Well, I am in the same spot again. I work with a group of people…the same kind of give and take….I have to…be able to listen to other people and come to a consensus and balance everything that comes down the pipe."

Raising a family and working full-time does not leave much time for Sue to do volunteerism, so she guides her students into doing a community service project each year. She observed, "Those are the things the kids seem to remember, doing something for others."

As the interview concluded, Sue affirmed that she "wouldn't have traded her [community college student government] experience for anything." Then, this very quiet participant took a moment for mother pride and established that two of her own children have doctorates and another one has a masters degree.

Participant Summary

The mini-portraits of the participants provided insight into their unique personalities, student government experiences, and subsequent life experiences. As explained in chapter three, the 11 participants were diverse in regard to gender, age, occupation, student government positions, advisors, decades of their community college experience, and types of degrees sought. However, the participants shared common traits, including importance of family, friendly

personalities, satisfaction with their community college, the ways they got involved in student government, and the reasons they stayed involved.

All of the 11 participants mentioned their families--seven in a very proud and expanded way, and others more neutrally. Six individuals talked about their children's education. Several talked at length about their families, even relating how their student government experience influenced their parenting or spousal relationships. Two participants shared family pictures during their interviews.

The participants were very articulate and interesting individuals. All of them were warm, welcoming, and likeable. All easily responded to my questions; while four participants pretty much stuck to the questions I asked, seven others easily took off on tangents, including asking and answering their own questions, creatively thinking aloud, and establishing links between their student government experience and other life experiences.

Most of the participants' experiences with the community college were positive. In alignment with the research on community college attendees, they chose to attend a community college because of cost or because of location.

While at the community college the participants became involved in student government in one of three ways. Six of them had somebody (e.g., instructor, advisor, peer, "cute" student government officer) who asked them to become involved as student leaders. Three participants credited high school involvement in student government as giving them an interest to continue at the community college level. Two participants transitioned from involvement in campus clubs or as representatives for student congress into officer positions.

All participants stayed involved in student government because they wanted to be helpful. They said they wanted to "promote change," "do some good," "make a difference," "serve" students, or to give students "more bang for their buck."

The Nature of Community College Student Government Experience

Introduction

Participants' memories had to bridge a gap of 11 to 45 years to recapture their community college student government experiences. Many of them referenced this issue with an apology as they fretted about recalling details of their experiences. I assured them that whatever they could share of their perceptions would be valuable. Most of them were able to relax into their stories and connect meaning to their memories.

Participants' general perceptions of their community college student government experience were filtered through the belief that they actually did make a difference to the student body and the college. They made a difference through events, publications, funding decisions, reorganization of procedures, and through hearing and thoughtfully evaluating student and campus needs. They remember their roles as being important, because they remember these activities as being helpful to the campus climate. The value they placed on their efforts consequently left them with a positive overall feeling about their student government experience.

They said that their experience was different than that of general student government participants (e.g., congress representatives, club officers), because, as executive council members, much of their work was done in the spotlight. They understood that it was the nature of their jobs to make very public decisions, providing them the glory and just as often forcing them to take the heat if there was disagreement.

Participants' recollections of their experiences fell into the four major areas of relationships, travel, money and power, and challenges. These areas are discussed in the following sections.

Relationships

All of the participants discussed the quality of their relationships with their advisor, peers, and the administration, including faculty and staff. One of the most frequent recollections of the participants was their memory about their advisor. Each participant's relationship with his or her advisor proved to be significantly memorable. Nancy stated: "[The advisor] who has the program is as important as the program." Brad said, "[My relationship with my advisor was a] high point of [my] student government experience."

Participants perceived the role of their advisor as a professional who understood the complexity of the institution and was there to guide the student government leaders through it. Nancy described the advisor as respecting the institutional boundaries and "gently nudging students back to center," as necessary.

The vast majority of participants established that their advisor relationship was positive. Though Jim and Gary acknowledged some unpleasantness with their advisor, they noted that the challenges were due either to the nature of the student government job or the nature of the advisor's job. For example, the nature of the student government job included discord between student and college administration needs and the nature of the advisor's job included holding student government leaders accountable, thus forcing them to develop.

Participants viewed their advisors as helpful, knowledgeable, respectful, and positive. Participants described the helpfulness of the advisor in this way: He or she "bent over backwards," "built relationships with all levels of the institution," and "acted as the driving

force." They saw their advisor as knowledgeable, someone who "brought perspective," "made students stop and think," and "knew the ropes." The participants said their advisor was respectful: He or she "made students feel likeable and worthwhile," "did not squelch ideas," and "was courteous." Finally, they saw their advisor as positive, using words such as "wonderful," "easy to get along with," and "honest."

The participants also fondly remember making friends and working with new people. Many of the participants had friends in the student government before they became involved. However, 11 to 45 years later, the participants tended not to remember much about their peers, and most admitted to not staying connected to their peers at the completion of their student government experience. In fact, only three participants had any knowledge of where some of their student government peers are located today.

The stories they did tell about their peers were in regard to personality, age, colorful episodes, specific events, or deaths. For example, Pete's leadership team was composed of older student government leaders who had families that socialized together. Randy was an attendant in a peer's wedding. Sue mourns the death of a dear friend and student government peer.

Still, their general sense about their student government peers was positive. They described engagement with their peers as "exciting," "enjoyable," and "fun," and as happening within an atmosphere that involved a lot of "working together," "listening," and "give and take." Any negative feelings that participants had about their peers in the work environment came from the belief that some individuals were hard to work with, had an "agenda," or were unwilling to compromise. A rare example of a negative peer experience outside of the work environment came from Randy, who noted that a student government peer still owes him money from book returns and a car sale.

Participants generally viewed the community college administration, including staff, faculty, and their advisor, as positive and helpful. Gary said, "My…teachers…[were] good people and I got to hang out with some of them and learn from them, not just as a student. It takes it to another level as far as the student experience goes." Pete agreed, "It [the relationship] was pretty good. Personally, I enjoyed being with them." Jim explained that it wasn't always blissful: "Well, at that particular time …[when football] was brought up, it [relationship with administration] was strained. But, other times it was really good….You know? Some of them…could really help you a lot and had been there a long time and could advise you." Ben said, "They gave us a lot of leeway."

Participants enjoyed an inside view of the running of the college and liked being known by administrators. Pete said, "It was nice to know when I went into…[the college offices] they knew who I was. It was neat. I got kind of a peek at how the college was run."

Any tension in the relationship with administration stemmed from control over student funds. Pete remembered,

It was an interesting time. They wanted to do some expansion and they didn't know where they would get the money. They weren't taking it from us… We had to keep a real good eye on it….Being older we were more mature and we didn't want them to mow over us.

Gary recalled,

The administration decided they needed a…[van]. They spent $15, 000 of the students' money without asking the student body or anything. That rubbed us the wrong way. All of a sudden our student funds…[have] $15,000 missing. They didn't hide it but said, "That's the way it's going to be."...All I know is we had a

political cartoon in the student paper showing students laying underneath the new

bus as the administration is driving it.…life isn't always fair or logical.…who

knew they were going to do this. They never told anybody and who said they

couldn't do it? Maybe they could and obviously they did.

Travel

Another frequent participant recollection was about travel, regardless of the number of

years that had passed since their student government experience. Travel experiences were

always connected to words like "fun." Brad recalled, "I went to a couple conferences. I

remember going and at the time, it was fun. I think I got something out of that." Positive travel

memories included going to other states like California, Virginia, and New York. Ben said,

"The school sent us to New York. We got to go to the Junior United Nations meeting.…that was

a neat experience for a small town boy to get to go back and see the big cities, New York, and

some influential people." Travel overlapped with positive memories of meeting new people.

Ben remembered, "We would meet with other community college ASB [Associated Student

Body] officers and discuss, you know, common problems or…activities."   The travel also

helped with providing services to the students on their campus. Chuck said, "I remember going

to a convention center where they showcased different speakers…and…bands, so we could have

an idea of…who we could pick to bring on campus [to entertain students]." And finally, travel

allowed them to spend time together as a leadership team. Chuck shared, "I remember going on

a retreat to [the advisor's] cabin where we planned the year and talked about some things we

were going to do."

Money and Power

A significant part of the participants' student government experience was connected to money in that the participants actually determined the use and allocation of student funds. Chuck admitted, "[I liked] being in charge of activities and money and actually making a difference as far as what we could do." The participants reviewed and determined financial need and allocation. Pete said,

Our class…dropped the budget from the football team....it just got to the point where….the program was asking for more than we could afford to do, we finally said, "Look you got to bring it down. They refused, so we cut off their budget."

The participants controlled and managed student funds. As the treasurer, Pete recalled, "The bills came in and we'd approve them….so I would get a weekly report…of what was spent and we'd go though it. Just to keep an eye on it….we were on top of it all the time."

An equally significant part of their student government experience was associated with power through control, influence, connections, and their ability to assert student desires. Both Jim and Ben explained that power was not important to them, but the research data show that power was part of the experience.

Participants experienced power through control. Gary reflected, "It was fun having my hands on the controls in the student government." They experienced power through influence, as Chuck confirmed, "You can make a difference in something and be a part of an organization and have some meaningful input, which translated into meaningful output. The…tech guys got a few extra bucks from the budget because of it. That was one positive thing." They experienced power through being connected. Randy said, "If the administration had something going on they wanted the student president there, so there was a lot of rubbing elbows." Gary confirmed, "I got

to meet with the governor and talk to different community leaders and be recruited by politicians….I got to talk with people who were out and actually doing it." Being known by administrators was a valuable connection, as Chuck expressed, "I could walk into the president's office and he knew who I was." And finally, they experienced power though the assertion of student ideas and desires. This was accomplished through the day-to-day helping of students. Pete explained, "As a student leader you meet a lot of people because they have problems and they want to talk to you …to try to solve those problems." Student desires were also executed through doing events. Gary said,

> It is kind of fun to come up with an idea and they go, "Yeah. That is a great idea. Let's do it!"...Anybody can put up a proposal and get in on the agenda and floor and get funding for it and it all of a sudden becomes a reality, something you thought of! All of a sudden here it is a reality and you go "Wow that was fun, it was work but it was fun, and I learned it, and liked it."

Participants' assertion of power was also manifested in the activation of student opinion at the college. Chuck recalled, "We were in charge of naming the new student union building….we had a contest and went through a list of names." They also activated student opinion at broader levels. Ben remembered, "We were on the committee…and they had a statewide meeting and that is when they changed the name from junior college to community college."

Challenges

Though participants perceived their total student government experience as positive,

challenging experiences were memorable and shared in unusual detail and with unusual

expression of emotion. The challenging experiences fit into three categories: administrative use

of student funds, lack of value placed on student input, and job-based or peer-related conflict.

Several participants remembered that student funds were spent by administration,

sometimes without student government permission or sometimes without following the intent of

the students. This item was reoccurring in participant memories and is also referenced within the

administrative relationships section of this chapter regarding a purchase of a van and in the

power and money section where students simply specify the need to keep a good "eye" on their

money.

A long quote from Martin's interview illustrates this issue:

Honestly, from that student government experience, there were…several

budgetary items that the school was asking for matching funds.…we deliberated

over that for quite some time and…really spent a lot of time being able to keep

that budget in check…it was really emotional.…weeks of back and forth debate

on how much…earmarking this fund and matching funds. But in both of those

situations really, it didn't matter what we had come up with because the

administration still made their decision about where the funds went.…Like I say,

it was really, it was very emotional. Especially in…just the student...[congress]

meeting itself, where the president meets with the other heads of organizations. I

did recall that it was very, very, very emotional, because they were doing their

best. Everyone was trying to bring back information that they thought would be

most helpful and most beneficial. And once the monies were allocated

appropriately, according to what they [the students] had given as a parameter, it

was like, well, "We [the administration] made this decision so this is what it's

going to be." So, for a couple of those experiences really, I didn't have much

interest after that in student government.

The above quote is particularly valuable because it exposes the intensity of the work and

emotions that often go into student government decision-making. When participants took

themselves and their efforts seriously, they expected to be taken seriously and became

disillusioned when they perceived they were not respected.

In a similar, but non-budgetary vein, participants recalled experiences of being on

college-based committees where either they perceived their input as not being valued, or where a

committee decision was ignored by administration. Randy remembered:

One of the things I didn't really like about being president was I sat on the tenure

review committee. [One teacher] didn't get along well with…[the] departmental

supervisor. And so…there were certain hurdles to jump over. [The teacher had]

to come back the following year. And then the following year…even though the

tenure review committee recommended…tenure…[the departmental supervisor]

flat out said, "No. I'll quit." And so, I saw ugly stuff at the upper levels and ugly

stuff at the lower levels.…the futility of it…having review committees just to say

they have one, I guess.

Gary was invited back to the college, post student government experience, to help

decide the college's process in meeting a new federal regulation regarding athletics:

I got a call from one of the heads of the booster club.…Somebody wanted some credibility on this thing.…We put a lot of work into it. Everything…[we] recommended, they [administration] didn't do. I am thinking they just want[ed] some justification. …[The mandate] was bigger than anybody realized as far as what it was going to do to the sporting program.

In addition to the memories of administrative use of student funds and lack of value placed on student input, participants remembered painful job-based or peer-related conflicts including election challenges, impeachment attempts, controversy, exposure through publications, and theft. Gary shared an embarrassing exposure:

It was painful but a lot of the failures and the pain [are] some of your best features. I did enjoy it and I am proud even though I did make the funny papers. The…[community newspaper] was ruthless; they put in an entire column about my grade point average right next to the comic strips.

Kate recalled an experience with theft:

It was awful. It was awful. I mean these students put on this dance to make money for a fundraiser and we've lost the money…later we found that someone …was hiding under a table and stole it. And here is the executive board standing there going, "OK what do we do now?" It was over $2,000. And it was a huge ruckus. They came and said, "We want you to replace this money." And we had to justify how that divvies out. And of course we took care of it, but it was a struggle and a test of the executive board to sit down and come together. And it was a quick decision because this is something you can't just let go on day after day.…The general [congress representatives] didn't have to deal with any of that

stuff. This was an executive decision and they didn't have to deal with…those

test situations.

Again, the participants tended to remember challenging experiences in detail and

expressed the memories with emotion. Whether the challenge was administratively orientated

and emotional or futile, or it was caused by students and was ruthless or awful, the memory was

charged with feeling in the recall many years later.

<div align="center">The Impact of Community College Student Government Experience</div>

Introduction

Since the community college student government experience was done in an educational

environment, this study assumes that any impact from the experience relates to learning. So

what did the participants learn through their experience? This section shares that participants

experienced learning on the job, the importance of people skills, a gain in confidence, and

finding one's "voice."

Learning on the Job

What participants recalled learning from involvement in student government, they did not

learn through structured leadership classes. In fact, if there was any formal training, most do not

have a detailed recollection of it. Though Randy was involved in student government over

several years and proudly remembers being trained, most participants' comments regarding their

leadership and job training were "we had the skills before we came [to the community college]"

or "it was sink or swim."

Several participants had prior military training, a past college degree, or high school

student government experience that caused them to feel that the community college student

government "was lucky to get them." However, most participants believe that they learned their

skills by doing the job. They said they felt vulnerable upon gaining their leadership position.

They shared that they were without any clear job description or mentoring. Gary remembered:

> None of us got a handbook on how to be a [student government leader]….No
>
> [training]. In fact, I remember…[the advisor] coming in and challenging me
>
> because I didn't know what I was doing as president, and I was offended, "[Of]
>
> course I don't know what the hell I am doing, nobody told me."

> Nancy explained, "It was sink or swim….You either stood up and presented your case [or

the idea didn't happen]." In spite of their insecurity and perceived lack of training, the

participants learned their jobs by doing them, through researching, organizing, and improving the

student government and how it served students. Kate confirmed,

> I remember opening the file drawer and looking at the files for the clubs that were
>
> there and there was just no rhyme or reason….And I thought, "How does anyone
>
> make any decisions around here?"….So I took those files and tried to research as
>
> much as I could with what I had. And in that process…[I] thought…this is how it
>
> was done before and this is how I think it will be better.

> Kate further explained that the sink or swim environment itself helped the leaders rise to

the occasion:

> If you become part of student government you're kinda shoved to the forefront.
>
> See? [For example,] "I want to make the world better" and someone is looking at
>
> you like, "How are you going to do that?" You put yourself in the position to be a
>
> leader, so lead.

Value came from negotiating the sink or swim nature of student government leadership, because it was similar to how professionals typically learn on the job. Gary credited student government involvement with providing a simulation of career experience:

I thought it [student government] was [an] incredible real world experience. As real world as you can get in a college environment and being a student… So I thought it prepared me better than most. In fact, probably better than 99 percent for what I was about to face out…there.…It served me well for my entire life and I highly recommend it to anybody who is leaning that way.

In a later interview, Gary reconfirmed,

Hands on experience is the most meaningful. Your input has output and your ideas equal doing something. Student government experience is a practical application, because [as an analogy] "You don't know if you like the color until you actually paint it."

Nancy believed the student government environment to be an ideal form of education: "Too much of education we spend influencing others on our own personal space and we don't allow them to develop their own space. They need to have more student government!" Regarding the value of such education, Chuck agreed. Though he confessed to never using the degree training received at the community college, he admitted, "I guess I got a little bit of education there with some of the ASB [Associated Student Body] stuff."

Gary qualified learning on the job with an interesting comment that provides insight into why student government leaders may be willing to "swim" when placed in the forefront. He observed, "I like people and that is a prerequisite because I don't know if you can learn that."

Importance of People Skills

Liking people may very well be the prerequisite for a willingness to learn and develop interpersonal skills, or what Jim defined as "people skills." Community college student government leaders were thrown into working with and serving student peers of different ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, clubs, perspectives, and view points. Through working in student government, they honed their people skills, which meant embracing diversity in its every form. In order to do this, they learned that they had to keep an open mind, listen, accept different points of view, work together, adjust to meet the needs and interests of others, compromise, and show respect.

In learning this lesson, they had to acknowledge that they were part of a team. Ben explained,

Well you know you all bring in something and again you gotta keep an open mind

that you're just not you, the ASB [Associated Student Body] president. It's not

always going to be what you want it to be. You've got to be able to work with

people and accept their ideas and be part of the decision making group.

They recognized that they were responsible for serving all of their peers. Nancy said,

The student population is made up of multiple cultures and values and belief

systems, and all are valid and equal. So, in formulating a program…you may

have an agenda, but you need to adjust your agenda to the population that you're

trying to reach.

In doing so, the participants came to believe that their community college experience provided them a unique environment in which to learn about diversity. Kate shared the impact

of both the community college diversity experience and how student government involvement amplified the learning:

Community college opened my eyes in a different way than it did [the eyes of] my friends who were at a university, because of the different [age] range of people. I wasn't in a dorm with all other eighteen year olds. I was in classes that had sixteen year olds, twenty-five year olds, thirty-five year olds, and all the way to fifty year olds. And student government even opened my eyes more to that because now I'm dealing with Spanish Club, who has concerns about how they want their culture expressed; how they want other people to understand their culture….I had to understand why they were coming to us and asking for an application to become a club. And, why it was important to them and I needed to understand how it was going to affect the rest of the student body….there always had to be a justification and so, I really had to become diversified in understanding where people are coming from and why they are who they are….I looked at it as very positive. I left there feeling educated in an area that I really hadn't even thought about before.

Kate later continued to explore the impact of working with a diverse student body:

I would say the proudest part of my [student government] experience [was] personally opening my eyes to...the whole idea of the homosexual aspect of the group that wanted to come together as a club. I really was quite proud at the end of that although I don't remember if they ever got club status. There was a whole movement of people understanding where they came from... I actually felt proud

when I was done that year because I worked heavily with them. I came from a family that has very strong Christian values and I remember my mother having a real problem with my being involved in that situation. I found that by the time we were done that year, that we had really taken people on board that were really just so against it in the beginning.... I felt really proud of that because that was something that even myself, in the beginning, was kind of skeptical about.

The participants felt that they gained valuable practice in people skills that translated into growth, which has proven useful in their personal and professional lives. Participants seem to be generally caring people. They believe themselves to have a positive impact on others through their professional work, their community service, their families, and their political involvement. They see themselves as advocates for others: Gary, through community involvement, likes to create opportunities to honor people; Ben, Brad, and Randy are especially interested in creating positive experiences for young people; Nancy, Martin, Pete, and Sue use their listening and organizational skills to help people achieve goals; and Jim and Chuck have enjoyed political involvement at local and state levels.

Martin offers better professional service because of a particular student government experience that provided him profound learning in people skills. He was the student representative on the interview committee for a new college president and observed a reoccurring theme. He remembered,

"Hidden agendas." That's kind of a term that would come up again and again. "What's your agenda?" "What's your hidden agenda?" "What do you believe of people with hidden agendas?"...That was something that I really took …[away from that experience] was that if you really…want to work with someone you

have to be mindful that they are also interviewing you…In essence giving them a feel and a flavor if they really want to be with you. That is something that I now learn to be really beneficial for me when I work with patients. A patient is coming to see if they can find confidence in you….The questions that I'm asking should be allowing them to gain confidence to see if …[I'm] able to be a health care provider to them. The same thing then in that case, I feel like by the end of some of those interviews a lot of those people vying for the position really weren't interested. And that is something I was able to learn from that experience as well.

Brad gained a way of looking at his professional life because of his advisor's role modeling of people skills. He shared,

I would call [my advisor] one of my first mentors, you know. And then as you go through life you have a lot of mentors if you're lucky, but probably the first one is the most critical because, you know, when you're young you can make some really stupid decisions….You know how it is in life raising kids. It's like parents can tell you [something] a thousand times, but if they [kids] hear it from someone else that is an influence [they think,] "Wow this…[person] really knows what [they're]…talking about." I think some of that was just getting some of that reinforcement. But I mean integrity, having fun at what you do, trying to make the job fun. I mean let's face it, you spend a lot of time at work and if you're not enjoying it? And I have been at supervision management since the early '80s and I have dealt with employees who are very unhappy, who are there not because

they want to be there. And so, just the philosophy of life and I really credit…[my

student government advisor] with a lot of that stuff.

Chuck's people skills help him further the causes of his professional organization and

community service club. He said,

I've been president of the…[professional] association here.…Right now I am the

president of…[a community service] club.…On a state basis with

the…association I have been to a lot of the board meetings there and participated

on a city basis with the…association. And probably the same type of council [as

student congress]. Of course in the…[professional] business…we work with the

cities and the counties and sometimes that requires going to a council meeting.

That [student government] is probably my introduction to learning a little bit

about organizations and how they run. I have also been involved with a few other

community activities and organizations where we have meetings and have to get

together as a group and decide what we are going to be doing.

A handful of participants credited their student government experience with

making them better people, spouses, and parents. Kate explained,

It impacts me as a mom, it impacts me raising my children. To have them look at

the world not through rose colored glasses. To have them look at other people

and think, "They come from different places, they have different experiences,

they are different people, and that's OK" .…We're here on this earth not to judge

other people, but to be helpful, considerate, and curious. And I look at some of

those things that those clubs, those diversities, those different people, and

I…think I am better because of them. My kids are going to be better because of

me and that is because of them….It's kind of a chain reaction….and that's positive for me.

Four participants have used their ability to organize and work well with people in political activism. Jim claimed, "[Because of the student government experience] I've been precinct chairman. I've been campaign chairman in the county for a congressional candidate. …I've gone to probably five or six county and state conventions."

Gaining Confidence and Finding One's Voice

The participants' generally positive student government experience was also linked to feelings they had about themselves. Participants believe that the student government experience increased their confidence and provided an environment where they were challenged into practicing their leadership voice. Nancy defined this leadership voice as "verbalizing and convincing." In gaining that confidence and voice, they learned to work with and lead others.

At the simplest level, they gained confidence when others put faith in them. Sue reflected that her confidence was boosted when her peers asked her to run for office:

I think it made me a little more sure of myself. People came to me and said, "We think you'd be good at this and we are willing to support and help you, we think you have good input and you are a good listener." You just think, "Oh my, I never looked at myself that way before." Sure it gave me a lot more confidence.

As student president, Randy presented to a student congress of seventy people each week. Yet, years later he confided, "Well, believe it or not, I'm actually a shy person. And so it [student government leadership] helped me overcome a lot of my shyness."

The experience of working together for a common purpose provided an opportunity to practice their leadership voice. Kate confirmed,

Wow. I grew a lot in that position. It opened my eyes to all sorts of things:

diversity, and sitting down and arguing a point and seeing someone else's point

and still being able to say, "You know? I see where that other person is coming

from." But still being able to say, "But I really feel strongly about this."

Ben agreed:

I would say I probably had a little confidence going in, but the experience of

getting up in front of people and talking and putting together committees….I

think that was pretty beneficial. Probably a confidence type thing that you learn

you can get through things.

What was the value of gaining confidence and finding one's voice? By finding their

voice, they are able to assert themselves effectively within systems for their own benefit, the

benefit of others, or to galvanize a group for a common interest.

Both Chuck and Jim gained confidence through learning about the structure of the

college system and the people behind the power. This has allowed them to better navigate

institutional systems throughout their lives. Chuck said he learned "How organizations operate,"

and he reflected, "I was taught not to be intimidated by the president of an organization or

somebody that wields a lot of power somewhere." Jim echoed,

By being involved in the government at the college, before I was married, it is a

lot easier then to be involved in…my children's schools...I think there's a benefit

there that translates...If you understand…the processes…of schools….to know

who my kids' teachers were and to talk to those individuals….I think that a lot of

times when you…serve others, you gain insight yourself and it improves you. I

guess the principle is that you don't gain unless you do it.

Participants who were student government presidents all fondly remember running the student congress meetings. In fact, learning parliamentary procedure and how to run meetings is credited as providing life long value in helping them to lead others. Gary said, "Knowing parliamentary procedure and how to conduct a meeting was vital which has paid out many times over for me since then. And, I thought that was worth [the student government experience] if nothing else." Chuck said something similar, "That was some of my first introduction to parliament and procedure. Overall I probably learned how to conduct somewhat of an orderly meeting and get something accomplished and get group consensus on things."

Summary

This chapter has provided mini-portraits of the 11 participants in this study along with discussion of the major themes that emerged regarding the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of that experience. The nature of the community college experience included the themes of relationships, travel, money and power, and challenges.

The data reveal that participants believed themselves to be impacted through their experience in community college student government. They learned how to "learn on the job" and make themselves useful even as they were trying to figure out their role within a structure. They gained people skills that help them positively interact with and advocate for others. They gained self-confidence and in doing so learned to articulate their thoughts and lead others.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of community college student government experience and the impact of this experience on personal development and subsequent life experiences of community college students. As described in chapter three, data were collected through phenomenologically-oriented qualitative, open-ended interviews with 11 past community college student government leaders. These interviews explored the questions: (a) What is the nature of community college student government experience? (b) What is the perceived impact of student government experience on personal development and subsequent life experience of community college students? (c) How does this experience benefit the community college student, the community college, the community, and others? As discussed in chapter four, analysis of the data resulted in four major themes regarding the nature of the participants' experiences: relationships, travel, power and money, and challenges. In addition, the analysis of the data uncovered three major themes regarding the impact of these experiences on participants in this study: on-the-job training, people skills, gaining confidence and finding one's voices.

This final chapter summarizes the data analysis, presents conclusions of the study, and discusses implications of the study for practice, policy, and future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

Summary of the Analysis

The overall experience of participating in community college student government was positive for the participants of this study. Community college student government provided an environment where participants developed through the relationships they experienced, their opportunities for travel, their connection to money and power, and the challenges they negotiated. The participants believed these experiences increased their self-confidence, and that the on-the-job learning that took place prepared them for later real-world work environments. In addition, these experiences helped participants to develop people skills through which they asserted their newfound "voices." Participants believed the skills gained through their student government experience were of life-long value because the skills positively influenced their personal relationships, their community and civic involvement, and their professional and political effectiveness.

On the basis of these findings, it appears that community college student government engagement is beneficial to individual development and subsequent life experiences of students. The results of this study may be useful to higher education professionals in their efforts to be intentional when providing student development services.

Conclusions and Implications

Unlike the bulk of published studies which focus on student engagement through non-student government leadership activities (e.g., clubs, sororities, fraternities, alumni associations) at four year institutions (Huang & Chang, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Ifert Johnson, 2004; Logue et al., 2005; Pizzolato, 2005), the unique contributions of this study are its focus on *community college* students and, specifically, on *student government* leadership experience. In regard to these contributions, the four major conclusions of the study are (a) Participants in

community college student government share personal characteristics; (b) the community college environment influences the nature of the student government experience; (c) student government experience positively influences participants' development; and, (d) participants in community college student government tend to remain living in the college vicinity and contribute back to the community, but not to the community college itself.

This section will discuss these conclusions and their connection to the literature, and the implications of each conclusion for practice, policy, and future research.

Participants' Personal Characteristics

The participants of this study were typical community college students in that they were diverse in age and in academic goals (CCSSE, 2004; AACC, 2000) and that they tended to remain in the community after graduation (Carnegie Commission, 1970). In addition, the participants seem to share several personal characteristics. Each participant was articulate, warm and welcoming in personality, interested in people, involved in student government with the intent to help others, and civic-minded. The participants believed that their student government experience assisted them in gaining self-confidence, sensitivity to diversity, people skills, and civic interest. Furthermore, the study's data reveal that the participants view relationships (e.g., with advisors, peers, college personnel) as an underpinning of the student government experience. The study's findings regarding the importance of relationships are consistent with Huang and Chang's (2004) research that engagement in out-of-class activities is positively linked with growth in interpersonal skills.

These participant commonalities suggest that students with particular personality traits may self-select leadership opportunities at community colleges. Specifically, individuals who gravitate toward student government involvement may share characteristics that are linked to

leadership. Additionally, they may, in general, like working with people, and they may be prone toward community service or political activity.

The conclusion that community college student government leaders share common traits has implications for policy and practice. In particular, the common interest in relationships implies that it may be useful for student government advisors to facilitate relationship building during student government training with the intent of fostering students' understanding of themselves and others. Since student government leadership exposes students to personally and publicly "provocative moments" (Pizzolato, 2005), often while making decisions that weigh their perspectives with the perspectives of others, leadership training that facilitates relationship building may provide students practice in considering the perspectives of others in their decision-making.

Best practices in student government training in regard to relationships might include helping the students understand themselves (e.g., identity development, personality type, conflict resolution style, goal-setting); understand their peers (e.g., group bonding, team building, brainstorming, visioning); understand the college professionals (e.g., people behind the titles; roles of the professionals and their offices; policies, practices, and procedures that guide the college professionals); and understand the needs of the community (e.g., social, educational, economic, civic).

In regard to research, future studies on personality traits as related to student government leadership could be of value in answering the following questions: Do students who seek student government experiences share personality traits that are linked to leadership? If so, can these traits be intentionally groomed through student government involvement? Such information might be useful to student government advisors who would be interested in knowing of

predispositions that may exist in students who gravitate toward student government leadership opportunities and how to awaken and nurture beneficial predispositions.

Community College Environment on Student Government Experience

The community college environment influences the nature of the student government experience. Environmental characteristics specific to community colleges that influenced the student government experience for this study's participants were the diversity of the student body and the college organizational structure, including student representation on central committees.

The diversity of the student body influenced the participants' student government experience by exposing them to student peers from a broad range of ages, backgrounds, and academic goals. As student government leaders, the participants' experience with peer diversity was intensified through serving and representing the student body. The participants were influenced by the college organizational structure and mentioned that they liked getting a "peek" at how the college was run. Through "rubbing elbows" with administration, checking weekly financial reports, and "keeping an eye" on "their money" they came to know college personnel and gain an understanding of institutional processes. Student representation on central college committees was influential to participants' development. Working on college committees helped them develop confidence in communicating with "people who have power," and also provided a foundation for committee experiences in their post-college professional lives.

Relative to student representation on college committees and the value of that experience, Astin's (1984) research on student involvement says that out-of-class interaction with peers, college staff, faculty, and administration enhances student development. Baxter Magolda (1992) says that such involvement helps students grow from concrete thought to more abstractly

independent thought. Additionally, the institution stands to benefit from student representation on committees. Terrell and Cuyjet (1994) assert, "A truly 'collegiate' form of governance in American colleges and universities involves a sharing relationship among faculty, administrators, and students in institutional decision making, problem solving, and goal setting and in accepting responsibility for the day-to-day and long-range functioning of the institutions. To achieve such shared participation, administration and faculty must invest in student participation" (p. 1).

The broad conclusion that the community college environment influences the student government experience development has implications for policy and practice. It could be beneficial for colleges to provide an expectation of student representation on all committees with the intent of fostering students' relationships with the college and to influence student development. Student committee representation could be facilitated through the student government in much the same way faculty representation on committees may be assigned through faculty senate. However, since not all glimpses of the college's inner workings were positive for this study's participants, advisors of student governments might consider fully debriefing feelings, ideas, and challenges that result from such involvement. This may be useful because when students become more involved with the college's operations, they may need assistance in interpreting the college's motivation behind decisions. Improved understanding of institutional operations may increase student comfort with institutions in general, and in particular, may better inform student government decision-making when college administration and programs request student funds.

In regard to implications for research, further research that focuses on the college community as a whole, including the phenomenon of student representation on college committees and the impact of such involvement on both student development and institutional

governance, would be useful. The results of a study of this type could guide student government leaders' understanding of the operations of institutions, the nature of relationship building within institutions, the student government function within the college community, and the value of student government decision-making relative to the use of collective student resources (e.g., time, money, facilities, services).

Positive Influence on Participants' Development

The overall community college student government experience for participants in this study was positive, and the experience also positively influenced participants' development. Community college student government experience provides participants a "real-world" experience that becomes a foundation for post-college work and life. By creating in participants a sense of "ownership" and responsibility, their student government experience simulates a real-world job. Participants in this study described their student government experiences as allowing them to visualize an activity or solution to a challenge, implement their vision, learn from their successes and failures, gain confidence, and find their voice. The participants in this study continue to use such skills today, in the real world, as they relate to their family and clients, supervise and collaborate with others, and volunteer through religious, community, and political avenues.

This conclusion is supported by Ifert Johnson's (2004) survey of 7,083 alumni from 31 institutions (small universities and private liberal arts colleges). She concluded, "Experiences during college, including participation in activities and experiences that contribute to developing intellectual and personal skills, are related to how alumni behave and influence others around them for many years after graduation" (p.183) and that "everyday community participation

behaviors are an important way that college graduates influence their families, communities, and others around them" (p. 183).

Participants in community college student government also gain interpersonal skills. Through their student government experience they learn to work with others, and come to appreciate diversity. Pascarella (2006) states, "Interactions with a diverse spectrum of people, ideas, values, and perspectives that are different from one's own and challenge one's assumed views of the world have the potential for important developmental impacts during college" (p. 511). This point is particularly relevant to community colleges (Pierson et al., 2003), which typically have highly diverse student bodies. Therefore, this study confirms that working with a diverse student body, diverse viewpoints, and the diverse needs of the campus helped community college student government participants to gain self-confidence and embrace diversity as they worked toward furthering student desires.

Recognizing that the community college student government experience simulates the "real world" for participants has implications for policy and practice. In practice, it may be valuable for college administrators to acknowledge the work of student government similar to the way accomplishments of other college divisions and services are congratulated. Additionally, student government training and on-the-job experiences can be intentional in simulating the work world beyond college, while allowing for student development by providing opportunities for student leaders to routinely debrief, reflect, evaluate and make sense of their efforts and interactions.

Implications for research include studies that could improve on the generalizability of the findings of this study. Examples include: a multi-case study that includes several community colleges and a larger number of ethnically diverse student government leaders; and a longitudinal

study that explores the nature of the community college student government experience over time.

Participants' Contributions to the Community College

The literature states that community college graduates, much like the participants in this study, tend to reside in the college's service vicinity (Carnegie Commission, 1970). This study's findings suggest that community college student government participants tend to contribute back to their communities throughout their lives. The study's participants were civically active in schools, churches, politics, and service organizations. However, this civic engagement did not include re-engagement with, or contributions to, the community college itself.

This is a significant issue, because the leadership and other skills developed by student government participants could be of great benefit to the college. It stands to reason that community college staff would be interested in finding ways to encourage college alumni to re-connect with the college in meaningful ways.

Implications for community college policy and practice are the need to help students become aware of the many contributions they can make as alumni toward supporting the college. Student government advisors could provide training to student government leaders in regard to this issue. Training ideas that may prove helpful are as simple as encouraging interaction with the alumni or foundation offices, including current student government leaders in alumni activities, or creating a list of all college personnel, trustee members, and prominent community members who are alumni.

Implications for research include the need for studies that explore the reasons that former student government leaders do not re-engage with the community college following graduation. In addition, future research could identify if and how educational institutions can be purposeful

in involving students so that their graduates re-engage back to the college and in the community in ways that benefit the college and future students.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This study's participants reached back through 11 to 45 years to offer advice to student government advisors and words of wisdom to students who might be considering involvement in community college student government.

Advice to Advisors

Participants in this study suggested implications for practice through the words of wisdom they offered to student government advisors. In general, they asked advisors to focus on "positives" as they interact with student government participants. Ben reminded advisors that engaging students in an activity that gets "them off the street" and keeps "them motivated" might "open their eyes and mind and they are going to go on and do something else" and therefore stay in college. Gary asked that advisors remember they are:

> Dealing with young adults...try and help them think creatively. Basically use phrases like "in a perfect world" or say "I have a magic wand and we can do anything."...Get them to get their eyes off the desk and up to the horizon and then up to the stars.

Martin suggested that advisors help their students set goals, provide follow up to the goal-setting and tasks assigned, and invite others (e.g., administrators, faculty, staff, outside professionals, volunteers) to "participate in mentoring the young people in that group." Brad expressed that leadership skills can be taught but that such skills are secondary to building self-esteem. He warned that individuals can learn leadership skills, but will only be able to use them in times of crisis if they have a strong self-esteem.

Using sports video highlights as an example, he suggested that advisors could find positive things the students are doing and reflect those things back to them. He said, "If they have self-esteem, you can tell them they are superman and they will do it."

Sue suggests that advisors allow students enough independence to learn but not so much that they catastrophically fail. Her advisor had "the perfect balance of letting us make mistakes so that we could learn from them, but he didn't ever let us sink." Ben confirms that if "You have confidence in yourself, you can allow others to take a role." Thus, advisors are encouraged to set up learning environments where such confidence can be fostered and in turn, students will build a strong student government.

Brad reminds advisors that student government is a learning experience that can positively impact students, if advisors believe in students, and that the experience can influence student development so they can positively impact others. He asserted, "You look at the kid in front of you and sometimes they are a diamond in the rough, fortunately people saw that in me and I have tried to pay that back ten times over."

"Words of Wisdom" to Students

Participants in this study could not resist offering advice to future community college student government leaders. Maybe in providing these words of wisdom, they were talking to their younger selves from a perspective only the passage of time can offer.

Nancy said, "Make sure you know what you believe in...be willing to listen...work together." Sue reminded, "Be a person who is willing to listen...try to come to consensus. Don't go in so hardnosed that you aren't willing to budge from your position." Gary said, "Learn everything...about how government works on a small scale...how to conduct a meeting and pick a project either through your own ideas or consensus...learn everything...because it will pay off

many times over in real life." Ben warned, "You can't be fighting and banging your head against the wall... You have to be open-minded and receptive to other people's ideas." Pete advised,

Be true to yourself and your fellow government officers. Listen, but don't go under pressure from administration or other people. The decisions you make will affect a lot of people. Don't jump to conclusions, just research it, look at it, and talk it over. And make your decisions, not on the motion, but on the facts and figures; basically on what you see is right and wrong. It's up to you.... You just have to sit down and listen to what others have to say, specifically the students. And if you have to take an opinion poll and find out what they think, that is easily done.

Brad suggested,

Learn from as many people as you can. [From] some people you're going to learn *how* to do things and really want to do things the way they do. [However], you will be in some situations where you're learning just as much, but you're learning how *not* to do things. That is just as important....just keep [your mouth] shut and open your eyes and learn.

In conclusion, it is my sincere hope that the data uncovered by this study will support college administrators, advisors and students seeking to enhance the student government experience of student leaders.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. What was your position and role in your community college student government?

2. Did your leadership experience in community college student government influence you? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. What do you remember most about the total student government experience?

4. After your community college student government experience, were you involved in student government at any other college? If so, how were the experiences similar? Different? Did the community college student government experience helped prepare you for further involvement with student government. If so, how? If not, why not?

5. Did you gain any useful skills through your community college student government experience? If so, tell me about the skills you gained.

6. What about your student government experience helped you learn these skills?

7. How do you utilize those skills today?

8. Tell me about how the skills you gained through your student leadership position benefited you personally.

9. What, if any, employment did you pursue after your degree work at the community college?

10. How did/do the skills you gained through your student government experience benefit you professionally?

11. What, if any, volunteer or community involvement have you pursued?

12. How did/do the skills you gained through your student government experience benefit you in your volunteerism or community involvement?

13. Are there any other ways your skills gained through your student leadership experience have been used to benefit the community?

14. Have your gained skills been used to benefit the community college you attended? If so, how (donor, staff member, board member, direct or indirectly as a client, etc)?

15. Can you tell me anything you know, are proud of, or have concerns about regarding your community college today (current events, restructuring, building, cost, etc)?

16. Are there other benefactors of the skills gained?

17. What/who do you believe was the single most important influence in your student government experience?

18. What do you remember as peak experiences?

19. What do you feel most proud of about the experience?

20. What would have improved your student government experience?

21. If you could do it again, what would you do differently?

22. Do you have any regrets? Should have, could have, would have?

23. What value would others remember of your student government involvement?

24. What influence did your student government peers have on your experience?

25. What influence did your advisor, or other college staff, have on your experience?

26. Do you maintain contact or ever wish you could reconnect with your co-student government leaders, advisor, or other key individuals from that experience? Why? Why not?

27. What larger ramifications, if any, were an off-shoot of your experience in student government?

28. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your student government experience?

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire:
The Impact Of Student Government Leadership Experience On Community College Students

Code number: _____

Current age: _____

City of residence:
_____

Community college(s) where student government experience took place:
_____

Approximate/actual age at the time of the community college student government experience:
_____

Institution(s) of higher education where additional involvement in student government took place:
_____
_____

Current occupation:
_____

Past occupation(s):
_____
_____

Circle the term that best describes your volunteer or community involvement since your community college student government experience: **High Average Low None**

Circle the term that best describes your political involvement since your community college student government experience: **High Average Low None**

In the years after you left the community college where you had your student leadership experience, what relationship(s) have you had with the college? Please circle all terms that apply:

Staff member
Faculty member
Administrator
Board member
Volunteer
Donor

Student
Parent of student(s)
Relative, other than parent, of student(s)
Patron of events
Other (Please explain): _____