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The Socialization of Students at a Midwestern College

by

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Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education

Eastern Michigan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 21, 2012

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two children, Ethan and Abigail, who have persisted with their father through the good and bad of his pursuit in obtaining a doctoral degree. Without their love and support, this dissertation could not have been written.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Elizabeth Broughton, who has steadfastly remained with me throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Without her guidance, support, and gentle nudging, this dissertation would never have come to completion. I would also like to thank each member of my dissertation committee—Dr. Anderson, Dr. Orrange, and Dr. Tracy—for their review, suggestions, and helpful feedback on my dissertation.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my parents, Blaine and Sharon Rader, who have provided emotional and financial support towards the completion of my doctoral education. Their support of education is without question.

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to understand and explain the overall culture and subcultures of Prairie College (a pseudonym) and how those cultures socialized students to persist or depart from the institution. In accordance with the higher education student retention theory and research of Braxton (2000), Kuh and Love (2000), and Kuh (2001), there is potential for an institution of higher education to serve and retain greater numbers of students when administrators understand the institutional culture (Morgan, 1996; Mintzberg, 1979; Spindler, 1988) in which they work as well as that of students they serve.

Qualitative research methods were used. The study answered three specific research questions: 1) how did students experience the environment/culture of Prairie College; 2) what experiences allowed the student to feel she or he belonged or did not belong at Prairie College; and 3) how did the student decide whether or not to persist at Prairie College?

Examination of the institutional and student cultures of Prairie College found that 1) students were satisfied with their relationships with faculty; 2) faculty was the most influential socializing agent of the college's institutional beliefs and values upon students; 3) faculty teaching and advising were highly valued by students and led to student persistence; 4) students valued the interpersonal intimacy Prairie College provided as a small school; 5) students valued their relationship with family and home communities and did not want to lose their connections; 6) many students desired continuation of the "high school" cultural experience at Prairie College; 7) students did not perceive administrative staff supporting the operational core nor student culture of Prairie College; 8) students desired more social enclaves to improve the overall student

culture of the college; and 9) student athletics provided a positive socializing environment for students, but students who did not participate in athletics were excluded from this socialization.

The overall result of individual faculty, staff, and student observations and interviews brought clarity to how students experienced Prairie College and where a cultural match among the historical, faculty, staff, and student cultures occurred, potentially promoting student persistence.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background.....1

 Statement of Problem.....3

 Purpose of Study5

 Research Traditions5

 Research Methodology6

 Significance of Study7

 Conceptual Framework.....7

 Delimitations of the Study14

 Summary15

Chapter 2: Review of Research and Literature16

 Introduction.....16

 Background on College Student Retention.....16

 Organizational Culture.....20

 Culture within Higher Education Organizations.....24

 Organizational Socialization.....27

 Cultural Anthropology and Conflict30

 Summary33

Chapter 3: Research Method.....34

 Introduction.....34

 Location of Study.....37

 Research Tradition38

 Research Method38

 Researcher as Instrument40

Conceptual Framework.....	43
Research Ethics.....	44
Measures to Insure Safety and Confidentiality for Human Subjects.....	45
Data Gathering.....	46
Data Analysis.....	47
Validity.....	49
Summary.....	51
Chapter 4: Results of Study.....	52
Introduction.....	52
Institutional Culture – Historical Subculture.....	54
Prairie College Religious Orientation.....	55
German Language and Culture.....	58
Administrative Leadership.....	59
Early Instruction.....	60
Student Recruitment.....	61
Student Admissions Standards.....	62
Prairie College Finances.....	64
Church Governance of the College.....	65
College Reputation.....	65
Summary of Institutional Culture – Historical Subculture.....	67
Beliefs.....	67
Espoused Values.....	68
Basic Assumptions.....	70

Institutional Culture – Faculty Subculture	71
Well-Credentialed Faculty	72
Teaching Faculty.....	73
Aging Faculty.....	75
Faculty Workload.....	76
Faculty/Student Relationship	76
Summary of Institutional Culture – Faculty Subculture	78
Beliefs	78
Espoused Values	79
Basic Assumptions.....	80
Institutional Culture – Student Affairs Staff Subculture.....	80
Few Student Life Staff	80
Marginalization of Student Life Staff.....	82
<i>In Loco Parentis</i> Student Life Program	83
Student Life Rule Enforcers.....	84
Student Life Silo	85
Lack of Student Hospitality	85
Summary of Institutional Culture – Student Affairs Staff Subculture.....	87
Beliefs	87
Espoused Values	88
Basic Assumptions.....	88
Student Subculture	89
Small School Culture	94

Student Admissions Standards.....99

A Second High School Experience.....102

Academic Environment104

Relationship with Faculty108

Relationship with Staff111

Campus Social Climate.....114

Rationale for Student Withdrawal122

Summary of Student Culture124

 Beliefs124

 Espoused Values126

 Basic Assumptions.....128

Corroboration.....129

Summary.....130

Chapter 5: Summary and Implications of Research131

 Introduction.....131

 Purpose of Research.....131

 Conceptual Framework.....132

 Methodology.....132

 Summary.....133

 Implications of Study.....140

 Implications for Practice at Prairie College140

 Implications for Further Research at Prairie College144

 Implications for Theory145

Limitations146

Recommendations for Future Research147

References.....149

Appendix A.....157

List of Tables

<u>Table</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Analysis of Data Collection.....	54
2	Interviewed Student Demographics.....	90

List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Institutional and Student Cultural Match – Student Persistence.....	8
2	Institutional and Student Cultural Mismatch – Student Departure	13
3	Historical Subculture	54
4	Faculty Subculture	71
5	Student Affairs Staff Subculture.....	80
6	Student Subculture.....	89

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Keeping matriculated students enrolled in a higher education institution through graduation is an important administrative and educational role for colleges and universities. When students leave a college or university prior to graduation, there can be loss of institutional reputation but, more importantly, loss of revenue used to support the institutional mission. The time, energy, and money spent in selecting and attending a college or university that is not an academic or personal fit creates a difficult situation. Improper fit results in greater time towards degree completion and potentially more money spent in pursuit of an educational degree.

As an educational leader, I am interested in student retention issues. More than 100 years ago, colleges maintained graduation rates of students. Since the recording of retention rates, the overall national average graduation rate has consistently averaged around 45 percent (Tinto, 1982). In 2010, the 5-year U.S. baccalaureate graduation rate was 46.2 percent (ACT, 2010). While private higher education institutions nationwide have higher graduation rates than the national graduation rate for public institutions nationwide, 64.7 versus 47.8 percent, respectively (ACT, 2010), why has this graduation rate not improved over time? Tinto (1993), a scholar on student persistence, found that approximately 15 to 25 percent of student departure is attributable to academic dismissal. Why, then, do the remaining 30 to 40 percent of enrolled students nationally withdraw voluntarily from college? My interest was in understanding how the culture of a private Midwestern college socializes its students to persist or depart from the institution.

Even though college and university graduation rates have not improved over time, obtaining a U.S. college degree is important in obtaining employment and a higher-paying job. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) reported that the overall unemployment rate in 2010 for all U.S. citizens holding a high school diploma was 10.3 percent, compared to college graduates at 4.7 percent. Furthermore, the average college-educated individual makes over \$1,000,000 (in 1999 dollars) more over a lifetime than the average high school educated individual (Day and Newburger, 2002). In 2010, the median weekly income for a high school educated individual was \$626, while a college educated individual made \$1,038 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). While these statistics are significant, the importance and value of a college degree is made even clearer by college students on the Freshman Survey, a national survey by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). The CIRP reports that one of the most significant reasons a student attends college is “to obtain a higher paying job” (Sax, Astin, Lindholm, Saenz, Korn, and Mahoney, 2010).

The student retention issue, keeping students enrolled in institutions, is important to colleges and universities as well as to the individual student. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2003), the numbers of high school graduates will remain relatively flat through 2013, making it more difficult for institutions to maintain or increase budgets based on traditional college student populations. Further, the decline in Federal and State funding for higher education makes each student more important to the overall financial operation of the institution, and graduating the student in a timely manner keeps tuition more affordable for students (Tinto, 1993; NCPPRHE, 2002; Jones, 2003).

As I explored the retention problem, a significant complicating factor presented itself. There is no one theory or “fix” that can be applied and work consistently across institutions. I found several theories that explore retention issues: economic (St. John, Cabrera, Nora and Asker, 2000), organizational (Kuh and Love, 2000; Laden, Milem and Crowson, 2000), environmental (Moos, 1979), psychological (Stage, 1989; Brower, 1992; Peterson, 1993; Bean and Eaton, 2000), social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1971), sociological (Berger, 2000, Milem and Berger, 1997), and interactionist (Tinto, 1993). For this study, I used the research tradition from organizational socialization and educational anthropology.

Even with these many theories, colleges and universities currently operate under the assumption that their student bodies are homogeneous and that a similar educational process will work for all students (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998). This assumption does not assist me in understanding why students persist or depart from a specific private Midwestern college. Student bodies are not homogeneous. Through this study, I explored how the culture of one private Midwestern college organized students in or out of the college through a socialization process that leads to student retention or departure.

Statement of the Problem

In this study, I identified Prairie College as a private institution where students may be at greater risk of withdrawing. This assumption was based on my experience working at a similar college in the Midwest. Approximately 25 percent of the incoming first-year student cohort at this college withdrew before the beginning of the second year (National Center for Educational Statistics, IPEDS, 2005). Nationally, private selective liberal arts colleges report that students returning for the second year of college equate to

82.8 percent, according to data from the American College Testing Service (ACT, 2005). While this college's first-to-second-year retention rate is only 6 percent lower than the national average, this equates to an approximate loss in revenue of \$1,500,000 based on 27 fewer students over the course of 3 years at a discounted tuition rate of \$18,526 (33%). It was deemed to be significant for this college to explore its retention issue.

Graduation rates are another common factor in determining a college's success in educating students. Prairie College graduates 55% of its students in 4 years and 63% in 5 years (National Center for Educational Statistics, IPEDS, 2005). The national 5-year graduation rate for private selective liberal arts colleges is 64.3 (ACT, 2005). While the graduation rate is nearly the same, progress could be made to match or surpass national graduation rates.

In the fall of 2004, a presidential special committee on retention was created at Prairie College to investigate the decline in student persistence (Prairie College, 2005*). A part of this committee's charge was to investigate several assessments to understand the experience of students at Prairie College and to improve retention. These instruments consisted of *Your First College Year Survey*, *College Student Survey*, *ACT Student Opinion Survey: Statistical Comparison Survey*, *ACT Student Opinion Survey: Summary Report*, *National Survey on Student Engagement: Means Comparison Report*, and the *National Survey on Student Engagement: Institutional Benchmark Report*. Emerging academic, social, and institutional themes were examined. The findings reported that Prairie College was not dissimilar in many areas under study from identified benchmark

*Due to issues of confidentiality, there is no entry in the reference section for the actual source of this information.

schools, as identified by this presidential special committee. Differences reported by students at Prairie College from the benchmark schools included greater academic stress and difficulty, less academic support through advising, less satisfaction with coursework, greater involvement in athletics, greater connection with their families, less connection with campus activities, strong dissatisfaction with recreational, academic, and housing facilities, and dissatisfaction with campus support staff (Prairie College, 2005). Based on these differences, 12 retention strategies were put forward to the campus community at the end of the Winter 2005 term with the overall theme to increase “radical hospitality” (Prairie College, 2005). During the time I conducted this study, it remained unclear whether these strategies were improving student retention at Prairie College.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences and socialization process of college students at a private Midwestern college. I explored the culture and socialization process at Prairie College, which may assist faculty and administrators at the college in considering future programs or policies to improve student persistence. With this aim in mind, I sought to learn the shared common experience of students in order to answer three specific questions. They were:

- How do students experience the environment/culture of Prairie College?
- What experiences allow the student to feel she or he belongs or does not belong at Prairie College?
- How does a student decide whether or not to persist at Prairie College?

Research Traditions

For this study, my research tradition evolved from theories based in organizational development and socialization and educational anthropology. Wanous (1992), Schein (1978), and Van Maanen and Schein (1979) have all focused research on how individuals within organizations are socialized by groups within business organizations. Spindler (1987) focused his research on how students are socialized within educational institutions. Wanous, Schein and Van Maanen, and Spindler all use a form of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) to describe phenomena. Symbolic interactionism seeks to explain empirically the meanings individuals make of the social phenomena when involved in social settings. Through symbolic interactionism, I sought to identify themes, construct ideas from the empirical data, and demonstrate support for the themes formed from the data (Jacob, 1987).

Research Methodology

The methodology I used for this study is qualitative and follows the qualitative research methods of Lofland and Lofland (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Spradley (1979, 1980). Qualitative research methods assist the researcher in understanding the meanings people assign to experiences (Morrow and Smith, 1998). Further, qualitative research facilitates an effective approach to understanding the lived experience and socialization of students within Prairie College. Johnson (2000) stated that retention research on student departure or persistence should be qualitative, culturally sensitive or culturally based, and done within the context of a socially constructed reality.

In conducting this study, I explored the socialization process at Prairie College by understanding its logic, arrangements, and explicit and implicit rules (Miles and

Huberman, 1994). The ethnographic process was approached through the use of words that explain how “people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9).

Significance of the Study

Developing an understanding of the socialization process of college students at Prairie College was important. Currently there are no comprehensive studies that explain the experience of college students at private colleges and the possible reasons for why college students persist or depart from them. According to Kuh (2000), there is very little research that focuses on the impact of organizational culture on student persistence.

Conceptual Framework

For more than 20 years, I have been an administrator in higher education, working with college students. Most of my professional work has been conducted at private colleges. At one of these colleges, I was responsible for monitoring student retention and providing programs and services to assist with student persistence. I began this study thinking that I could “fix” the retention problem at my institution. As time progressed, I realized that programs and services were not necessarily the answer to the retention problem. After a career change in student affairs and further research, I wanted to explore and understand more fully how students are socialized within a college environment where I was not attached to any particular program, policy, or person. Through understanding how students are socialized, I anticipated providing insight into the culture that might contribute knowledge of benefit to students, faculty, and administrators at a private Midwestern college.

How students are socialized within Prairie College was researched through an organizational culture and socialization process that involves both organizational and individual factors. This process incorporates the theories of Tinto (1987), Wanous (1992), Schein (1992, 1978), Kuh and Hall (1993), Kuh and Love (2000) and Spindler (1967) and is visually outlined in Figure 1.

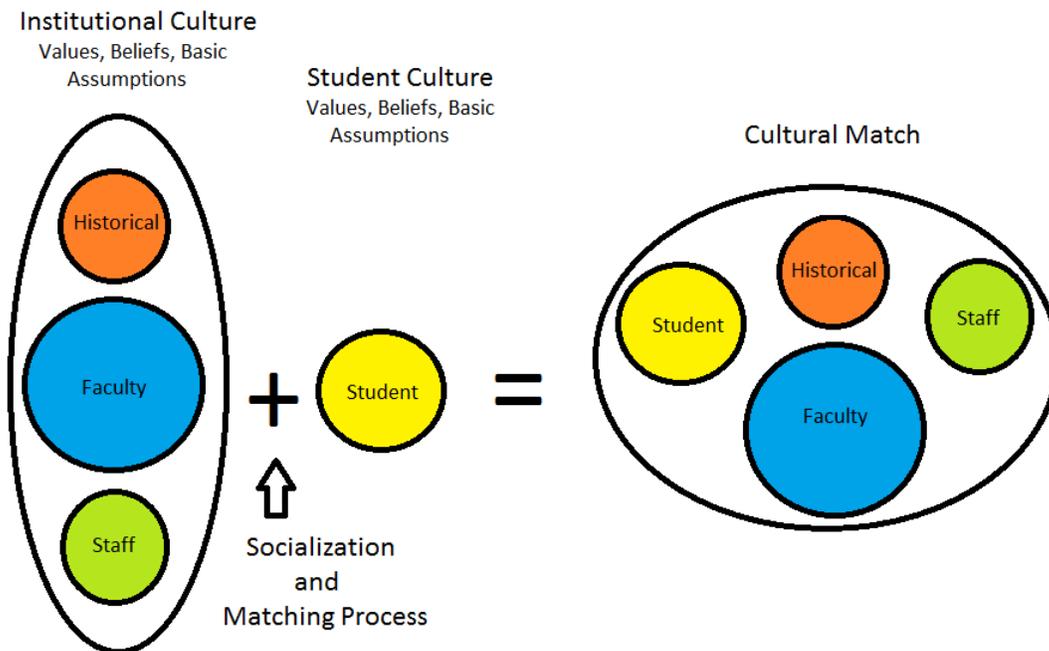


Figure 1. Institutional and Student Cultural Match: Student Persistence

Colleges and universities can be best described as professional bureaucracies that are organized around an operating core otherwise known as the faculty (Mintzberg, 1978). The faculty within the professional bureaucracy has significant autonomy to perform their role but must also work very closely with the students whom they serve. Without students, or “clients,” the college or university cannot survive. It is the faculty

that indoctrinates and socializes students to the acceptable standards of how to become professionals within the faculty's area of expertise. Subsequently, staff within the bureaucracy supports the operational core of the institution.

My conceptual framework for how students are socialized within the professional bureaucracy of Prairie College was organized into organizational and individual socialization concepts. First, there were organizational factors depicted in Figure 1 as the institutional culture that involves historical, faculty, and staff cultures. As the college (organization) begins a recruitment process (Wanous, 1992), it seeks to select students WHO can succeed within the culture of the college based on the college's values, beliefs, and basic assumptions. The college makes decisions on which students to admit by looking at the core technology (Morgan, 1997) of the institution and what it can provide to prospective students. The core technology of the college is determined by examining the academic programs offered; the educational backgrounds of faculty and staff within the institution; the level of quantitative, written, and analytic ability of successful students within the institution; the amount of high school preparatory work the student has taken; and the amount of student support services offered. The core technology of the college serves to form the expectations as well as the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the college for its students. Once the college has determined its expectations, it seeks students with the ability to succeed within the college environment. The college then makes a determination on the student's ability to succeed in the organization based on ACT/SAT scores and high school grade point average; written application statements; ability to pay tuition and fees; personal attributes such as athletic ability, musical talent, and leadership; and, possibly, a campus interview. If the student's ability meets the

college's expectations, there is a match and the student is selected to attend (Wanous, 1992; Schein, 1978).

Conversely, the decision on whether to attend a college is more than just organizational; the student's culture, values, beliefs, and basic assumptions must also be taken into consideration. While the college is making its selection decisions, as depicted in Figure 1, the student is simultaneously making selection decisions about the college. This decision-making process also serves as part of the initial socialization process. Through this part of the organizational selection process, the student evaluates the college culture as an outsider. As a non-member of the college culture, the student assesses the college culture, the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions, and determines whether the college provides enough financial resources for the student to attend; how autonomously the student is expected to perform; how much academic rigor the institution professes; how easy it is to build relationships with faculty and staff; how easy it may be to make friends; how accepting the college is of personal matters of the student; and occasionally, if there are appropriate student support programs and services. The student can observe the culture through an admission visit(s) to the campus, reviewing materials (print and electronic), and speaking with others (parents, friends, relatives, high school teachers, and guidance counselors) about the college climate.

The college culture is significant, but student expectations also play a part in the selection process. Each student has varying expectations or motivations to attend the college. These expectations and motivations affect the socialization process. Some of these expectations can include feeling respect and support from the college, making friends, making academic progress, achieving career goal(s), and being able to afford

tuition and fees. If the student likes the college culture and meets the college requirements, there is a match and the student attends.

Once the college and student have selected each other, further socialization occurs as the college and the student make further determinations to assess whether a proper match has occurred. Once the student arrives on campus, she is no longer looking at the college culture as an outsider but begins the process of experiencing the organizational culture as an insider or future member. This socialization process entails entry, socialization, and mutual acceptance (Wanous, 1992; Schein, 1978) of the campus culture. The entry process is similar for both the college and the student. During entry, the college and student determine if they received accurate information on each other and if their expectations were realistic. The college makes a determination as to whether a good match was made if the student makes academic progress and persists. The student makes the determination about a proper match as s/he goes through the first semester or year of school and beyond.

While the socialization process is different for the college and the student, both focus on how the student is accepted and made to be a part of the college culture through the socialization process. In essence, people within the college are socializing students by providing or not providing appropriate structure through structured orientation programs, opportunities for student involvement, and the occasion to build relationships with faculty, staff, and students. The student is successfully socialized to the college when the student understands how the college “works” and has found “his/her place” within the college environment, which takes into account the programs, involvement, and relationships acquired.

The socialization process ends when mutual acceptance is formed between the college and the student (Wanous, 1992; Schein, 1978). Mutual acceptance happens when the college and student expectations have been met and there is some congruence in the values, beliefs and basic assumptions of each. This is visualized at the end of Figure 1 with the historical, faculty, staff and student cultures encompassed in the overall institutional culture. Activities that show an acceptance of cultures include a student who has made academic progress, is able to financially afford college, has advanced career goals, and made interpersonal relationships. A match has been made and the student persists.

Figure 2 depicts what can occur when the institutional and student cultures do not match. Akin to Figure 1, the institution continues to seek students who meet the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the college culture with students, but they do not match. Similarly, the student may make a decision on whether to attend the college based on her cultural values, beliefs, and basic assumptions, which may not match with the college. Overall, if there is no match, the student does not attend or is not accepted.

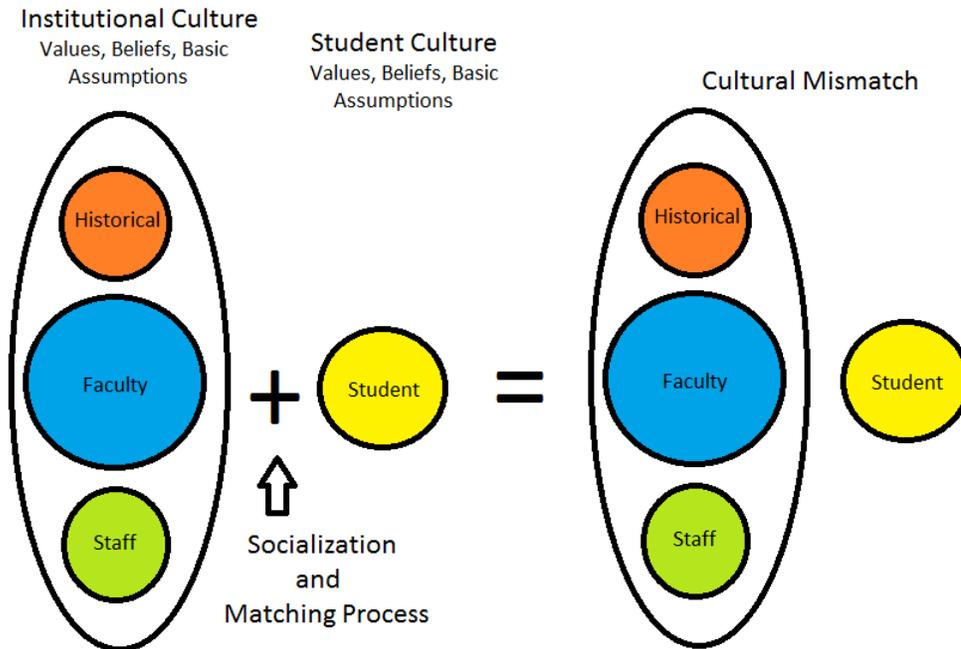


Figure 2. Institutional and Student Culture Mismatch: Student Departure

Sometimes the mismatches in culture are not determined as an outsider or are not fully disclosed until the college actors interact as insiders. Figure 2 displays how, once the student arrives on campus and starts the socialization process more actively with various college faculty and staff, a mismatch of cultural assumptions, beliefs, and values can occur between the college and/or the student. For example, the college may not have evaluated the ability of a student to perform well academically. Hence, the student is organized out of the organizational culture by poor grades or unfulfilled academic gains. Similarly, the student may not make connections with faculty, staff, or fellow students. This lack of connections keeps the student as an outsider, and the student subsequently organizes out of the culture, as there is no match.

As depicted in Figure 1, if the college's cultural expectations (academic progress and fiscal commitment) and the student's cultural expectations (academic progress, fiscal commitment, interpersonal relationships, career goals) are satisfied, the student persists. If one or more of the college's or student's cultural expectations have not been met, the student withdraws voluntarily or involuntarily, transfers, or stops out, as depicted in Figure 2. There is no match between the college and student.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited by factors based on qualitative methodology. While the study provides new knowledge to Prairie College on the socialization process of students that leads to persistence and departure, the data cannot be readily generalized to other institutions via scientific method "cause-and-effect" (Donmoyer, 1990) or through a qualitative comparative method (Schonfield, 1990) of like institutions. Rather, the findings of this study are transferable (Donmoyer, 1990) to Prairie College.

The research in this study is concerned with individuals and not with aggregates as in other social science work. This study is a qualitative single-case study (Donmoyer, 1990) and should be attributed to "one moment in time" (Kuh and Witt, 1998). While data gathered in this study will be true for the specified research time by utilizing the qualitative method, it cannot predict similar results in the socialization process of future college students at similar institutions. As each student's experience and the institutional context can be different, a similar study at another institution may or may not produce similar results. This research illuminates "what is" and provides a "coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation" (Schofield, 1990, p. 203). The reader must use the

thick description (Donmoyer, 1990; Schonfield; 1990) presented to determine applicability to their institutional context. While educators use research to improve practice, no two institutions are exactly the same. Institutions may have similar nomenclature, but the cultures within are not similar. Hence, the reader must take the thick description that applies to their institutional context to create hypotheses and ideas that may create generalizing for their institution (Becker, 1990).

Summary

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the purpose, conceptual framework, and methodology for the study. Chapter 2 will present related research on student retention, organizational development, organizational culture, and educational anthropology related to the conceptual framework of the study. Methodology of the study is described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 supplies the results of the four cultures of Prairie College and the impact on student socialization. Finally, Chapter 5 will present results of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of research and literature related to the topic under study encompasses four primary areas: current literature and research related to college student retention and persistence, primarily focused on the research of Vincent Tinto (1987) and John Braxton (2000); organizational socialization research, which focuses on how people socialize new members into existing organizations (Wanous, 1992; Van Mahann and Schein, 1979; Schein, 1978); cultural anthropology research and how educational organizations socialize students into a particular group (Spindler, 2000); and research on how organizational culture is defined and how cultural values, beliefs, and norms are learned by newcomers (Schein, 1992).

Background on College Student Retention

College student retention is one of the largest researched areas in higher education today (Tierney, 2000). The Center for the Advancement of College Student Retention hosts a retention reference web site for individuals and educational institutions named *Collegeways*. As of November 2009, more than 1400 articles, books, and dissertations have been listed on this website on various student retention issues (Collegeways, 2009). These retention resources have been categorized into 19 different issues for further investigation, ranging from adult retention to minority student retention to retention theories and formulas (Collegeways, 2009).

While research on college student retention has been extensive, leading the general student departure research has been Vincent Tinto (1993) with his Interactionist Theory. Tinto's book, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student*

Attrition, has been one of the most widely used and studied in higher education with more than 400 citations and 170 dissertations related to it (Braxton, 2000). Tinto's model for attrition is based on Emile Durkhiem's (1951) four types of suicide: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical. Tinto applied Durkhiem's theory and created 4 different modes of student departure. These modes included departure due to lack of institutional fit, lack of institutional structure, too much institutional structure for the student, and no interpersonal connection for the student. Tinto (1993) asserted his departure theory in the following way.

The educational analogue of suicidal tendency is those dispositions which incline individuals toward departure rather than persistence within the communities of the college. These fall into two categories involving dispositions, normally referred to as expectations and motivations. In the case of student departure these prove...to be best measured by intentions or goals and commitments. The former specify the valued goals, educational and occupational, toward which activities are directed; the latter the person's willingness to work toward the attainment of those goals both in the educational enterprise generally and within the context of a specific institution in particular. (p. 110)

Overall, Tinto's (1993) retention model evolves into three major components: Institutional Commitment to Students; Educational Commitment; and Social and Intellectual Community. Institutional Commitment is defined when the institution puts student welfare ahead of other institutional goals. Educational Commitment is making sure the institution is committed to the education of all students, not just some of its students. Social and Intellectual Community is when the institution develops supportive

social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members.

While Tinto's interactionalist theory is the foremost leader in the study of student departure, many researchers believe that Tinto's model is in need of change. Braxton (2000) asserted that Tinto's interactionalist theory can only be supported by multi-institutional appraisals with strong empirical backing. Similar single-institution tests of Tinto's theory render only modest empirical support. With this in mind, Braxton (2000) stated that Tinto's interactionalist theory might benefit from further examination of the economic, psychological, and sociological constructs of student departure.

Although Tinto's model is admirable in the way it shows support for all students within the college environment, it does not specifically look at the culture of the college. If a college environment supports only students with certain cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973), traditionally the characteristics and life experiences of the dominant culture, those students without appropriate cultural capital may not be satisfied and persist. As such, there is a cultural capital mismatch between the student and actors within the organizational culture, and voluntary or involuntary student departure is likely to result.

Related to campus climate and environmental factors that affect student retention, Braxton (2000) stated it is important to understand how colleges and universities socially reproduce. Most institutions, if not all, work to reproduce what is already there and not create change. This is where Bourdieu's (1973) theory of social capital evolves. In the words of Braxton (2000), social capital and reproduction is the "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p. 83). In other words "people

who live similar lifestyles because of their common level of access to capital develop a shared worldview as a result of common experiences and actions... this serves as a mechanism for marginalizing others who have access to different amounts and types of capital” (Braxton, p. 99).

Bridging the social or cultural capital issue, Rendon, Jalomo and Nora (2000) examined the issue of culture and socialization related to retention. While Tinto focused on the individual factors of student departure, Rendon, Jalomo and Nora described a concept of dual socialization. Tinto (1993) stated that students must go through a “rights of passage” (Van Gennep, 1960) process where students must separate, transition, and incorporate themselves into the new culture. Instead of two separate cultures, as in the Tinto model, Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) stated that the cultural majority and cultural minority need to identify shared values where people established within the organization maintain their culture and the individual keeps his or her culture of reference by creating overlap between the two. This model can be visualized by using two circles that overlap, with the overlap being the shared values and norms. The benefit of this model is that neither people within the organization nor individuals lose their culture of reference but together they create shared values for the student experience. Unlike Tinto’s (1993) interactionalist theory that places greater emphasis on the student to adapt to the institution, Rendon, Jalomo and Nora (2000) stated that shared cultural norms need to exist between people within the institution and individual students. In essence, they placed a much higher emphasis on the responsibility of the people within the institution to adapt to individual needs of students.

While the culture and climate of the institution can be problematic, Stage and Hossler (2000) stated that there can be a motivational “mismatch” between individual students and people within the institution. Stage and Hossler refer to a study by Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler (1995) that “found when the expectations formed by prospective students prior to matriculation were met, they were more likely to be committed to graduation from the college in which they enrolled” (p.171). Therefore, if the student admission process offers students the ability to obtain self-efficacy through opportunities to (1) experience mastery, (2) watch others like themselves succeed and thus experience success vicariously, (3) be persuaded by others to engage in challenging activities, and (4) develop positive emotional reactions to college situations and expectations (Stage and Hossler, 2000, p.174), students are more likely to succeed. The student’s perception or knowledge that he or she can succeed, self-efficacy, in the college environment motivates the student to persist. If the student does not have enough self-efficacy, departure may result.

Retention research frequently focuses on individual motivations and expectations to explain the student departure phenomena. While individual student expectations and motivations provide one part of the departure puzzle, organizational culture and socialization provide additional information to view the student retention phenomena.

Organizational Culture

Culture does not occur just in schools and communities at large but in organizations as well. A formal definition of organizational culture by Schein (1992) is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be

considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 12). Critical aspects in viewing culture involve observing behavioral regularities; group norms; exposed values; formal philosophy; rules of the game; climate; embedded skills; habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms; shared meanings; and root metaphors or integrating symbols (Schein, 1992). All organizations hold these aspects to some degree and socialize newcomers accordingly. As time unfolds, the members take for granted the basic assumptions held by the organization and people within it.

In order for a culture to survive, it must integrate its internal processes to ensure its capacity to create the status quo while adapting to the external environment so that the culture and organization can adapt and survive (Schein, 2000). People within the organization accomplish this by creating a common language and conceptual categories; defining group boundaries and criteria for inclusion and exclusion; distributing power and status; developing norms of intimacy, friendship, and love; defining and allocating rewards and punishments; and explaining the unexplainable (Schein, 2000). Through this process, newcomers are integrated into a culture, and insiders are bound to one another.

Examining artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions are how Schein (1992) uncovers the various levels of culture within an organization. Schein is but one of many researchers who have defined culture. Love, Boschine, Jacobs, Hardy, and Kuh (1993) uncover student culture similarly by examining artifacts, perspectives, values, and assumptions. Kuh (2001) found that dozens of definitions of culture exist and puts forth his own definition of culture as “the collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices,

beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on campus” (p. 25). Using this definition of culture, Kuh (2001), has created five propositions related to student persistence using the lens of organizational culture.

1. Colleges and universities that have a coherent educational philosophy and value structure and set forth clear expectations for student performance will exert a stronger “cultural pull” by teaching students what is important and inducing them to act in ways that will help them succeed academically and socially.
2. Institutional cultures that value and celebrate community have higher student satisfaction and retention rates.
3. Residential campuses have stronger, more engaging cultures that induce more conforming behavior and lead to higher persistence and graduation rates.
4. Students at institutions with strong coherent cultures learn early on what they are supposed to do to succeed.
5. In general, the greater the distance between the values and norms of a particular student subculture and the academic values and expectations espoused by the institution, the more likely it is that the subculture members will leave college prematurely (p. 27–30).

Organizational culture can be something that “is” or something that “does.” Kuh and Hall (2003) stated that culture can be a metaphor like a machine (Morgan, 1992) or something that “does” like a traditional independent variable. As an independent variable,

culture could influence student performance, satisfaction, and retention as well as institutional effectiveness and fiscal stability, or culture could be seen as a dependent variable that is a product of the characteristics, attitudes, and behavior of faculty, staff, and students and the external environment (Kuh & Hall, 2003). There is both a cause and effect that occurs in college and university cultures that happens when actors interact with one another that defines the culture.

At times the college or university can become so entrenched in its own culture that it cannot perform in the external environment. This becomes a significant problem when people within the college or university culture do not see changes in the external environment. Laden, Milem, and Crowson (2000) stated that

the persistent and seemingly intractable problem of student departure in higher education might well be considered an indicator of what Meyer and Zucker (1989) label “permanently failing organizations.” Permanently failing organizations are those ‘whose performance, by any standard,’ falls short of expectations—yet the organization and its accompanying problems goes on and on indefinitely.

Such organizations can go on indefinitely, at least in part, because the various interests that surround them become more concerned with maintaining the existing organizations than with maximizing their performance. (p. 235)

If the college or university does not recognize the change in inputs, students, and does not alter its programs to advance its culture, it is destined to fail to retain students. Any kind of retention program is then merely symbolic. As the student environment changes, the institution must adapt to the diversity of the student environment or student departure may result.

Colleges and universities can create a culture of persistence or departure through their organizational beliefs, values, and assumptions about themselves and newcomers. The institutional mission, the patterns in which actors interact with one another, and the beliefs and assumptions it has of itself and others all play an integral role in how students perceive the environment and whether they can be successful in it. The organizational culture of the college or university can assist in advancing whether a student persists or departs from the institution.

Culture within Higher Education Organizations

All organizations, higher education and otherwise, form cultures over time. A benefit of looking at student departure and persistence through a cultural lens is that it allows an accounting of interactions on process variables such as involvement, effort, and perceived belonging that come from a sociocultural perspective rather than a psychological one (Kuh & Love, 2000). As summarized by Kuh and Whitt (1998), an institutional culture conveys one or more of the following properties:

- 1) observed behavioral regularities; 2) norms or specific guides of conduct, some of which are more salient than others; 3) dominant values exposed by the organization; 4) the philosophy that guides an organization's attitudes and actions toward employees or clients; 5) rules for getting along in the organization; and 6) the feeling or organizational climate and the manner in which members of the culture interact with those outside the culture. (p. 126)

Hence, institutional culture is “the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an

institution of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus” (Kuh & Whitt, 1998, p. 127).

Kuh and Love (2000) observed higher education culture as changing all the time. The culture changes as old and new members of the institution make contact with each other and members of other groups and cultures. “The interactions between people influence and subsequently change both the students and the larger institutional environments and subenvironments” (Kuh & Love, 2000, p. 198). Failure of the student or the institution to acquire frames of reference, normative behaviors, and values results in student departure (Kuh & Love, 2000). Kuh and Love’s (2000) eight cultural propositions for premature student departure are listed below. These propositions provide additional understanding in viewing premature student departure in higher education.

1. The college experience, including the decision to leave college, is mediated through a student’s cultural meaning-making.
2. One’s culture of origin mediates the importance attached to attending college and earning a college degree.
3. Knowledge of a student’s cultures of origin and the cultures of immersion is needed to understand a student’s ability to successfully negotiate the institutions cultural milieu.
4. The probability of persistence is inversely related to the cultural distance between a student’s culture(s) of origin and the cultures of immersion.
5. Students who traverse a long cultural distance must become acclimated to dominant cultures of immersion or join one or more enclaves.

6. The amount of time a student spends in one's cultures of origin after matriculating is positively related to cultural stress and reduces the chances they will persist.
7. The likelihood a student will persist is related to the extensity and intensity of one's sociocultural connections to the academic program and to affinity groups.
8. Students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist, especially if group members value achievement and persistence (Kuh & Love, 2000, p. 201)

Tierney (2000) advances the cultural phenomena even further for premature student departure. Tierney stated that Tinto (1993) takes a functionalist approach to dealing with the retention problem. The functionalist approach is a remedy to mend a perceived problem rather than acknowledging the problem exists and is part of the cultural phenomena. For example, the educational system in the U.S. is one that "sorts and separates individuals according to certain loaded variables that have consequences" (Tierney, 2000, p. 215). Rather than accept that the sorting and separating is a part of the educational process, the functionalist tries to fix the problem. Students are not sorted and filtered by their ability, but because of who they are – boys, girls, ethnic minorities, poor, disabled or otherwise (Tierney, 2000). Therefore, students should be equipped with the necessary cultural capital to succeed within the higher education environment that goes beyond basic ability.

The higher education student culture can be dissected in many ways with the culture being very different in each dissection. Among the student culture there are national cultures, institutional cultures, intra-institutional cultures consisting of subcultures, peer groups, and culturally marginalized groups (Love, Boschini, Jacobs,

Hardy, & Kuh, 1993). Students are newcomers into the institutional culture. Many students begin the college experience without significant cultural capital. When one feels marginalized, one does not feel a part of the institutional culture. Failure to institutionalize all students may represent the institution's inability to socialize all members to succeed with the student persistence or departure being the test of institutionalization (Laden, Milem, and Crowson, 2000).

Organizational Socialization

Colleges and universities, businesses, the armed forces, civic organizations, churches, and all other social groups socialize newcomers. The socialization process is not unique to colleges and universities. Significant research has been conducted in how people socialize new members into existing business organizations through management practices and human resource management. This type of research is typically called organizational development, or OD. Organizational development is focused on understanding problems and processes in organizations that through understanding can make them more effective (Schein, 1978).

Wanous (1992), a researcher of organizational development, provides a sociological human resource management model that is useful in understanding student departure. His "Matching Model" theory illustrated how new employees are brought into an organization through an organizational recruitment, selection, and orientation process that is simultaneously focused on the employee and the people within the organization. An employee who is able to successfully complete the recruitment, selection, and orientation process then becomes an active member in the organization who is subsequently retained by the organization.

The matching model Wanous (1992) applied incorporates five stages: entry, recruitment, selection, orientation, and socialization. This socialization process is analogous to the way college students become members of a college or university through the recruitment, selection, and orientation process. Wanous elaborated that new employees (newcomers) need to change and adapt as they are socialized into the organization. The change or socialization process happens as the newcomer learns from members of the organization (insiders) the values and norms of the organization that encompasses the entire recruitment, selection, and orientation process of the organization. Failure of the newcomer to adapt to the values and norms of the organization results in a newcomer who is likely to depart voluntarily or involuntarily.

Schein (1978) is akin to Wanous (1992) in that he asserts that there are three stages of transition into a career: entry, socialization, and mutual acceptance. According to Schein (1978), the entry stage includes the recruitment and selection process. The socialization stage is how the individual “learns the ropes.” The mutual acceptance stage is the formal and informal process by which a new employee gains “full membership” into the organization.

Similar to Wanous, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) viewed the organizational socialization process as a teaching/learning process. The teaching/learning process is a means by which a newcomer “learns the ropes.” Van Maanen and Schein (1979) stated that newcomers learn the ropes by understanding the cultural perspective of people within the organization and determining whether they fit into this culture. What may be culturally common to the newcomer may be very uncommon culturally to people in the

organization. According to VanMaanen and Schein (1979), if the newcomer can accept the culture of the organization, the newcomer will persist and not depart.

While Wanous (1992) and Van Maanen and Schien (1979) studied the socialization of people within organizations, Schien (1978) studied the socialization process of newcomers through a career development and life cycle process. At varying times in the newcomers' life cycle, there are different needs and wants from the organizations they wish to join. Similarly, based on the needs and values of the organization, the organization desires newcomers with appropriate characteristics. Schein asserts that a socialization process is successful when the newcomer and organization have made a good "match" based on their own values and needs. This socialization process is somewhat similar to the dual socialization process of Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000). Schein (1978) stated that "organizations are dependent on the performance of their people, and people are dependent on organizations to provide jobs and career opportunities" (p. 1). If the organization failed to provide meaningful jobs and career opportunities that match the newcomer's skills, abilities, and values, the likely result will be newcomer departure. Hence, leaders within the organization must be attentive to the needs and characteristics of the individual.

Organizational socialization is "the ways in which the experiences of individuals transition from one role to another are structured for them by others in the organization" (Van Mannen & Schein, p. 230) and can be selected consciously by the people in the organization or unconsciously by learning how to perform on one's own. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) stated that newcomers can be socialized into six different dimensions that include collective or individual; formal or informal; sequential or variable; fixed or

variable; serial or disjunctive; and investiture or divestiture socialization. The goal of any one of these processes is to direct how people learn the culture and how to successfully function within the organization. The ability of the newcomer to learn the culture can often be a direct result of how the newcomer learned it (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Wanous (1992), Van Maanen and Schein (1979), and Schein (1978) all provide a conceptual framework of people being socialized within organizations. However, there is a significant difference in how businesses and colleges socialize individuals. Most people entering the world of work are planning to stay within the organization for an unspecified amount of time, whereas a college student typically plans to be with the organization approximately 4 to 5 years. Based on the amount of time an individual will be with an organization, there are different levels of investment that the organization and the student are willing to make on one another. The overall expectations and motivations of the organization and individual can differ.

Organizational socialization adds to the understanding of college student retention as it removes some of the individualistic motivations related to retention. The focus of organizational socialization is to bring clarity to the process by which individuals are socialized into organizations as a possible means for success or failure. Through organizational socialization, the student retention puzzle can be viewed as a process that the organization has a significant role in solving.

Cultural Anthropology and Conflict

Individual motivations and organizational processes can impact whether students persist or depart, but the culture of an organization can also have an impact. George Spindler (2000), an educational anthropologist, stated that education is a way of

socializing students into a particular group. Spindler, who primarily worked with elementary age students, viewed education as teaching the “necessary cultural and social knowledge in order to function effectively in that group. Thus, education is not necessarily political, but a mechanism within each society to prepare members for life in their community” (p. xiii). Applying Spindler’s theory, a student is either socialized “in” to the cultural norms of the college or university or socialized “out” of the environment due to a mismatch of values, beliefs, and norms.

In an interview with McDermott and Erickson (1995), Spindler noted that “most schools require [students] to adapt to the mainstream culture of the institution” (p. 3). The failure to adapt creates a conflict that occurs when the culture of the institution is in conflict with the student’s cultural heritage or personal belief system. Spindler stated that the educational institution is structured to reproduce what is already within and ensure the status quo (McDermott and Erickson, 1995). For example, when a student feels the institution is not congruent with their cultural system(s), the student may choose to make the decision to depart voluntarily or people within the educational system will find a way to organize the student to depart. The student or newcomer has learned that he or she does not fit within the environment.

Understanding the culture of a college is important to the college administrator as he or she shapes a culture that fosters student persistence. Spindler (1959) states that “culture is one in which conflicts in values, and between goals and the means to them are present and patterned” (p. 81). Therefore, failure of the student to encompass the institution’s values and goals leads to dissatisfaction and possible departure. The failure of the student to be assimilated is cultural compression or a “patterned reduction of

alternatives for behavior, usually through restrictive cultural definitions of new roles” (Spindler, 1958, p. 86) and something most college administrators try to avoid.

When an individual enters an organization, there is some form of conflict. This conflict can be minor or major for the individual. Spindler (1967) stated this conflict resides between traditional and emergent values. When explaining the transmission of American culture to elementary students, Spindler stated that the traditional values (puritan morality, work-success ethic, individualism, achievement orientation, future-time orientation) are in conflict with emergent values (sociability, relativistic moral attitude, consideration of others, hedonistic/present-time orientation, conformity to the group).

While these conflicts manifest themselves in colleges and universities, the values, beliefs, and orientation of the college and/or university can become incongruent for the individual student. The closer the student is with the traditional or emergent values and beliefs espoused by people in the institution, the more likely the student is to persist. Hence, when the cultural compression is reduced and the cultural transmissions students receive are congruent with their value and belief systems, there is likely to be less discontinuity of the student through the educational process (Spindler, 1967). Therefore, successful student socialization has taken place.

As Spindler (1967) stated, culture plays an important part in the socialization process of students in schools. It is a school’s culture, the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions, that either welcomes students, inviting them to participate in its life and activities, or conversely disowns them and organizes them out of the system.

Summary

There are many different factors that can lead to a student departing from an institution of higher education. Students may lack the individual motivation to complete a degree (Tinto, 1987; Stage & Hossler, 2000). A higher education institution may fail to socialize the student properly (Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1992, VanMaanen & Schein, 1979). The culture of the organization may not match that of the student (Schein, 2000, 1992; Kuh, 2001, 1993). There may be significant cultural conflicts leading students to depart (Spindler, 1967, 2000; Kuh & Love, 2000; Tierney, 2000; Laden, Miller, & Crowson, 2000). What emerges from the student retention, organizational development, and organizational culture research is that the socialization process and the transmission of organizational culture to students have merit in understanding the overall retention picture of a college or university. The researchers presented in this chapter were foundational in my understanding of the organizational culture and socialization process at Prairie College and shaped conceptual framework for this study.

Chapter 2 provided the theoretical background for the conceptual framework of this study. The methodology for the study is described in Chapter 3. Following the methodology, the data results are found in Chapter 4. Finally, the implications of the study can be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

I became interested in learning more about the experiences of students due to my role in student affairs administration at various private Midwestern liberal arts colleges. Since I began a master's degree in college and university administration in 1988, I have worked with college students and college student success/retention programs. My professional work has focused on creating programs and initiatives for student success that have involved alcohol and other drug prevention programs, first-year experience programs, leadership development, minority student involvement, study abroad, and general student retention. While I assumed that these efforts improved student persistence, retention, and graduation rates, the data did not show results. Students were not persisting and graduating at a significantly higher rate. My professional work appeared to be merely symbolic, as it was not producing retention results. There had to be another answer or way of thinking about and understanding the retention/student success phenomena.

To better assist students through the college process and improve skills in working with students, I enrolled in a doctoral program in educational leadership while working at a private Midwestern liberal arts college. The coursework in the doctoral program triggered my interest to study college student retention and organizational culture. An independent study and a doctoral course assisted me in understanding the organizational culture. A paradigm for thinking about the student retention issue began. That new paradigm focused on culture and socialization.

While pursuing this new paradigm, my professional work changed. In my newly acquired position, I was challenged to think about culture and the dynamics of culture upon college students in a new way as Dean of Students for a higher education institution that focused on international education outside of the U.S. While I was continuing to work in the field of student affairs in this new position, I had to consider student persistence and success in a context that is culturally bound, as many cultures around the world view graduation and persistence differently than those in the United States do. Still, the concepts I learned through work at the private Midwestern liberal arts college and doctoral work on organizational culture in general proved to be transferable to this new international context. Additionally, the concepts of George and Louise Spindler (1987) also helped me conceptualize my new work responsibilities and that of this study on culture and socialization. While the student retention picture expanded with my new work responsibilities, I continued to wonder how organizational culture affected student retention at small private liberal arts colleges. In all likelihood, I will end up working at another small private liberal arts college in the future, and greater knowledge will assist me in performing my role better.

While navigating my new job environment, I identified a nearby private Midwestern liberal arts college at which to continue to explore the student retention phenomena. The new institution was similar to those in which I had previously worked. Further, I had some familiarity with this college because of personal and professional connections to the institution and because I had once interviewed for a position there. With some personal and professional contacts at the institution, informal contacts with faculty and staff were established. Preliminary approval for studying the college was

obtained from the President and Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Thus, I began to explore and understand the culture and experiences of students at Prairie College. My first approach was conducting a grand tour (Spradley, 1980) with the school and actors within it. The goal was to advance understanding and knowledge about student socialization at the institution which, in turn, might help administrators in planning programs and initiatives for student persistence and graduation.

From the grand tour, I began to keep field notes on my interactions and experiences at the college. These field notes were kept in a notebook and on the researcher's laptop computer. The notes I made in my notebook were later reorganized for possible use in describing the student and organizational culture. While I had some familiarity with the institution and similar institutions, I consciously treated all situations as something new as much as possible while knowing there is subjectivity in research (Philips, 1990). I was cautious to view the culture as it was and not reenactments of previous scripts or experiences. Throughout, I sought consensual validation (Philips, 1990) through the use of triangulation (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to increase objectivity.

Since I was not a member of Prairie College, I assumed a passive participant observer role (Spradley, 1980). Similar to Glesne's (1999) participant-observation process, I collected cultural artifacts (admissions view books, college newspapers, college catalog, various campus student publications, student services materials, as well as reviewing the college web-site); studied the history of the college; observed students, faculty, and staff in social settings (orientation, in the dining center, at sporting events, in

the Union, and at campus lectures); and conducted 11 semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979) with students.

Location of Study

The private Midwestern college selected as the site for this study meets most of the characteristics associated with small private selective liberal arts colleges in the Midwest. While the college has the Carnegie classification of Master's Colleges and Universities I and is religiously affiliated, it is primarily a liberal arts college. The tuition, fees, books, and room and board for the 2003-2004 academic year cost \$28,071. For Fall 2003, the college received 1,654 applicants; of these, 70.8% were admitted and 34.8% were enrolled full-time. The ACT test was submitted by 97% of the applicants with the 25th percentile composite score being 21 and the 75th percentile composite score being 27. The ACT scores of students place it in the "selective" category. Ninety-eight percent of full-time, first-time undergraduates received financial aid in 2001-2002. Overall undergraduate enrollment was 2,116 with 41.8% men and 58.2% women for Fall 2002. There were 444 full-time, first-time undergraduate students in fall 2001. The enrollment by race/ethnicity was 85.7% White; 4.6% Black; 4.1% Hispanic; 2.6% Asian or Pacific Islander; 0% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 1.4% race-ethnicity unknown; and 1.6% non-resident alien. In the cohort year of 1996, 53.8% of degree-seeking students graduated within 4 years; 64.4 % graduated within 5 years; and 65.4% graduated within 6 years. Slightly more women than men, 66.9% compared to 64%, graduated within 6 years. During the 2002-2003 academic year, 378 degrees were awarded: 147 in business, management, marketing, and related support services; 68 in communication, journalism,

and related programs; 57 in education; 52 in psychology; and 54 in the social sciences (National Center for Educational Statistics, IPEDS, 2002).

Research Tradition

The research tradition evolved from organizational development and socialization as well as educational anthropology. Wanous (1992), Schein (1978), and Van Maanen and Schein (1979) have all focused research on how individuals within organizations are socialized by groups within business organizations. Spindler (1987) focused his research on how students were socialized within educational institutions. Wanous, Schein, and Van Maanen and Spindler all use a form of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) to describe phenomena. Symbolic interactionism seeks to explain empirically the meanings individuals make of the social phenomena when involved in social settings. Through symbolic interactionism, the researcher seeks to identify themes, construct ideas from the empirical data, and demonstrate support for the themes formed from the data (Jacob, 1987).

Research Method

While exploring the student experience at Prairie College, I found little qualitative information as to why students left the college. Therefore, qualitative research served as the best means for understanding this phenomenon. Braxton, Hirschy, and Shederick (2004) stated that grounded theory is currently the best way to understand student retention at the collegiate level, as this method will bring about new concepts, patterns of understanding, and generalizations. Hence, qualitative research would provide clarity to the lived experience of college students at Prairie College.

The methodology for this study was qualitative and followed the qualitative research methods of Lofland and Lofland (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), Spradley (1979, 1980), and Glesne (1999). Qualitative research methods assisted me in understanding the meanings people assigned to experiences (Morrow and Smith, 1998). In performing this study, Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that “the researcher’s role is to gain a ‘holistic’ (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules” (p. 8). This process was conducted through the use of words that explain how “people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 9). Cultural artifacts (Glesne, 1999) of Prairie College were also examined to understand how they may shape the culture of the groups within the institution and how they socialize students.

Accordingly, symbolic interactionism research is emergent (Blumer, 1969). Actors within the environment assign meaning to people and things in the environment as they interact with them. While the actors interact in the environment, the meanings derived from their interaction can stay the same or change. Frequently through interaction in the environment, meaning evolves. As I went about collecting data about the college and students within it, I was also analyzing data at the same time. Information gathered from observing students, staff, and faculty, and reading campus materials and history informed how data were to be collected in the future. By understanding the history, present organizational dynamics, and interactions of students, I was able to make better meaning of the experiences of students at Prairie College.

Similar to the educational anthropologic work of Spindler (1988) in understanding the meaning of elementary children socialization within public schools, I sought to learn how students socially interact with other students, staff, and faculty and what restricts interaction within the culture of Prairie College. More important, my interest was in knowing how students make meaning of these interactions and the feelings these experiences had on their satisfaction and subsequent persistence at the college.

Researcher as Instrument

The primary instrument in collecting data in qualitative research is the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1995) stated that a good qualitative researcher-as-instrument is a researcher who has:

1. some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study
2. strong conceptual interests
3. a multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in a single discipline
4. good “investigative” skills, including doggedness, the ability to draw people out, and the ability to ward off premature closure (p. 38).

As the instrument conducting the research, I addressed Miles and Huberman’s researcher-as-instrument items. I had considerable familiarity with the setting’s phenomena. Prior to the study, I had been employed by three private colleges in Michigan, Minnesota, and New York, as well as one state university in Michigan. In all of these positions I utilized an interdisciplinary approach based on college student development and practice. College student development theory is interdisciplinary and takes into account psychological, sociological, and environmental concepts. My training

in student development theory provided me with the skills to understand students and draw out what their needs might be in a college environment through individual conversation, observation, or formal assessment.

Through overseeing student housing, student conduct, alcohol and other drug programming, and academic student success in positions at these colleges, I had a basic understanding of why students choose a liberal arts college and some perceptions of why they might persist or depart from them. I also understood elements of private Midwestern colleges' organizational culture and how institutional actors can act within them. To avoid being myopic in my understanding of those private Midwestern colleges in my personal work experience, I have also been an active member in the Small College and University knowledge group of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and regularly participate in national activities focused on small private liberal arts colleges.

College student retention has been a significant part of my work portfolio for eight years at private Midwestern colleges and eight more years in an international context. During that time I was responsible for creating retention initiatives on both an academic and social level. I have met with students on campuses in the U.S. and abroad and discussed their satisfaction levels with the institutions. I have conducted quantitative retention studies that have identified areas of weakness for institutions. I have attended professional conferences focusing on college student retention that have included the National Association for the First-Year Experience and Noel-Levitz, a recruiting and retention consulting firm.

I adhered to a multidisciplinary approach for the study. My approach was grounded in education (secondary and higher education), management, higher education administration, organizational theory, and anthropology. I obtained my knowledge through coursework in master's and doctoral degree programs and through professional reading. All of these disciplines influenced my understanding of organizations and student socialization phenomena.

While not formally trained in counseling per se, I have performed advising roles since my undergraduate days as a Resident Assistant at a private Midwestern college, which addressed Miles and Huberman's (1995) investigative skills. Throughout my career in higher education, I have aspired to understand the lives and lived experience of students. From the beginning of my career as Residence Hall Director to my current position as Dean of Students, I have asked students questions in order to have them share their experiences, thus assisting me in obtaining developmental program goals and assessing program effectiveness. Whether discussing a disciplinary incident with one student or assisting another with a relationship issue, I have been aware of the importance of obtaining clarity and understanding of the situation in order to assist the student, family, or faculty or staff member.

Based on the information above, I have a strong general familiarity with the phenomenon of college students as a whole and, specifically, those at two private Midwestern colleges; a conceptual framework; an approach that is multidisciplinary in education, organizational development, and anthropology; and good interpersonal skills to enhance data collection.

Conceptual Framework

Organizational and individual factors influence one another in the socialization process; one cannot be separated from the other (Tinto, 1987; Wanous, 1992; Schein, 1978, 1992). Institutions of higher education are organizations made up of people who share similar cultural beliefs and values. The cultural beliefs and values of the organization are developed and evolve over time. How was the mission and purpose of the organization created? How do people within the organization interact with one another and with outsiders? How do outsiders to the organization learn the organizational values, beliefs, and norms? All of these questions shape people within the organization and how they socialize newcomers. It forms the culture of the institution.

Similarly, organizations, schools in particular, sort students into cultures or value systems that are congruent with what already exists or place them into another group or organization (Spindler, 1967). Through the socialization process, the individual, or college student, must make decisions as to whether he or she fits into the culture by determining if he or she can make academic and social progress. Thus, a student willingly or unwillingly participates in a socialization process where he or she determines if his or her values are congruent with other actors within the organization.

When organizational values, beliefs, and norms match that of the individual and visa versa, persistence is likely to result. When there is a mismatch between the values, beliefs, and norms, involuntary or voluntary withdrawal from the organization is likely to result. This study explored the culture and socialization process of students at Prairie College.

Research Ethics

In data collection, the researcher must act ethically with the participants in the study. As stated by Glesne (1998), the researcher must avoid exploiting the participants for personal or professional gain; refrain from intervening or reforming the participants; refrain from advocating for changing something at the research site; and refrain from becoming friends with the participants. Avoiding these actions allowed me to remain ethical and not cause damage to the participant, research site, or researcher. Throughout this process, I respected the right of privacy to the participants and the research institution, and I did not deceive anyone throughout the process (Glesne, 1998).

While an informed consent form assures participants of the confidential matter of the information to be shared, it does not speak to the ethics of the researcher. In qualitative research it is important for the researcher to make clear personal biases that may influence the data collection (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). I therefore made known that I had worked at two other colleges that are somewhat similar to Prairie College; once interviewed for a Dean of Students position at the college; have personal connections to this college; and come from the same religious tradition that has a strong commitment to social justice issues with which Prairie College affiliates.

While any researcher comes into the research setting with several possible biases, I took a utilitarian or “scientific” stance to the research site and participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to address possible biases. Miles and Huberman (1994) set forth twelve ethical issues that should be considered in any research project. Three of the ethical dilemmas that may have some impact on possible researcher bias are now examined.

Honesty and trust: Since I have personal connections to the college and I am a Dean of Students at another higher education institution, would the participants be honest with me? Would they trust that I would not confide confidential information with outside parties? If this question arose, I explained that a family member had not served as a trustee at the college for two years, and they no longer had any formal ties to the organizational structure or operation of the college.

Intervention and advocacy: I have a bias toward advocating for students. Through this study I sought to understand the student socialization process at Prairie College and not “fix” any student or socialization process. Any possible results of this study that may improve student persistence will be determined by the college, not by me.

Research integrity and quality: Based on the possible bias that can come into this research situation, it was important to have the dissertation chair periodically review the analysis of participant interviews, coding, and other methodological procedures to make sure the researcher was obtaining an accurate understanding of the research phenomena. Further, it was to my own benefit, as well as the benefit of Prairie College for me to be rigorous in data collection in order to more accurately understand the student socialization process.

Measures to Insure Safety and Confidentiality for Human Subjects

Spradley (1979) stated that there are six ethical principles in working with human subjects; these are stated in the Anthropological Principles of Professional responsibility. I practiced Spradley’s principles, which included considering the informants first; safeguarding informant’s rights, interests, and sensitivities; communicating research objectives; protecting the privacy of informants; not exploiting informants; and making

reports available to informants. All of these principles were taken into account for the participants through the use of an informed consent form (Attachment A). I provided additional verbal explanation if a participant did not understand fully any element of the informed consent form. Before any interviewing was conducted, The Institutional Review Board of Eastern Michigan University and that of Prairie College approved the informed consent form and the purpose of this study. Additionally, each participant read and signed the informed consent form before any interviewing took place. Participants were not penalized for not participating or stopping at any time during the semi-structured intensive interviews with me.

Data Gathering

The data-gathering procedure consisted of collecting physical, verbal, and behavioral artifacts (Kuh & Hall, 1993; i.e., admissions viewbooks, the college catalog, historical texts of the college, the college newspaper, written documents of administrators and faculty, observing new student orientation and campus lectures), observing students (Spradley, 1980) in various settings in the culture during the 2005-2006 academic year, and conducting semi-structured interviews (Ortiz, 2003; Spradley, 1979; Spradley, 1980) with students during the Spring 2006 term.

As in most qualitative research, I was the primary instrument (Glesne, 1999) in obtaining data. I obtained thick data, or “information that goes beyond bare reporting of an act... but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Glesne, 1999, p. 22), by using follow-up questions and/or scheduling additional interviews to obtain the full meaning of the participant experiences. All interviews with participants were tape recorded so that a transcription could be

created and analyzed. Interviews conducted produced 174 pages of verbatim transcription.

While I conducted the semi-structured, in-depth interviews, I kept a field log on my thoughts throughout the analysis process (Glesne, 1998). This field log assisted me in keeping perspective during research as well as documenting new thoughts and perspectives about the research topic. Themes began to emerge through the use of clustering, counting, factoring, and building a logical chain of evidence (Miles and Huberman, 1994). These tactics helped me understand the social phenomena and how students experienced Prairie College outside of what I saw through observation and cultural artifacts. It should also be noted that I maintained a contact summary form after interviewing individual students (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Throughout the data-gathering process, I sought to make cultural inferences (Spradley, 1980) from the information collected from students and cultural artifacts. Based on my conceptual framework, I sought to understand the actors' culture in relation to the beliefs and meanings they related to the cultural phenomena. Using this process allowed me to obtain thick description, which leads to strong internal validity (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that “qualitative analysis can be evocative, illuminating, masterful—and wrong” (p. 262). To avoid being inaccurate in analysis, Katz (1983) stated in Miles and Huberman (1994) that the researcher must address representativeness, reactivity, reliability, and replicability in the data. In assisting with the “4 R’s” of Katz, the researcher must be aware of three anthropological biases:

1. The holistic fallacy: interpreting events as more patterned and congruent than they really are, lopping off the many loose ends of which social life is made
2. Elite bias: overweighting data from articulate, well-informed, usually high-status informants and underrepresenting data from less articulate, lower-status ones, and
3. Going native: losing your perspective on your “bracketing” ability, being co-opted into the perceptions and explanations of local informants (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 263).

To refrain from these anthropological biases, the semi-structured intensive interviews with students were transcribed verbatim and analyzed. Notes from observations and discussions with staff were organized and analyzed. Through analysis, each interview was coded into themes. The themes were coded by frequency and magnitude, the structures and processes, and the causes and consequences (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) of how college students are socialized at Prairie College. By answering these questions, I determined what structures and processes were involved in socializing students in or out of Prairie.

In assuring validity of the study, I used several processes articulated by Creswell and Miller (2000). These processes consisted of triangulation, using corroborating evidence collected through observations, interviews, and documents; member checking; creating an audit trail; keeping a log of all research activities; and taking thick, rich description—documenting a clear accounting of what was told to me so that it would be easily understood by others. For example, I discussed feedback I received from staff, faculty, and students to confirm representativeness and validity.

Additionally, I applied Miles and Huberman's (1994) 13 methods of confronting validity and reliability. These methods were checking for representativeness; checking for researcher effects; triangulation; weighting the evidence; checking the meaning of outliers; using extreme cases; following up surprises; looking for negative evidence; making if-then tests; ruling out spurious relations; replicating a finding; checking out rival explanations; and getting feedback from informants. For example, I utilized my dissertation advisor to discuss and review data collected in this study. Further, in 2011, I discussed the study with two emeritus members of Prairie College without revealing coding. The discussions validated the evidence and categories from the data results.

Validity

This chapter has provided good detail about the steps taken to insure a sound qualitative study. Whether through triangulation or allowing outside readers to corroborate or disconfirm my data and codes, I have sought to provide what Glesne (1998) calls trustworthiness in my interpretations of the private Midwestern college culture. I sought to provide information that can be confirmed, expanded and/or informed by administrators and other actors at Prairie College that may assist them in retaining more students.

It should be noted that while I was engaged in the Prairie College environment for over a year, I did not meet with every student, faculty, or staff member of the college. I did not review every artifact the college had for public display. I was, however, able to ascertain a good understanding of the college through review of significant artifacts and engaging with numerous actors within the environment. My review and interactions were representative of the general population of the college and are no more or less valid than

any scientific inquiry to the culture of Prairie College. My subjectivity (Peskin, 1988; Glesne, 1998) was kept in check through prolonged engagement in the Prairie College environment, triangulation, clarifying my biases, and frequent review and debriefing with my dissertation advisor. Similar to Peskin (1988), I was careful to monitor and manage myself so that my research and I did not become intertwined. The result of these steps provided rich, thick description (Glesne, 1998) that allowed me to provide the reader a better understanding of what in the Prairie College culture assists or deters students from persisting.

Similarly, the issue of generalizability of the findings may come into question with the reader. Through this study, I sought to understand the lived experience of students attending Prairie College. In this qualitative study, I did not desire to make known the probability of certain variables that might lead to the persistence or departure of students there. I sought to make known the lived experience of students. Through this understanding, administrators at Prairie College may be able to add/adjust programs and services to assist students in improving persistence and graduation rates.

Education is an applied field. Educators learn from the successes and failures of colleagues. Through the use of rich, thick description in this study, educators from other institutions may view one or more similarities within their own institution. These similarities may have impact on their own practice or organizational culture. While this study may be representative of similar private Midwestern colleges, the reader must keep an objective view in the study's findings. Some findings may apply, while others will have little relevance. No two educational institutions are identical. Each has its own cultures and must be treated as such.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided information on the qualitative method of this study and the theoretical background for the conceptual framework of this study. This included providing information on the research method, disclosing how I would serve as the instrument for this study, and explaining how data would be collected and analyzed and validity determined. The data results using the methodology for this study are found in Chapter 4. The implications of this study can be found in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the organizational culture of a Midwestern college and explore the socialization process of students within it. From May 2005 through June 2006, I observed, interacted with, and examined the Prairie College culture. During this period I interacted with students, staff, and faculty on the Prairie College campus, researched the history of the college, and sought to create meaning of the culture through this study.

To understand Prairie College culture, I utilized a conceptual framework that examined the organizational culture and socialization process of the college that involved both organizational and individual factors. This framework applied the theories of Tinto (1987), Wanous (1992), Schein (1992, 1978), Kuh and Hall (1993), Kuh and Love (2000), and Spindler (1967) and is visually outlined in Figure 1 and 2 and described in detail in Chapter 1. The results that follow are presented by describing the institutional culture—historical, faculty, and staff—and then the student culture of Prairie College.

The description of the institutional and student culture uses artifacts (Kuh & Hall, 1993; Spradley, 1979; Spradly, 1980), otherwise known as the visible organizational structures and processes that included how people interact within the environment and the emotions these interactions create upon them over time. By examining artifacts, I sought to learn “what is going on here” (Schein, 1992) at Prairie College. A view to understand the espoused values, strategies, goals, and philosophies of how Prairie College is organized was explored through examining artifacts and through discussion with students, staff, and faculty of the college. The espoused values explained “why actors do what they do” (Schein, 1992) within this college. Once I understood the ways in which

processes were executed, the basic underlying assumptions, the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, were revealed (Schein, 1992).

While reviewing artifacts, I assumed a passive participant observer role (Spradley, 1980). Similar to Glesne's (1999) participant-observation process, I collected cultural artifacts (admissions view books, college newspapers, college catalog, various campus student publications, and student services materials); reviewed the college web-site; studied the history of the college; observed students, faculty, and staff in social settings (orientation, in the dining center, at sporting events, in the Union, and at campus lectures); and conducted 11 semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979) with students. A visual description of how the data were collected using the organizational culture model of Schein (1992) is presented in Table 1. The results of institutional culture are presented first, with faculty, staff, and student cultures following.

Table 1

Analysis of Data Collection

Level of Analysis	Data Collected
<p>Artifacts</p> <p>Visible organizational structures and processes</p>	<p>Student admissions materials College catalog College website Historical writings of the college Observation of students, staff, and faculty</p>
<p>Espoused Values</p> <p>Strategies, Goals, and Philosophies</p>	<p>Observation of students, staff, and faculty Semi-structured interviews with students, staff, and faculty</p>
<p>Basic Underlying Assumptions</p> <p>Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings</p>	<p>Researcher reflection upon student, staff, and faculty interviews</p>

Institutional Culture – Historical Subculture



Figure 3. Historical Subculture

In describing Prairie College’s institutional historical subculture, I relied upon historical artifacts, observation, and interviews. The history of Prairie College is an important subculture to the institution and assists in understanding the transmission of

culture to newcomers. It also provides insight into the beliefs, values, and basic assumptions of actors within the institutional culture. Further, it brings to light past conflicts that have shaped how actors within the culture have adapted in order to have the organization survive. A significant component of the student socialization process is how these historical conflicts have shaped the way newcomers are socialized within the college. The historical cultural artifacts were analyzed using the historical writings of Jones* (a pseudonym; 1981, 1960), the Evangelical United Brethren Book of Discipline (1963), and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church (2000), along with contemporary observation and interviews. Understanding the history and evolution of Prairie College assisted in understanding the institutional culture and the key values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the institution.

Prairie College Religious Orientation

Prairie College is a United Methodist college. While Prairie College was not United Methodist at its inception, Methodist religious doctrine is a part of the College's value and belief system.

Methodism was founded by John Wesley, who was born in England in 1702 and attended Oxford University in 1729. While at Oxford, Wesley formed a student group that was "methodically" devoted to religious study and religious duties. This "method" was how others saw Wesley and his followers and subsequently coined the derogatory term *Methodist* to describe them. Wesley was a strong believer in the Church of England tradition, the Anglican Church, but his "method" was a departure from it. This departure eventually created a new church in the Protestant dimension. Different from Catholics,

*Due to issues of confidentiality, there is no entry in the reference section for the actual source of this information.

Methodists believe that the Bible is the true source of faith, not the Pope or other church tradition, and that salvation comes from God's grace alone. Methodists believe there is no "one way" to heaven.

In 1735, John Wesley traveled to Georgia to serve as a missionary. He spent three years in America. After some religious conversion through the teachings of Martin Luther, a German and founder of Protestantism, Wesley reluctantly created a religious constitution of sorts in 1784, which formed the British Methodist Church in England. As part of the mission of the British Methodist Church, Wesley believed it important to ordain clergy and send them to America. One reason behind the formation of Prairie College was to bring Methodist ideology into America.

As Protestantism spread in America, there were several fractures that occurred. These fractures came from the personal beliefs of missionaries, the culture and language of the communities in America, and what it meant to be in service to the poor. These fractures created the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Association, the United Brethren in Christ, and the Evangelical United Brethren. All of these fractures have now blended and formed the United Methodist church, with more than 11 million members worldwide. Prairie College currently identifies as a United Methodist college.

Prairie College was formed from the values of the Evangelical Association tradition within Methodism. Unfortunately in the early years of Prairie College, most Evangelical Association believers had little need for formal education. Evangelical Association members disliked the educational "culture." In the early American frontier, most religious revival leaders did not have a formal education. Evangelical Association members believed that when people received formal education, they no longer thought

highly of revivals and became indifferent or hostile toward them (Jones, 1981).

Supporters of the denomination believed that unskilled preachers, or the uneducated, had “God’s greatest gifts” because they could preach without a formal education (Jones, 1981). This mentality of not valuing education created conflict for the development of an Evangelical Association college.

In 1843, a departure from the belief that the education kept people from becoming stronger in the faith occurred. This change was influenced by Evangelical Association ministers arriving from Germany with educational experiences. These ministers believed that “Greek opened the way for a better understanding of Scripture; history revealed the effect of prophecy; and science disclosed the God of Nature whose expression as God of Grace is revealed in the Bible” (“Discipline,” 1963, p. 243). It was believed that schooling for both laymen and ministers alike would make both better disciples.

Debate over education and its value continued among laymen and ministers in the Evangelical Association. At an 1847 meeting of the Evangelical Church, the denomination voted on whether it would support the creation of schools. The vote did not pass. Yet the result allowed individual conferences to support schools. As a result, the first Evangelical Association school, Albright Seminary, was opened in 1853, in Reading, Pennsylvania. It closed due to the lack of support—educational, financial, or both—for formal education. While Albright Seminary was not successful, Prairie College, established in 1861, has been. Today there are 122 institutions listed by the University Senate of the United Methodist Church as United Methodist-related schools, colleges, universities, medical colleges, and theological schools, with at least one United Methodist school located in all but 11 U.S. States.

German Language and Culture

While religion was important to the formation of Prairie College, German ethnicity and language also played an important part in its evolution. As Methodism spread across America, Jacob Albright, a German-speaker from Pennsylvania, experienced a Methodist conversion in 1790. In 1800, Albright began the Evangelical Association of America through which Prairie College was founded. Unlike the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Association of America conducted its services in German until the early 20th century. While theologically the Evangelical Association was similar to the Methodist Episcopal Church, the use of German language provided a significant separation for Methodist adherents. These Germanic roots are significant in the development of Prairie College.

Spindler (2000) described education as teaching the “necessary cultural and social knowledge in order to function effectively in that group. Thus, education is not necessarily political, but a mechanism within each society to prepare members for a life in their community” (p. xiii). As Prairie College was being established, it needed to keep the values and beliefs of the Evangelical Association and its German roots intact. To spread Evangelical Association beliefs, the Illinois and Wisconsin Conferences of the Evangelical Association of North America met in 1859 to plan for an institution of learning that would train church leaders. Two years later, in 1861, the Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Iowa Conferences decided to develop an educational institution in Freiburg, located approximately 45 miles southwest of Nantes (both pseudonyms). Freiburg was determined to be a good location because it was home to many German-speaking

Evangelicals. There would be a strong cultural match between the institution and the people residing in Freiburg.

Administrative Leadership

As Prairie College was being formed, it needed a leader. This leader would need to assert the Evangelical Association beliefs and values along with its German roots. The Evangelical Association appointed Joachim Staguhn (a pseudonym) to be the president of Prairie College. President Staguhn's vision for the college was that it should be

an institution for the instruction and inculcation of high Christian principles and the teaching of basic classical studies and sciences. In addition, he felt that a college should be a center for the uplifting and general enlightenment of the nation and society in general. He sincerely felt that a collegiate institution should assume aggressive leadership in crusading against ignorance, prejudice, injustice or and social evil of the day. (Jones, 1960, p. 13)

President Staguhn's values and beliefs appeared to be congruent with developers of Prairie College and the Evangelical Association.

Although President Staguhn was a Christian, he was not raised in the Evangelical Association tradition. He was a Congregationalist, now known as United Church of Christ. Prior to taking his administrative post at Prairie College, he was a student and administrator at Oberlin College, a liberal arts Presbyterian college in Oberlin, Ohio. While President Staguhn subscribed to Evangelical Association doctrine, the initial faculty he hired were all graduates of Oberlin College and not familiar with Evangelical Association values and beliefs. Until 1963, the Church's doctrine stated that "all persons employed as members of the faculties of the colleges and theological schools of the

Evangelical United Brethren Church [the successor to the Evangelical Association] shall be Christians and faithful to their church obligations” (Evangelical United Brethren Book of Discipline, 1963, p. 234). While Congregationalist and Presbyterian theology have similar Protestant roots to Methodism, the impact of the faith traditions and ensuing conflict began to emerge as academic instruction at Prairie College began.

Early Instruction

The student socialization process began in 1861 when Prairie College opened its doors to 40 men and women students. At the time of opening, the college had a preparatory department. The courses were all taught in the English language by two professors and one teacher. This was a conflict for the German community in which Prairie College operated. Consequently, the enrollments struggled. The core technology of Prairie College was not congruent with the roots of the Evangelical Association and the German-speaking people of Freiburg. There was a cultural mismatch between organization and student cultures.

To manage the cultural conflict over instruction that was rooted in language, President Staguhn believed that an institutional name change might assist in drawing more students who were interested in a religiously affiliated institution with instruction in English. Prairie College subsequently changed its name in 1864, believing that its earlier name affiliation with Freiburg would not lead students to enroll in an English-speaking institution in a German town. Unfortunately for Prairie College, the enrollments did not increase with the name change.

In 1865, the following year, several German families from the Illinois Conference of the Evangelical Association asserted that German language in the curriculum was as

important as the English language in preparing students for American citizenship (Jones, 1960). President Staguhn had asserted with the college's inception that English needed to be used to "destroy clanship" and remove prejudices based on nationality (Jones, 1960). Evangelical Association members were not going to attend a school that did not support their religious beliefs or German roots. To calm the conflict, in 1866, the college began some course instruction in German. Reports of ensuing conflict provide evidence of the Evangelical Association and the German residents of Freiburg imposing their values on the college. It also serves as the college's first recruitment and retention effort. The college had to adapt its core technology, the curriculum, to survive. Subsequent courses offered in the German language continued until 1918 when, during World War 1, there was a desire to remove German influences on the campus and nation.

Student Recruitment

A significant part of the socialization process for an organization is recruiting new members. Without this, an organization will die. While the introduction of German courses into the curriculum eased the immediate conflict with residents of Freiburg and the Evangelical Association, enrollment was not increasing at a fast enough pace to keep the school financially viable. With low enrollments continuing, the trustees began considering relocating the college. At the time, traveling to Freiburg was difficult because it was not near public transportation like a railroad. It was considered by college officials that having greater access to Nantes would bring greater enrollments. Similarly, church records stated that the college "had been unwisely located," and this resulted in the problem of low enrollment (Jones, 1960).

The second recruitment effort for Prairie College occurred in 1869, when the trustees relocated the college to Chelsea (pseudonym). Chelsea was selected as it was 13 miles northeast of Freiburg, had a number of Evangelical families, had greater diversity in the population, and had access to Nantes through the railroad (Jones, 1960). Chelsea's generous offer of \$20,000 and 5 acres of land only made the decision to move easier for the college (Jones, 1960). Today, Prairie College still operates in Chelsea. The decision to relocate created a stronger match between student and college values.

Student Admissions Standards

As an organization begins the socialization process, it needs to determine what kind of members it wants to recruit. Lack of clarity in recruitment can result in mismatches and potential student withdrawal. When Prairie College opened its doors in 1861, it was open to both men and women from any high school regardless of rank (Jones, 1960). President Staguhn had high aspirations at the college's inception to create an Oberlin College-style institution with high academic standards, but the college had to admit all students in order to keep its doors open. With many Evangelical Association members not valuing formal education, admission standards could not supersede a high school diploma. The practice of admitting students with only a high school diploma continued until 1941, when the college decided it wanted to become more selective and move closer to President Staguhn's value of creating an institution of high academic caliber. In 1941, recruitment standards were changed and a student was required to rank in the upper three fourths of his or her graduating class in order to gain admission (Jones, 1960).

In addition to changing the academic rigor of students admitted to Prairie College, faculty also asserted that they wanted to keep the college enrollment small. Faculty did not want enrollment to surpass 900 students. A faculty vote ensued and was passed in 1941 to keep the student body at no more than 900 students. Faculty believed that creating stricter admissions standards for students and keeping the student body small would lead to fewer students on academic probation. While probably not referenced by the college in the same fashion as today, the number of students on academic probation demonstrated a retention problem that was being identified by faculty and administrators involving student preparedness. Over time the college developed an admissions policy to address the student preparedness issue. Today the policy states that a student must rank in the upper two thirds of his or her high school graduating class in order to be admitted.

As Prairie College is a school with religious roots, it is important to acknowledge that the Evangelical Association referred and sent numerous students to the college in the early years of its formation. In the early years of the college, Evangelical Association and Evangelical United Brethren composed the majority of students in attendance. Today, there has been a religious shift within the institution, and Catholic students make up the largest percentage of students. While the college founders undoubtedly desired to keep Evangelical students enrolled, the changing environment of Chelsea and the surrounding communities have forced the institution to redefine its inputs/students.

Prairie College Finances

Recruiting students and keeping them in school requires financial resources. Most students will not attend a college or university based on word-of-mouth information alone. Probably the most difficult problem facing Prairie College during the early years in

Chelsea was achieving financial stability. According to Jones (1960), the college was hindered in three ways.

First, the sale of scholarship-notes, although it produced immediate assets, often proved insufficient in the long run. Second, the Evangelical Association, struggling to meet its own obligations, could not provide solid support to the college. Third, the United States as a whole was suffering from the intermittent depression which followed the Panic of 1873. Thus, the College found it difficult to collect on scholarship-note obligations, as well as raise new endowment funds (p. 107).

Over the years, the major difficulty in developing an Oberlin-type liberal arts college was the general lack of a sufficient endowment and financial support to obtain the goal.

The lack of financial resources continues. No matter when one examines the finances of the college, a lack of financial resources in trying to completely fulfill its mission is obvious. In 2004, the endowment of the college was \$25 million. With an operating budget of more than \$38 million in 2001-2002, small changes in the environment, such as the loss of an academic or residential building or a public relations issue, could have grave ramifications for the overall financial operation of the college.

An understanding of the financial situation of Prairie College can be viewed through the physical structures of the campus. Old Main was the first building built on the campus in 1870. The building was designed to be four stories with a north and south wing. Today, Old Main still remains and is a focal point for the campus. Yet when one observes the building, it appears unbalanced. The south wing of the building was built, but there was not enough money for the north wing. Hence, it was never built.

Throughout the college's history, the story of Old Main is not dissimilar to many financial projects taken on by the college where funding was not sufficient.

Church Governance of the College

While Prairie College continues to be an institution affiliated with the United Methodist Church, it was in 1963 that the Evangelical United Brethren publically stated that it could no longer support and fund higher education in its traditional fashion. The Evangelical United Brethren Church declared, "Institutions of higher education shall operate under their own boards of trustees. They shall be under the general supervision of the general Board of Christian Education within the provisions of the Discipline, [the polity of the Church] and be conducted according to the principles and ideals of The Evangelical United Brethren Church" (Evangelical United Brethren Book of Discipline, 1962, p. 233). This polity statement made sure that the Church held control, financial and religious, over the institutions, but also allowed external factors to have influence within the schools, mostly financial.

Until 1963, members of the Board of Trustees at Prairie College were required to be Evangelical Association/Evangelical United Brethren or graduates of Prairie College. As time evolved, it became increasingly difficult and expensive for the Church to financially support Prairie College and other institutions of higher education within the denomination. Subsequently, a change in the Book of Discipline was created that opened the institution to external and environmental factors by having non-Methodists serve on the Board of Trustees. This change assisted the college in gaining additional resources to survive.

College Reputation

From Prairie College's humble and modest beginnings, it has always striven to become a premier liberal arts college. The college's status and reputation has always been important, as it wanted others to perceive it in high regard. From my observations and interviews, there is a belief among organizational actors that being viewed as a premier institution creates value for students to attend the institution and for faculty and administrators to come and work at the institution.

The college likes to profile its reputation to outsiders through external reviews like *The New York Times*. In 1985, *The New York Times* profiled the college in "Best Buys in College Education." The following year, The Great Lakes Colleges Association, of which the college is not a member, ranked it among the top 50 colleges and universities in productivity of graduates who complete PhD. degrees in life sciences. The ever-popular *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the college as one of "America's Best Colleges" in 1988. This was followed in 1989 with the editors of *Peterson's Competitive Colleges Guide* listing the college among those that "attract the nation's top students." Then in 1994, *U.S. News and World Report* again ranked the college among "America's Best Colleges" and among the top 12 colleges and universities in the Midwest for 12 straight years; it later ranked it among the top tier Midwest "Master's Universities."

Summary of Historical Culture of Prairie College

Schein (1992) stated that "cultures basically spring from three sources: 1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders of organizations; 2) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and 3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders" (p. 211). Understanding how an

organization emerges through its history, beliefs, values, and basic assumptions provides an explanation as to why the organizational structures are the way they are. The founding of Prairie College, how it developed over time, and what actors learned through the evolution process provided some rationale to why various actors believe in and value certain elements within the organizational culture and why new actors are socialized the way they are within the organization (Schein, 1992, Wanous, 1992). A summary of the historical culture of Prairie College beliefs, values, and assumptions follows.

Beliefs

Prairie College was established by the Evangelical Association, now the United Methodist Church, to instill Christian values and train students to take leadership roles in the Church and the communities in which they would eventually live. The college continues to believe it is shaping students with high moral values and character but with less emphasis upon United Methodist Church doctrine. The reduced emphasis on United Methodist Church doctrine is mostly attributed to the United Methodist Church's inability to provide significant financial support to the college.

As Prairie College evolved, it became more emergent (Spindler, 1967), less traditional, and more open to change in its beliefs and values. The founding core technology (Morgan, 1997) as an Evangelical Association liberal arts institution evolved into the belief that the institution needs to serve vocational, pre-professional, graduate students. The evolution of academic offerings has been in part to weather bad economic times in the college's history and to better serve the Chelsea community as it has moved from being a rural farming community to a large suburban, high-tech, professional community. While many academic pursuits are offered, faculty and administrators

believe that liberal arts and undergraduate education are Prairie College's fundamental core technology.

Prairie College is a school with limited financial means. This has been demonstrated in the construction of each of the new buildings on campus and the kinds and number of students it has admitted. As the financial contributions of the Evangelical Association and later the United Methodist Church held less impact on the overall operation of Prairie College, many believe that the number of students enrolled leads to financial success or failure. Throughout the history of the college, faculty and administrators have debated what kind of students and how many students should be admitted to the institution, which has been both a financial and academic quandary.

Thus, the historical beliefs of Prairie College remain that the college is religiously affiliated, with a relatively small enrollment by design, focused primarily on the undergraduate liberal arts, instruction by teaching rather than research, and average to above academic student selectivity in admissions. To paraphrase a comment from the current Prairie College president, the college is a "diamond in the rough" or a high quality school that can be overlooked if one is not observant, and it could be even better if it had more financial resources.

Espoused Values

A core value of the college is the Protestant work ethic, which is also a core value of the United States. Any individual actor at Prairie College can succeed if he or she remains disciplined and works hard. This is an American way of life and something taught to students at Prairie College. Teaching of an "American" way of life was instilled

in part when President Staguhn, in 1861, insisted that instruction be performed in English and not German.

To support Prairie College's mission and value in creating a premier academic college, the college seeks students with strong academic backgrounds. To create a college of high academic caliber, Prairie College values students of academic strength. While the administration has been willing to take students who are not academically ideal, priority is placed on admitting students who are academically successful prior to attendance at the college. It is believed that admitting students with higher academic ability lowers the number of students on academic probation and increases the college's rankings.

The values of the Evangelical Association and later of the United Methodist Church have become less important to the day-to-day operation of the college. In its early formation, the college maintained its relationship to the church to help it survive. This was particularly the case in obtaining students. Today, the church contributes little financially to the operation of the college, and a majority of the students are not United Methodist. With less church money and fewer United Methodist students, the value of the church relationship continues to diminish. Historical church ties can help with some current student recruiting, but it is no longer a major factor of day-to-day influence.

Prairie College values a small student body. Some of this is by design and some by necessity. Due to the land-locked campus, the college does not have the physical space to expand without purchasing expensive historic property to add to its academic facilities or student residences.

It is easier for an organization to remain true to its values and beliefs when it does not need to welcome too many newcomers. While Prairie College has continued to grow,

it has never lost sight of its value in remaining a “small” college. Admitting too many students can result in problems, primarily academic, for the college. Further, if there are too many students, it loses the “family” feel. Keeping the college small keeps the values and beliefs of the college intact and easier to manage. Some would state this is a matter of control over the environment.

Basic Assumptions

An overarching assumption about the organizational culture at Prairie College is that it must adapt to survive in the educational marketplace. While the institution was created to prepare Evangelical Association leaders for the community, the religious roots of the college are a distant part of the active mission today. Prairie College continues to prepare students for ministry and Christian education, but the educational demands of the community it serves have changed. Prairie College has adapted to meet the needs of students and the community. This has been demonstrated in the addition of graduate and vocational programs.

The relatively small institutional endowment and small enrollment requires staff to be frugal with money. More so, it presents faculty, staff, and students with the anxiety that Prairie College will not have enough money to complete projects or sustain programs. While Prairie College has been able to start initiatives, there appears an underlying tension about having enough money to successfully accomplish any initiative.

Over the years, an assumption has formed that admitting more students would result in the lowering of academic standards. Faculty assumed that more students equated to more remedial education or the poor academic performance of students. In addition, there has been an assumption that raising academic standards will result in fewer

students. The assumption formed from this is that the college is not clear about whom it wishes to serve and, once that has been determined, about how many students it wishes to serve.

In summary, the historical culture of private Midwestern culture is one of a religiously affiliated institution that, over the years, has become less and less religiously based for students and funding. Teaching, and not research, has been a core element of the academic culture for faculty and students. Money to keep the college functioning and advance its program has been an issue. The college has needed to work hard to keep its position within the higher education community and as such has needed to adapt to environmental factors that have changed.

Institutional Culture – Faculty Subculture



Figure 4. Faculty Subculture

The history of an institution provides the foundation to previous conflicts that have occurred in the development of the institution as well as the transmission of the culture's values and beliefs to members. In order for a culture to be transmitted, there must be organizational actors to facilitate and transmit the cultural values and beliefs to students. One of the most significant actors to transmit organizational culture to students at Prairie College is the faculty. Since the college's inception, faculty has transmitted the

values and beliefs of the institution to students. The faculty is a significant socializing factor in socializing students at Prairie College.

During the study, Prairie College employed 156 FTE faculty. The faculty forms into four divisions that include Arts and Letters, Economics and Business, Human Thought and Behavior, and Science. Within these divisions, there were 71 departments and programs in which students can study. Some faculty taught in several programs. A review of the college catalog indicates that approximately two thirds of the faculty were men and only 10 members of the faculty were from minority groups. The overall age of the faculty is not known, but a visual audit as well as a review of when faculty received their academic credentials would indicate they were middle-aged and older. When I spoke with faculty, staff, and students at the college, the need to replace aging faculty in coming years was clearly articulated. For example, when speaking with the provost, he informed me that in the next seven years, more than half of the faculty would be at retirement age. He was both concerned and optimistic about what this could mean for the college. He was concerned about what kind of impact the turnover would have on the organizational culture of the college but optimistic at the potential for hiring new faculty who would be even more interested in engaging with students and willing to perform greater levels of scholarship individually and with students.

Well-Credentialed Faculty

Most professional educators in higher education would assert that a characteristic of a strong faculty is the number of faculty who have obtained a terminal degree. The faculty at Prairie College believed that a terminal degree makes one well qualified. This value was repeatedly asserted in numerous publications to students about the college.

Admissions publications stated that 87 percent of the faculty held a terminal degree. One admission brochure declared that students would “have some of the most qualified and motivated teachers as guides,” thus affirming the college’s belief that the terminal degree makes a professor well qualified.

As the college sought new faculty for vacancies, it repeatedly acquired faculty from some of the strongest higher education institutions in both name and reputation from across the United States. Some of these institutions included Harvard University, Duke University, The University of Chicago, Vanderbilt University, Cornell University, Tulane University, and the University of Michigan. The need for a strong credential was confirmed by a member of the faculty when he stated “the prestige of the academic program of a new faculty member weighs heavily on whether or not a person will get an interview at the college.” Faculty with strong academic reputations has been a college value since the beginning, as early leaders sought to create an institution similar to Oberlin College. The faculty believed that the reputation of its members created value for its students.

Teaching Faculty

Frequently, small liberal arts colleges take pride in their small classes and the individual attention these classes can provide for students. An admission brochure states:

Professors at [Prairie College] love to teach. They want you to get excited about learning, life and your future. They take the time to get to know you and what you are all about. And with a 14:1 student faculty ratio and an average class size of 19, it’s easy for them to do. ...From day one, our faculty will inspire you to learn, to listen, to think, and to express yourself with confidence.

The college stated that in the search for faculty, they looked for people with a “passion for small-group, hands-on instruction. People who have not forgotten what it means to be a student. People who give freely of themselves and their time to help you discover their life’s work.” Further, the faculty who are eventually hired “choose to teach [at the college] because they value individuality – their own and that of their students. They draw on life from the talents, personalities, and potential gathered in classrooms, laboratories or studios.”

In another admissions brochure, a male junior affirmed what was said by the college about faculty teaching and the individual attention he received from it. When speaking about how the faculty helped him, he said, “At a school this size, you get so much early, hands-on experience. It makes learning a whole lot more meaningful and interesting.” In the same brochure, a female psychology major stated,

Psychology is a very complex field and the information is very difficult. But the approach the professors take makes it understandable. The way they approach different topics has really brought it down to a level of ‘this is what it is. This is how you can understand it.’ They don’t dumb it down, but bring it to a level where you can quantify all of the information and really understand it.

The faculty subculture expected faculty members to be engaged in many different ways in teaching students. Teaching was a value of the faculty, and students expected it.

Yet the expectation of teaching was not just in the ethos of the faculty culture; it was formalized structures within the tenure process of the college. A 30-year faculty member of the Religion Department informed me of some of the categories of the tenure process. He reported that if a person was to become a tenured professor, he or she must

excel at teaching. This faculty member stated that formalized tenure process in his department placed “40 to 50 percent of tenure criteria on teaching” and that this level was similar to all departments at the college. He continued to inform me that “one cannot become a professor without good teaching evaluations from students. It is a must. The student teaching evaluations at the end of each semester are reviewed very carefully.” Professors with poor teaching evaluations would not receive tenure, and adjunct professors would not teach there long without positive reviews.

Aging Faculty

While the faculty of the college saw their role primarily as teaching, there was increasing concern among the administration that some of the pedagogy of the faculty was dated. In 2004, a presidential special committee on retention was formed to investigate the decline in student persistence. The committee examined several surveys to understand the experience of students to improve retention. The examination showed that faculty needed more professional development, particularly for the 100-level courses. The emphasis on 100-level courses corresponded to the changing demographics of millennial students and the aging pedagogy of the faculty. The motivation of millennial students and methods to improve teaching and learning for these students was assessed to be a problem of the middle-aged and older faculty. To address this issue, a staff member informed me that the college appointed a tenured high performing faculty member to a joint faculty and staff position during the 2002-2003 academic year to create and provide support to faculty in improving their pedagogy through on-campus teaching and learning workshops, as well as to provide continual student assessment of the teaching and learning environment of students at the college.

Faculty Workload

The average course load of a faculty member at Prairie College was seven courses per year. Prairie College's instruction was based on a 10-week academic term; thus each faculty member taught, on average, two courses a term with an additional course taught during the December term or during the summer. A 2004 presidential special report found that time devoted to research in addition to a full teaching load pulled faculty away from making contact with students. Further, the demands of teaching and research impeded faculty from creating significant interpersonal relationships with students. Faculty indicated to the presidential special committee they were very busy with all of the demands that teaching, research, and committees had placed upon their time.

Long-term faculty members with the college had found ways to manage the stress of their workload by referring to their work as "a calling." A calling can be something felt from God to an individual or just an internal sense of meaning for one's work. A professor in the Religion Department stated that a professor who came with no experience as an undergraduate or graduate student at a small private college had trouble understanding the culture of a place like Prairie College. This professor stated it was not so much the "religious calling" but a calling to be in service to the institution and the students it served. Without an understanding of "service" and all it entails, a faculty member did not persist.

Faculty Student Relationship

When Prairie College was established, there was a heavy value on creating a liberal arts institution with high academic standards for students. The faculty believed that high academic standards would provide a strong student body and would grow the

institution. Since the college's inception, faculty and administrators were frequently in conflict over which students to admit. Faculty consistently desired brighter, more engaging students, and administrators desired just getting more students. In conversations I had with faculty, it was clear that the long-term desire for academically stronger students had not changed. One senior faculty member I interviewed indicated that the ability to obtain students with higher academic abilities was linked to a student's ability to pay tuition at Prairie College or the need to spend money on non-academic related issues such as working to support car payments, mobile phone payments, and a social life. He stated that if costs were lower and personal needs of students were lower, there could be a greater chance of students being more engaged in the academic environment and in developing relationships with faculty. While there were bright students at Prairie College, there were also, according to the president of the college, "a few diamonds in the rough." His statement affirmed the faculty's belief that not every student who was admitted was of the highest academic quality. Faculty preferred to be engaged with students who had a similar passion for learning as they did.

Although the academic standards of the students varied, the faculty culture exhibited the value that its members should have relationships with students whether their academic interests matched or not. For example, one professor informed me about how faculty offices are spread out all over campus. Dissimilar to many traditional campuses where faculty teach in buildings where their offices are maintained, Prairie College faculty offices were more frequently in converted homes scattered around but close to the main part of campus. These homes were now departmental offices. While the professor believed that having offices and classrooms in the same building would be more ideal for

building relationships with students, he also granted that being in a house had benefits. It facilitated a more relaxed environment for students and faculty to talk about academic interests and issues outside of class. He stated that the more comfortable space in a house created an environment where faculty more easily kept required office hours for students. This enhanced greater interaction between professor and student while also creating a means of accountability among faculty members. Fellow faculty members were able to see who was and was not maintaining required amounts of advising time for students. This was an important component of the tenure process for new faculty members as well as the faculty culture overall.

Summary of Institutional Culture – Faculty Subculture

Beliefs

Faculty believed that their role was to be high quality teachers to students. While research was a part of their role and responsibility at the college, they believed they were first and foremost teachers. This was demonstrated in the ways in which students talk about faculty and the way faculty talk about themselves. The emphasis on teaching was repeatedly addressed through publications such as the academic catalog, admissions brochures, and the website.

Faculty believed they were scholars of worth for their students and peers. This was reflected in the number of faculty who held a terminal degree and the search for new members with a terminal degree from prestigious higher education institutions.

The core technology (Morgan, 1997) of any academic community is the curriculum. Faculty believed they provided a strong academic environment to students and led this endeavor for the college. Historically, this was demonstrated in the

development of Project Phoenix, a new curriculum model that created the 10-week term as well as core requirements for a degree from the college. In the current life of the college, students confirmed that this was an example of their belief that the curriculum was academically challenging.

Not uncommon to any college, Prairie College faculty believed they were overworked. Between teaching load, advising, and service to the college, faculty believed they had little time for themselves or their students. This was supported by the report of the 2004 presidential special committee in which the faculty asserted that being overworked resulted in less time to engage with students and conduct their own scholarly endeavors.

Espoused Values

The faculty valued a strong intellectual environment for their students. They appreciated students who had the ability to succeed and participate at a high level in the academic life of the college. Since the beginning of the college, faculty desired students with high academic credentials that enhanced the academic community they wished to create. This was demonstrated throughout the history of the college with faculty requesting students with stronger pre-college academic credentials.

Basic Assumptions

The basic overall assumption of the faculty was that they wished to create an academically rigorous community of scholars. This was demonstrated in the faculty it hired and tenured, the history of the kind of students it desired to admit, and the reputation it wished to project. It was assumed that if you were a faculty member at

Prairie College, you would be committed to assuming a teaching role that assisted students in creating an academic community that would bring pride to the college.

Institutional Culture – Student Affairs Staff Subculture



Figure 5. Student Affairs Staff Subculture

Students attend a college or university to obtain a college degree. While faculty is preeminent in a student's success or failure, Student Affairs staff assists in the process of students obtaining a degree by supporting the academic mission of the institution through programs and services it provides. Depending on the values and beliefs of a college or university, Student Affairs staff can assist students in obtaining financial assistance, locating student housing, discerning career paths and job opportunities, providing resources for students to stay physically and mentally healthy, and providing opportunities for students to be connected to fellow students, staff, and faculty. During the 2005-2006 academic year, Prairie College spent approximately \$2,290 per student on student affairs and services programs.

Few Student Life Staff

Prairie College had few Student Affairs staff members. During this study, there were 124 administrative staff and only 28, less than 25 percent, performed Student Affairs roles. The gender balance in Student Affairs was evenly divided between women and men. Within the division of Student Affairs, there were 9 offices: Vice President for

Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Dean of Students, Campus Activities, Campus Safety, Career Development, Chaplain, Ministry and Service, Residential Life, and Wellness Center. With few staff members in each department, demands on departments and the individuals within were high. Staff members believed there were just not enough people to share all the work that needed to be done supporting students, their department, or the college.

In one interview with the college chaplain, I was provided with an example of how difficult his job was with few staff to support the office. He stated that his experience was not different from other Student Affairs offices on campus. The chaplain was eager to work with students on religious life programming for the campus. He understood this to be his primary focus at the college. At the same time, the college was renovating a building that was formerly a seminary for the United Methodist denomination. The building would host a new sanctuary for religious life as well as the Religion Department offices on campus. The chaplain explained how frustrating it was to maintain multiple tasks including administrative and student support, giving supervision to the renovation project, and raising funds to support the work of his department with not enough staff to assist him in performing these tasks. On the day of our interview he had spent most of his day writing and signing letters to students who had participated in religious life programming on the campus over the past 20 years. The letters were to be sent to support a capital campaign for the new religious life building renovations. While he saw this administrative work as part of his responsibility, creating all these letters had taken him away from supporting students who needed him on that day. He stated this was not an uncommon experience for him and other staff members. Administrative tasks

frequently prevented student life staff from interacting with students they were to serve. The few staff coupled with the expected administrative tasks took student life staff away from important support and socialization factors involved in their positions.

Marginalization of Student Life Staff

With small or one-person offices, it was not surprising that some student life staff felt marginalized. During an interview with the college chaplain, I heard about these feelings of marginalization. He was a graduate of the college and had served as the chaplain for more than 20 years. His connection with the college was strong and deep, and he had observed the college evolve over time. When he spoke about religious life on campus, he longed to do more. He remembered a time when students actively participated in worship life on the campus. While he understood that the secularization of society and the campus overall now made religious life not as important as it was in the college's formative years, he still saw spirituality and religious life as important elements of support many students needed while attending the college. His position continued to be questioned by administration as monies became scarce and funding from the United Methodist Church became less available. This made him feel marginalized.

It was not just money that made staff feel marginalized but also where their offices were located on campus. For example, the Health Center, Career Development Office, College Chaplain, and Residential Life offices were all located on the southern most part of campus. To students, these offices were far away from the academic life of the campus several blocks away to the north. Further, the offices were under the stands of the football stadium and had no windows. The Student Life staff location and physical space did not make them feel that they were active and valued members of the college

environment. Rather, they felt relegated to the margins of the campus all the while being expected to provide service to students in environments that were not particularly inviting to students.

In Loco Parentis: Student Life Program

From Prairie College's inception, religious doctrine was a very important part of student life. Families and religious leaders felt it important to keep their sons and daughters true to Methodist values and beliefs. It was important for faculty and staff to assume a parental role, *in loco parentis*, in regard to student welfare. This early convention of monitoring students did not change with the evolution of the college. The cultural norm among the student life staff was one of allowing some autonomy but maintaining an *in loco parentis* philosophy of working with students. While observing the new student orientation program, I was able to see the *in loco parentis* philosophy in action.

As students arrived with their families to begin orientation, admissions counselors and student life staff greeted parents almost as strongly as they greeted each student. It was clear that the parent was valued as much as the student. Parents were asked how they were feeling about their son or daughter attending orientation as well as their thoughts about attending the college in the fall. Parents frequently stated to staff that they expected the staff to keep a watchful eye on their student. While these comments were typically done in jest, it was clear there was sincerity in their comments as well. They were sending their son or daughter off to the college and they expected staff to monitor how things evolved with their student. They were placing their trust in staff to act as their surrogate. The staff seemed to take this responsibility seriously and responded in

affirmative ways through handshakes, pats on the back, and verbal affirmations to the parents.

Student Life Staff Rule Enforcers

Cultures have rules and norms that are instilled into newcomers. In interviews with students, they identified Student Life staff as rule enforcers. The rule enforcer norm coincides with the *in loco parentis* actions of staff. Whether it was Residential Life staff, Financial Aid staff, or another office, the role of staff was interpreted as responsible for enforcement of the rules and policies of the college. This *in loco parentis* part of the culture had not changed much since the beginnings of the college. For example, the role of staff in rule enforcement became extremely clear to me as I sought to obtain a table in the student union to solicit students to participate in this study. While I had met with numerous college officials to obtain IRB approval, I was confronted with many procedures and rules by the student union manager. The student union manager did not care that the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, the faculty IRB chair, or the College President had approved the study; she wanted to make sure I had a \$500,000 liability policy before sitting at a table and talking to students. She stated this was important in case I damaged anything while sitting at the table. The manager was more concerned about a rule than in understanding I was a researcher approved by the college to conduct a study and not a vendor selling goods. The rule was preeminent, not the individual situation.

The emphasis on rules was made known to college administrators in 2004 through the presidential special committee that investigated student retention issues. That study uncovered that Residential Life staff emphasized policies and procedures more than the

student experience. Students stated that staff were strong rule enforcers, sometimes to the detriment of developing positive communities in the residence halls. While rules and policies assisted in providing risk-adverse environments, staff used rules as absolutes, and sometimes hurdles, which did not always support students in their academic or social pursuits at the college.

Student Life Silo

The Student Affairs staff was quite removed from faculty at Prairie College and did not interact frequently with the faculty. There was only one ongoing program/department, the Academic Resource Center, where a faculty member and a member of the Vice President for Student Affairs office interacted. Student Affairs staff acted as an independent “silo” in the institutional culture. During my campus observations, I rarely saw Student Affairs staff interacting with faculty in the campus dining hall, around campus, at orientation, or at any campus events. While it appeared that Student Affairs staff knew who faculty members were, they had little to no relationship with them.

Lack of Student Hospitality

While observing staff interacting with students on the campus grounds, I did not see many Student Affairs staff engaging with students in a welcoming fashion. At an orientation event with Campus Safety and Residential Life staffs, this was made plain. The event was to prepare students to be aware of their surroundings in the community and on campus so that no student was a victim of crime and students maintained vigilance about their personal safety on and near the campus. The department presenters were somewhat verbally aggressive as they requested students to come into the room in

the Union where the session was to be held. As students filed into the room, presenters confronted students about where they sat in the room, suggesting that those in the back would not pay attention or would cause “problems.” Then as the presentation began, they did not properly introduce themselves to the students but rather only spoke to the material that needed to be covered. The presenters appeared to want to get the students out of the room as soon as possible. There was little warmth or compassion shown towards the students. While observing the session it was clear to me that this was a “required” session and it did not really matter if the students understood or valued the material being covered.

This experience was similar to the findings in the research conducted by the 2004 presidential special committee, which stated the college needed to “foster ‘radical hospitality’ or an institution-wide transformation regarding service towards students.” The presentation by Student Affairs staff in the Union did not welcome students; it provided information that was rushed and formal. As students came into the culture of the college they wanted to feel welcomed and valued. As shown in the research of Tinto (1987), when students feel valued by members of the college community, they are more likely to persist.

Similarly, Noel/Levitz, a retention consulting company, have stated that new students make decisions on whether they will persist at a college or university within the first eight weeks of school. The Student Affairs staff had created no structured system for welcoming and monitoring student success during the first weeks of the academic term. The 2004 presidential special committee also noted this lack of programming in its report when it stated there needed to be “more academic support systems and early intervention

mechanisms for freshman, especially in the first 4 weeks.” There was clearly a need for greater ongoing socialization of new students into the culture of Prairie College.

Summary of Institutional Culture – Student Affairs Subculture

Beliefs

There was a belief expressed by the 2004 presidential special committee that Student Affairs staff was not welcoming to students. Through observing Student Affairs staff on campus and through listening to student impressions of various staff members on campus, this could be confirmed. The lack of “hospitality” did not appear to be malicious but rather a lack of time and energy to give to students.

Student Affairs staff believed they were overworked. With only 28 staff members to be of assistance to 2,116 students, the ratio of students to staff was 75.6 to 1. If every student were to receive individualized attention, it would be difficult to provide a meaningful advising relationship with a ratio of that size. Further, the need for individual attention does not take into account basic administrative responsibilities that would be included in any Student Affairs position.

Feeling marginalized due to insufficient funding, lack of staffing, or general cultural ethos at a college is particularly common among Student Affairs staff on college and university campuses. Student Affairs staff believe they are not valued as much as the faculty. As several Student Affairs offices only have one staff member, it was easy for staff to feel this way.

Espoused Values

A key value of the Student Affairs staff was maintaining order in the student body. This was demonstrated in the Student Affairs staff belief they were to act *in loco*

parentis. Student Affairs staff believed they should act as surrogate parents and at times act as a rule enforcer, similar to the parent-child relationship. This mode of operation was demonstrated through residential life programs and was documented by the 2004 presidential special committee on retention.

As stated by one staff person, Student Affairs staff value relationships with students. Student Affairs staff saw relationships with students as important to the work they do. They were to be in service to students and support their success at the college. The problem for Student Affairs staff with these values was the amount of time it took to develop relationships with so few staff and so many administrative responsibilities.

Basic Assumptions

The basic assumption of Student Affairs staff was that they were to be of service to students at Prairie College. How they were of service to students was not clear. Student Affairs staff were frequently caught in a conflict between creating relationships with students and performing administrative tasks for students and/or the college. Student Affairs staff assumed that they were to perform both roles, but knowing when they should put greater emphasis on relationship building or administrative tasks needed greater direction from the leadership of the college.

Student Subculture

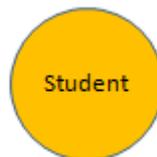


Figure 6. Student Subculture

Colleges and universities cannot survive without students. No matter how strong the institutional reputation or how competent the faculty and staff of a college or university, all will fold without students. Students are needed inputs (Morgan, 1997) for the organization as well as a significant subculture in any college or university culture. Students who attend a college or university form a distinct culture that has the potential to shape the overall organizational culture in significant ways, including basic admission standards, curriculum, faculty and administrative staffing, college and student finances, and out-of-classroom activities and learning experiences.

To provide description of the student culture at Prairie College, I observed students in a wide variety of social settings and conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 students who ranged in class standing from sophomore to senior. Table 1 provides a brief listing of student participants in the study, their class year, gender, off- or on-campus residence, academic major, in-state or out-of-state home, and the distance traveled to attend the college. Names of the students have been changed to protect their privacy. A brief description of each interviewed student follows.

Table 2

Interviewed Student Demographics

Student Name	Class Year	Gender	Residence	Major	In-State?	Distance from Home
Gwen	Senior	Female	On-Campus	Education	Yes	>25
Kendra	Junior	Female	Off-Campus	International Business	No	<200
Alex	Sophomore	Male	On-Campus	Computer Science	Yes	<100
Joan	Sophomore	Female	On-Campus	Psychology	Yes	>25
Sandra	Sophomore	Female	On-Campus	International Business	No	>200
Deidra	Junior	Female	On-Campus	English	Yes	>25
Sophie	Junior	Female	Off-Campus	Music Education	No	<100
Angela	Junior	Female	Off-Campus	Political Science	Yes	>25
Tom	Junior	Male	On-Campus	Accounting	Yes	>25
Kelly	Junior	Female	On-Campus	German	Yes	>25
Ginger	Senior	Female	Off-Campus	Musical Theatre	Yes	>25

Gwen was a 4th-year senior. She planned to complete her teaching degree in elementary education in the coming year. Her major was in elementary education with a minor in sociology and science. She had lived on campus for four years, since she was a first-year student. Her parents were divorced but both lived within a short distance of one another. She currently was working about 30 hours a week at the campus coffeehouse. She had also been a tour guide for the Admissions Department.

Kendra was a junior at the college. She informed me she was a little older than the typical junior. All she would tell me about her age was that she was “over 23.” Kendra was a triple major in international business, business management, and French and was forming a French club on campus. Her formative years were spent living in Israel, Texas,

and most recently Michigan. Her family currently lived in Michigan and was Jewish. She worked in the campus coffeehouse. Kendra stated that money was extremely limited for her and her family. She lived on campus her first two years at Prairie College and now lived off-campus to save money. Kendra planned to study abroad in France during the fall of her senior year.

Alex was a sophomore from a small town of about 300 people in Illinois. He went to a small private high school before enrolling at the college. Alex was majoring in computer science. He was a member of the track team where he did shotput, discus, and hammer. Alex was one quarter Mexican and had received information from LINC, a mentoring program for Students of Color. Alex had lived on campus for two years. He had an older sister who went to a private college in Illinois and another sister who attended a community college near his hometown. Alex was a first-generation student, as neither of his parents went to college.

Joan grew up in an affluent western suburb of Nantes. She was a psychology major. Joan came across as a “progressive” student with her nose ring and clothing and was not afraid to assert her individuality. She had lived on campus two years but had not been involved in any student organizations and had not participated in many activities on campus. Joan’s parents were divorced.

Sandra was originally from a western suburb of Nantes but moved near Ann Arbor, Michigan, during the middle of her junior year of high school. She stated her ethnicity was Middle Eastern. She was a sophomore but had junior academic credit status. Her advanced academic standing was derived from credit she received at the College of DuPage and Oakland Community College during high school. During

Sandra's first year at the college, she worked in the Dean of Student's office but stated she did not feel particularly close to anyone in the office. She was a triple major in international business, Spanish, and conflict resolution. Sandra currently worked in the Career Development office. She had been involved in several student organizations on campus including Student Government, College Union Activities Board (CUAB), and Break Away (a service organization) and had been to South Carolina and Mexico on service trips with the college. Sandra had lived on campus for 2 years.

Deidre was majoring in English and German with minors in history of ideas and psychology. She was from an affluent North Nantes suburb and was a junior who planned to graduate in Spring 2007. She played on the women's basketball team, was president of the [College] Green (an environmental group), and treasurer of the German club. She had lived on campus for three years.

Sophie was a junior from northwest Indiana, majoring in music education and psychology. She lived off-campus with people who did not attend the college; she found that she needed to "get away" from college students at the end of the school day. Sophie felt she was very involved in student organizations: Music Educators Organization, Voices of Praise, and College Union Activities Board. In the past, she was involved in the Residence Hall Association.

Angela was a commuter student from an up-and-coming western suburb of Nantes. She had commuted two of her three years to the college. Angela withdrew from the college for her sophomore year and attended the College of DuPage due to financial concerns. She was a junior majoring in political science. She had been a leadership intern with the Office of Student Affairs. During her internship, she programmed four events

and did public relations for the office. She stated she was more of an active participant than a leader in organizations. She was involved in Students Together Achieving Real Success (STARS, a peer education group) and a commuter student organization. Outside of Prairie College, Angela was very involved with an evangelical church in southern Chelsea.

Tom was a junior majoring in accounting and management. He grew up in a western suburb of Nantes about 15 minutes from the college and had lived on campus all three years. Tom was on the football team, was connected to some senior administrators at the college, and will be teaching a Varsity 101 course to first-year students next year. The course will teach new student athletes what they needed to know about drugs, gambling, study habits, and time management.

Kelly was home-schooled and attended Green University in Nantes before enrolling in the college. She was a junior but had senior academic status due to her prior schooling at Green. She was majoring in German and literature with a minor in history of ideas. She was from the inner part of Nantes. Kelly had lived on campus for three years and was a member of the International Club, Catholic Student Union, Cardinals in Action, and Voices of Praise. Kelly studied in Germany for a semester.

Ginger was a senior from the town in which Prairie College was located. She graduated from high school early and immediately started attending the college. She was a musical theater major. Prior to her matriculation, she participated in theater productions at the college as well as in the college summer theater camp. She had taken an occasional term off to do an internship with Disney, a film for ABC, and to perform in *Bear in the Big Blue House* and *Tony and Tina's Wedding*. She was currently 8 months pregnant and

lived with her boyfriend in a neighboring town. Ginger spent two terms living in a residence hall on-campus.

A description of how these 11 students experienced their culture and that of the college follows. The beliefs, espoused values, and basic assumptions of the student subculture are provided at the conclusion.

Small School Culture

With regard to size, the College Board divides colleges and universities into three different types: small, medium, and large. Information from the College Board is used by many students and high school guidance counselors to aid in selecting a college or university to attend. The College Board ranks Prairie College as a small liberal arts college. All Prairie College marketing made clear that the school was a small liberal arts college. Throughout the college's history, there had been many discussions about how large the college should become and how many students should be accepted. The decision had consistently been that the school should remain small.

As students reviewed information from the College Board, U.S. News and World Report's Best Colleges Rankings, or marketing provided to them from Prairie College, they understood that they were going to a school that did not have the academic and social offerings and resources of a large university. Prairie College could not provide the numbers of faculty, staff, and social and cultural programming of a large university. Students reported they desired a school that was smaller and could provide a more personal feel. Tom, a football player, informed me that he wanted to attend a small college that would not be too different than what he had experienced in high school. His high school was about the same size as Prairie College, and when choosing a college he

desired one with close interpersonal relationships similar to what he had experienced in his high school among football coaches and teachers. While there were not many faculty, staff, curricular and co-curricular offerings, the smaller school environment provided an opportunity for students to recognize and engage with fellow students and faculty with ease. This was a comfort to many students at Prairie College. As Gwen contemplated her almost four years at the college, she informed me it was her relationship with the faculty that kept her attending and served a sense of pride in the college and, at times, bragging rights with her peers who attended larger institutions where the student-faculty relationship was not as strong.

Deirdre provided another example. She graduated from a high school of 2300 students, and her graduating class was about 750. In choosing Prairie College, Deirdre stated, “The undergraduate [enrollment] is not so big. You know a lot of the students. You know a lot of the faculty. That is probably one of the big reasons why I decided to go here. I am kind of a shy person. So, you know, meeting people is not such an easy thing for me. But everyone is friendly. You feel like you know people because it is a smaller school.” She continued, “At a smaller college you get to know your faculty and advisor a lot more and you can explore classes that you really enjoy and that you just want to take. ...I can do basically whatever I want to do.”

While students can have great relationships with fellow students and faculty members at a small school, conversely the small number of faculty can sometimes limit the academic challenge students receive. This was a challenge for some students attending Prairie College. Gina provided an example as she shared her experience in musical theater. Her major did not have a lot of students or faculty who taught courses

within it. Hence, there were few levels of courses within her major. “You really have to push yourself or you are really not going to get anywhere. And sometimes, you just don’t want to push yourself. Sometimes you want a teacher to push you. That is why you are paying money to go to school. And they can only push you so far,” she said. Gina desired more faculty to provide a greater depth of instruction; she believed that a small college could not provide all she wanted from her education.

As Prairie College is small in physical size and enrollment, it is not particularly well known in the larger Nantes community, the state, or regionally. Students reported that the college does not provide the “brand recognition” of larger public universities within the state and the country or that of elite small liberal arts colleges like Brown, Dartmouth, or Princeton. The college combated the lack of brand recognition by emphasizing its rankings in *US News and World Report* and *Petersen’s Guide* as it communicated in marketing material with students and families. While most students stated they were getting a good education, they were also concerned that attending a small school and the school brand would not “sell” well with prospective employers and prospective graduate schools.

Many big universities have name recognition in the cities in which they are located. Kelly grew up in Nantes and was allowed to attend a medium-sized university in Nantes as part of her high school education. She could easily report the prestigious schools in the Nantes area. Kelly stated, “The only reason I knew about [Prairie College] was because of something I got in the mail. I looked at it and it said, [Chelsea]. Where is that? I have no idea where this is. And I looked on a map and I was like, it is an hour outside of Nantes, 45 minutes. How did I not know this was here?” The fact that the

college was small and without a recognizable brand prevented Kelly from being exposed to the possibility of attending at an earlier point in the recruitment process. This was a common belief expressed by a number of students at Prairie College.

It was not just the name recognition of attending a small school that had some students worried about attending. When talking about job opportunities upon graduation, Sandra explained that she was concerned about attending a small school that was not well known. Her belief and that of many Prairie College students was that bigger state and private schools drew more attention from employers, as those schools had valued prestige. Brand recognition was something Sandra valued but made a compromise in attending Prairie College. When explaining this compromise, Sandra stated that she did not think her decision to attend Prairie College would have too much impact on her if she decided to go to law school upon graduation. Sandra informed me that “if you want to be successful..., you have the disadvantage of going to a school that isn’t always well known. ...I would tell a prospective student that if they were planning to go here and not do anything outside of classes and get so-so grades, they shouldn’t come here. They won’t really get much out of this school. But, I think if a student is coming here eager, ready to get their hands in a number of areas and try things, and just grow, [the college] is a great place.”

While Sandra and other students summarized the benefits of attending a small school that was not necessarily well known, Prairie College’s lack of brand recognition led some families to wonder why their son or daughter might want to attend a small unknown school. Students reported that having family who knew the college brand as well as the benefits of attending a small college supported their desire to attend Prairie

College. Parents affected the recruitment and socialization process based on the reputation of Prairie College. For example, Sandra reported that she was accepted to the University of Michigan in addition to Prairie College. Her family was Middle Eastern and extremely proud of the fact that she was admitted to the University of Michigan because it was well known and academically prestigious. When Sandra decided to attend Prairie College, her family did not understand why she wanted a small school or one that was perceived as less academically prestigious. Her friends and her family projected the feeling on to her: "Oh, I thought you were smart." Those feelings chipped away at Sandra's confidence about attending the college. She figured people had negative impressions of her for not going to a larger school with a better academic reputation and name recognition.

While Sandra's parents were supportive of her being in college, overall she did not perceive they were particularly supportive of her attending Prairie College. She stated, "I think [my parents] are impressed with everything [Prairie College] offers me. Many of my cousins that did go to schools like Michigan State or University of Michigan never studied abroad or went on service projects. And not that those things aren't offered there, but I think they just weren't interested or encouraged to do those things. So they are just seeing the development I am going through and seeing all the things I have been able to accomplish, like what I have been able to publish through the [State] Bar Association.... ...Seeing my name in print was like 'you are making the most of it!' I think a lot of people still question why I am here and not at home, at the University of Michigan. But I think they will realize that once I make my admission into law school, it will all be worth it."

Student Admissions Standards

Wanous (1992) and Schein (1978), researchers in organizational development, stressed the importance of organizations whose members recruit new members to provide a realistic job preview (RJP). A RJP provides the newcomer with a clearer understanding of what he or she may be expected to do in their job as well as what peers might be like who join the organization. Similarly, professional admissions officers and student recruiters provide new students with a picture of what a particular college is like through materials, recruitment and orientation programs, and conversations during the recruitment process. Students and their parents want to make well-informed enrollment decisions based on “how things are at a college” and not on “how we would like things to be at a particular college.”

Overall, students perceived that admissions standards at Prairie College varied considerably. The variance could be in ACT/SAT scores, high school GPA, or basic academic motivation. The college was “selective” per the College Board in admission materials; still, students perceived the admissions standards to be relaxed when the college needed to admit more students for enrollment purposes or to “make budget.” This frustrated some academically bright students who felt that allowing students without the basic academic skills made the learning environment less desirable.

Joan provided an example of the broad admissions standards. She was a bright woman who told me it wasn't hard to get admitted into the college but “...it is hard to stay in. If you are not up on grades and stuff, there is no way you can do well. ...But to get in I really don't think it is that difficult. I think they pretty much accept anyone who applies. If you have a 1.0 GPA in high school you are not going to get in, but I only had a

3.4 GPA and a 26 on my ACT and they let me in.” While Joan was above the 24 ACT school average, she wondered how some students with lower high school academic credentials got into the college and then graduated. “I look at some people and I wonder how did they get into this school?” Joan’s comments affirmed the historical admission process whereby the college, in order to meet financial demands, admitted students with strong academic backgrounds as well as others without significant academic success.

While students reported there was considerable variance in admissions standards, many did not understand if they were true scholars or not. The variance in students admitted did not provide a realistic picture of what a student found among the student body upon matriculation. Alex provided an example of this with his ACT scores. He received a 27 on his ACT, which was above average for the U. S. and the college. But Alex believed he just did “all right.” When asked what he thought other students received, he stated in the “mid-20’s, 23 or 24.” Alex was a bright young man who perceived he was merely average because that is what he believed his peers were. While Alex could have been modest, his interpretation of his academic ability was that he was not something special. Even though he scored well on the ACT he believed he must be average like the rest of his peers. The variance in admissions standards and the lack of a true Realistic Job Preview regarding academics made students like Alex question their personal academic abilities and scholarship and led many students to undervalue their academic achievements and aspirations once matriculated.

Outside of academic credential variance in the admission process, students reported that the ethnic, racial, religious, and socioeconomic background of the student body at the college tended toward homogeneity. The college was actively seeking to

diversify its student population and had overrepresented Students of Color in all admissions materials. Students reported that college marketing materials did not accurately reflect how the student body looked. Students frequently commented on this mismatch. Most students on the campus were open and accepting to students of differing backgrounds but did not know much about those who were different from them. When Sophie informed me about diversity, she immediately spoke to the student admissions materials. She stated, “Our brochures right now have a third African-American, a third Caucasian, and a third everything else, all the minorities grouped together. They justify it as giving time to minorities. They have a very diverse population in the brochures, but we really don’t have more than 5 to 10 percent African American and a couple of Asians. So I assume they are looking for high achieving students who fall into that category of minorities.”

The college’s desire to obtain a more diverse student population created conflict for many students from diverse backgrounds. On the whole, students found the campus pretty homogenous. Joan demonstrated the mismatch in recruiting students from diverse backgrounds as she informed me that the college is “white, middle-class, and Protestant but not very religious.” After a brief discussion about the difference between diversity and multiculturalism, she said that most of the diversity at the college was socioeconomic. She stated students come from families where their parents paid for everything or where their parents paid for nothing. She said, “We are mostly white suburban kids from [the State].” Angela also reported that most of the diversity on campus came in the form of socioeconomic difference.

A Second High School Experience

Change is difficult for many people, including students. Some students desire to create a new life for themselves when beginning college, while others wish to keep their environment similar to their home origin. Similar to the theory of Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000), some students need to make transitions into a new culture by keeping part of themselves in their culture of origin. A student may need to keep attachments to family while attending school and engaging the new culture for fear of change. Too much change can create anxiety, which most people, including students, try to avoid.

With many students originally living within a 30-mile radius of the college, much looked and felt similar to high school. The size of the college, class sizes, campus facilities, athletic programs, and academic rigor made it feel similar to what students experienced in local Nantes area high schools. Students were attracted to the college because there was not much distance between their high school culture and the culture of the college. Many students found this comforting, while a few found this unsatisfactory as they wanted experiences that would challenge them personally and academically.

With most students being close to home and not needing to sever those ties, many asserted the college was like a second high school. Joan explained that she thought it would be “more different than my high school, but it ended up not being that way. It pretty much ended up being high school all over again.” When thinking about why students choose the college, Joan said, “They pretty much chose this school because it is their high school. It is not any different. I really don’t like change. I really want things to remain the same. I won’t lie. I didn’t want to go someplace that was really different. Like I thought college would be scary enough let alone go through a totally different

atmosphere.” Sandra furthered this sentiment when she reported, “Some people say this really feels more like a second installment of high school than it does of college because of what [students’] image of college should be like.” The belief that Prairie College should in some way be a second installment of high school was common among the student body.

When students are in high school, they typically live with their family and are expected to maintain family responsibilities and obligations while living in the home. While the definition of *family* can mean many different things, typically there is some form of family bond during the high school years. It can be difficult for students to break the employment, cultural (religious and/or ethnic), or basic physical distance from the family. In this case, many students at the college visited with family on a weekly basis, going home for a meal, doing laundry, and possibly visiting with friends at home. Most students had a strong connection to their families. The connection to home and family was reinforced because the family did not want the student far from home or the student was not ready to move away from what was considered safe. With students going home to see family and friends frequently, many did not become fully immersed in the college culture. This was particularly true for many commuter students at the college. Tinto’s (1987) retention theory asserts that a retention problem can emerge when a student is immersed in their culture of origin more than the culture of a college.

Gwen provided a good example of how family relationships impacted her decision to enroll at Prairie College. “My dad lived like 10 minutes away and he was so for this school. I got accepted to like a million schools but this is the one he wanted me to go to.” Gwen’s dad wanted her to remain close to home so she could keep the high school

and familial connection. Kendra provided a similar example. She lived in Michigan when she applied to go to college. Her mom reminded her that she had an uncle in Nantes and told Kendra to apply to colleges near her uncle. Kendra's mom valued safety and support in having an uncle nearby.

Angela provided a similar but different perspective to the family connection and relationship at Prairie College. Angela states she was not very "adventurous." She had been accepted to a private school in Texas that provided significant financial aid, but she was not ready to leave home. "I had to do things at my own pace and [Prairie] College allowed me to do that. Because I didn't have to leave my house. It wasn't like a split-second decision made in a summer. I just wasn't ready. My mom was like crying. I am the firstborn so it was just not going to happen." Angela stated that her family was important to her. "I think they need me in a lot of ways. I am an example for my younger brother. Neither of my parents graduated from college. And you know, they want this for me. More than anything, I am vicariously completing [this degree] for them." For Angela, staying close to home kept the family educational frame of reference, high school, strong for her and her parents.

Academic Environment

The college's marketing materials asserted to students that the college was about academics. Most students who attended understood that they were not going to a "party" school. Academic work was required. Students were not going to be able to "coast" through school. The college's philosophy and values were clear to students about academic engagement and, overall, students understood that they would need to do

academic work in order to be successful. Still, some students were not prepared for what they eventually experienced – a trait perpetuated throughout the college’s history.

When asked to describe the academic environment, Gwen stated, “We are a pretty studious college. ...I think we are extremely studious, I mean, Saturday morning or Saturday afternoon, the [the campus coffeehouse] is packed with people studying and starting all day Sunday, the [campus coffeehouse] is packed with people studying. The library is always packed. We are a trimester school which makes us have to be.”

Kendra affirmed Gwen’s perceptions, saying, “I think compared to other schools there is a lot more studying going on here than people think because it is a small school. That is why I hear we have a low freshman retention rate. Because people come here and think it is going to be like a community college, like you don’t have to go to class and you are fine. We are the complete opposite.”

Deirdre almost went to the University of Chicago but some changes with the basketball team there changed her mind. She told me that academically Prairie College was not as “prestigious or even as strenuous as you might find at the University of Chicago, [but] I am still coming out with a good education.” While Deirdre desired academic challenge during her college experience, her desire to balance basketball and her classes became more important in her desire to enroll.

The need for students to stay focused on their academic studies was strongly linked to the college’s academic term schedule. Students reported that completing academic coursework in a 10-week term resulted in them needing to stay on task with academic responsibilities or there would be problems with papers and exams. Students had to stay current with their class work or fall quickly behind. Most students adjusted to

the rigor of work required in the term schedule, but students were not well socialized by faculty, staff, or other students about how to academically handle the term schedule. Some students needed assistance in understanding time management within a quarter system. Without fully understanding the academic challenges of the term system, many failed a course or did not perform as well as planned during their first year. It was only after they had failed a course that the college offered an intervention to assist students with this academic challenge.

Alex explained how the stress of the term schedule affected new students. As a student athlete, he reported that during his freshman year a lot of guys on his residence hall floor found the college pretty tough academically. “I heard a lot of guys in my dorm say that the college is a lot harder than [they] thought it was going to be. It is tough, even the low 100 courses. You think this is going to be an easy class [and] some of them can be pretty tough. None of the teachers blow off the class because it is just a 100-level class.” When asked how much Alex studied, he stated about 15 hours a week and this was less than most of his peers. I asked him if he had ever experienced academic trouble studying that much. He told me “yes.” When Alex came to the college he had pretty much “coasted” through high school. “It was easy doing that. I get here and, not so easy.”

Alex then told me about a class he had to take because he failed a course his freshman year. “I failed a course last year and they had me take a special class. When you fail a class you have to take it. Only freshman take it. And that kind of helped me see that I wasn’t doing so well. And I just got a little more serious about [classes]. ...[The class] was basically getting study habits down and motivational techniques to get your homework done.”

Kelly explained how she experienced academic stress in a term format. She liked the terms but knew it made her very busy with little time for anything but school. “I am surprised at how many very smart people there are that do way too much. I think there is a tendency to way overburden yourself. But I think that partially comes from the 10-week term we have. Because you cram everything in and ...it is just different in a semester system. I think the trimester system perpetuates the crazy busyness of a lot of students.” Gwen affirmed Kelly’s experience when she reported that trimesters are difficult. She found that her friends who were in semesters do not believe her. Gwen stated, “My friends probably think that I’m lying that trimesters are really hard, but they really are. You have to have good close supportive friends to get through those 10 weeks.”

And it was not just managing individual classes, co-curricular involvement, and friends during the term. Kendra stated that it could be difficult to stay on track toward graduation on the term schedule. She informed me “If you miss a term, you miss a year. Because [sequence classes] are only offered Fall, Winter, Spring. And that’s it. There is no other way to move around it. So with having a French major, my choices for studying abroad were France and my senior year fall term. And that’s it. I couldn’t go anywhere else, I couldn’t do anything else, or I would not get a French major. So, it is not flexible at all.”

The structure of the term and the expectations of faculty through the curriculum kept students focused on why they should be in school: to learn. Still, students reported that the academic environment affected their motivation at times. Students said that they had to make personal sacrifices to stay and do well academically at Prairie College. All students need a break from their studies to rejuvenate from time to time, but many

students felt they could not take one. Gwen explained this when she stated, “With this 10-week schedule it’s just like you are sacrificing something. You want to go and drink on Friday night but you know the next day you have to write a paper because on Sunday you are doing something else, studying for another exam.”

Relationships with Faculty

Two components from Tinto’s (1987) retention model, Institutional Commitment to Students and Social and Intellectual Community, are congruent with the way many students perceived their relationships with faculty at Prairie College. Students stated that faculty put them ahead of many other institutional goals and assisted them in academic life. Tinto (1987) asserted that close relations between faculty and students is one of the best predictors for student persistence and enhanced student retention overall.

Prairie College students valued and enjoyed the personal attention they received from faculty. This was demonstrated in the language students used to describe a faculty member. Almost all of the students referred to their professors as teacher, not professor. This vernacular described the relationship students had with their professors whom they saw as teachers and advisors – academic and personal. Students frequently compared their professors to the teachers they had in high school. Most students found faculty approachable and willing to help them in both academic and some personal matters.

Kendra provided an example of how students viewed their professors as teachers. She had planned to attend Michigan State University but eventually chose Prairie College because “I thought it would be better to have a rapport with my teachers.” Similarly, Kelly explained how much she enjoyed the relationship she had with faculty at Prairie after having spent a semester in Berlin, Germany, commenting that the Berlin faculty did

not care whether she was in class and that it was hard to meet other students while there. Once Kelly returned to the U.S., she greatly appreciated that college faculty welcomed her back. Kelly informed me how affirmed she was that “people know who I am and they care if I am here or not.”

Again and again, students reported that faculty cared about their being a part of the Prairie College community. The caring relationship came from the interpersonal relationships that were formed between faculty and students. Sophie told how she enjoyed the personal and individual attention she received from the faculty. She stated, “I know all my professors, really well. We exchange Christmas cards. I know a lot of their families, their pets, their home life, and all that. I think my smallest class has been me. And my largest class has probably been 15 people. So it is very personalized. Even though I don’t always take advantage of it, I am always encouraged to see my professors outside of class. ...Professors [at the college] know exactly what you are doing and exactly what you are aiming for so they can cater to your needs.”

Similarly, Joan said, “The professors here are pretty cool. Most of my friends who I talk to that go to large campuses are like, ‘yeah, I have never really met my professors.’ I have met and I know all my professors. I am on a first-name basis with a couple of them.” One day when she was at the campus coffeehouse Joan said “[she] was sitting outside having some coffee and a cigarette with some of my friends and one of my professors just walked up and started talking to us totally about stuff that was class related but not really. He started mentioning, ‘So, how is your paper going?’ And started making jokes like that. So very easygoing. If they pass by me, I always say hi to them.

It's not like that's my professor and I can't talk to them. Actually, I have yet to meet a professor who isn't like that."

Joan provided another example of how strong the relationship is with some faculty. Once she forgot about an upcoming exam. Embarrassed about having forgotten to study for the exam, she took it anyway. When the exams were passed back and she did poorly, the professor asked her to stay after class and asked her what happened with her performance on the test, as it was irregular. Joan appreciated the individual attention the professor took in asking her what happened. It demonstrated to her that her professor was concerned about her academic performance and wellbeing.

While Alex stated that he did not interact much with faculty, probably because he is introverted and shy, he informed me that he interacts with faculty members about once a week. When asked how comfortable and helpful they were, he said, "If you take the effort and time to meet with them, they are usually pretty helpful. Maybe more than you think they would be.... They help you to a point but they don't give you the answers." Tom affirmed Alex's comments when he stated that "teachers are just so helpful. If you need anything, they will help you any way they can. That just helps me tremendously."

Professors are helpful and open to students, all the while maintaining expectations for achievement. Students asserted that faculty had limits, which students stated were reasonable. Sophie provided me the advice she would give a new student about seeking help from a professor at the college. "I would tell almost anyone to email their professor and say, 'Hey, I am having trouble; can I meet with you?' And the professor will say, 'yeah, come and see me tomorrow at this time.' They will bend over backwards to make sure. The only time it doesn't happen is if you do it the week before finals and say you

haven't understood anything all this term. He will say, 'Too bad, I may see you next term.'"

Relationship with Staff

While faculty was engaged with students in structured ways through instruction and advising, students did not interact frequently with Prairie College staff. Staff was not actively involved in the socialization of students. Spindler (1955) stated that understanding culture is most important for the administrator, as he or she manipulates the setting in which students interact with all actors in the educational setting. Staff and administrators set a tone for how the institution operates. According to Spindler (1955), when students rarely interact with staff, a trusting and supportive relationship cannot be developed. Overall, students at Prairie College experienced administrators as distant and removed from day-to-day student life.

When students described college staff they primarily reflected on their interactions with administrative and faculty support staff and financial aid staff. Students stated that administrative and faculty support staff secretaries answered many of their questions. Students stated financial aid staff was difficult to communicate with and frequently give them the "runaround." Students rarely discussed Student Affairs staff and other administrators who were hired to assist them and oversee the students' out-of-classroom experience. When these staff members were discussed, it was not in a positive light.

For example, Ginger stated how much she appreciated the secretaries and staff in the mailroom. She reported they were effective, saying, "You can call for anything." But she went on to say that the administration [financial aid] created "sideways things."

When asked to elaborate, she said, “It’s just that they make things so complicated. It’s just not that complicated. I am a very organized person and timely. I feel more responsible than some of the things that happen at this school. And there are things like, they won’t communicate clearly. Like on my bill, I would have a late fee on my bill every term. And it would be over stupid things that really shouldn’t have existed. It was things like this past term. ...They gave me this \$90 late fee. And I am like, I have been trying to pay my bill for 6 weeks and you’re not even letting me pay my bill. So that is something that is unnecessary and complicated that you spend hours on your cell phone working on.”

Very few students were able to identify more than a few administrators on campus, and many students stated that the administration did not know them. Kelly explained her experience in Emerging Leaders, which met every other week during her second term. Through Emerging Leaders, a Student Affairs-based continuing orientation program, she became familiar with whom to ask for questions on campus. However, the Emerging Leaders program was not mandatory for all students, and all she learned from the 6-week program was important academic information. She stated that introductions to college staff were provided through the program but relationships were not formed.

Sophie had strong opinions about the administration. She described her perspective on the college president who symbolically represents numerous administrators on campus. “Personally, I have a huge problem with the administration, namely the president. I mean he is a big supporter of the arts program, thank you, but other than that I can’t stand him. So I guess in terms of leadership, in general, I just wish we could have more of an authentic legitimate visionary leader. Because I go to a lot of

different conferences around the U.S. and the president [of that school], in their opening speech, is really someone I admire. I have a deep respect for them and what they are doing for their colleges. And when I heard him [Prairie College president] in his first speech I said, 'Am I really going here?' He is such an embarrassment. So that is just one thing that always gets under my skin."

Sophie continued, "Maintenance and grounds staff, I love them. The food staff are amazing. I don't really like what they cook but they are great people. Staff, in general, like the secretaries in Old Main, are wonderful. Administration, it really ranges. There are some that I really love. I can't get enough of what they do for this school and how authentic they are and just the way they present themselves on and off stage. Some that I just really admire. Then there are others... from people I just don't like to people who are doing really good things on campus and their heart is in the right place but they are really fake sometimes. They are just artificial with a lot of students. So it is a little frustrating. I mean we are all a little two-sided in some ways but when you see it in your leaders in a really pronounced way, it is frustrating."

Not knowing what "fake" really meant, I asked Sophie to elaborate. "For instance," she said, "like I have had people who will attend our Gospel Choir concert or lead Bible studies for students on campus or do some of those really great things, but then stab those programs in the back afterward. Not so much the Bible study, but like the concert and other forms of ministry and that sort of thing. They will either negate it or stab it in the back and say that was crap... 'I don't really support it. I just needed to be there.' Political reason or whatever. They will either do that or will say 'Look at me! I am the campus ministry supporter.' They will just be kind of all over the top." Overall, it was

the secretaries and food service workers who came to events that she and other students appreciated. They attended because they cared for her and her event.

Campus Social Climate

For many traditional age students, college is more than going to class, studying, taking tests, and writing papers. Students need social outlets to keep them happy and content. Social outlets and connections enhance the college experience. Kuh and Love (2000) stated that “students who belong to one or more enclaves in the cultures of immersion are more likely to persist” (p. 201). Further they asserted that a student who becomes active in the social life or co-curriculum of the campus has a greater likelihood of persistence.

Students find social life overall at Prairie College difficult. It has been an issue since the early 1900s when it was deemed that social life was important to students and the overall health of the college. While formal and informal activities were planned for students, there were not a lot of students or staff to facilitate them. Students reported the lack of students at most activities is disappointing for both planners of the activities and for those who attended. Frustration and dissatisfaction among students resulted.

Deirdre summed up the social life at the college well. “Weekends are hard here because there are a lot of commuters and a large number of the student body live really close. So we call it a suitcase campus. A lot of people are off campus on the weekends so a lot of those activities are not existent [on weekends]. Obviously, it is a college so there are parties and people living in houses and all that kind of stuff going on. But I think the problem is that being such a small campus with so many clubs and organizations, it is

hard to get a bigger group of people to do bigger more high impact activities. Because there are so many groups and so few students, interests are spread too thin.”

Joan provided another example of social life on campus. She stated that many students would say that they hang out in the dorms, but she asserted not a lot of students were actually doing that. She said, “You don’t come here for the social life. Cause there really is none.” The way Joan combated the lack of social life was by going to other schools to socialize. One of the schools she had visited was the University of Illinois where she found the staff and students were a lot less “anal-retentive” about policies and a lot more “friendly and outgoing.” She reported further how challenging social life is at Prairie College if you are not 21, the legal drinking age. She stated the “only thing to do other than watch movies and stuff like that is go to the bars. And that’s what juniors and seniors do. They go out [to the bars]. They come back. And that is it. That is why there is really no one hanging out in the dorms at all.” To combat this frustration and dissatisfaction with the campus social activities, students frequently chose the path of least resistance – alcohol events not planned by the college that are located on- and off-campus.

When discussing alcohol on campus, Alex reported that the college has a “zero-tolerance” alcohol policy and that “a lot of people in my hall got in trouble last year.” It was not just students who are of legal drinking age who were consuming alcohol. Sophie reiterated that the residence halls had a zero-tolerance alcohol policy, but living in the residence halls was frustrating. She stated, “It was frustrating for me to go back to my dorm and still have that partying around me and people being stupid and people walking into my dorm room in the middle of the night for random stupid reasons. This is not

necessarily immaturity, but the mindset of kids in the dorms.” Sophie did not like what she perceived to be lack of order in the residence halls so she moved off-campus and found the off-campus housing “half the stress.”

Similarly, Gwen said, “I like the small school but not on the weekends. There is not a lot to do unless you are 21. It’s a zero-tolerance campus,” meaning the campus alcohol policy was strictly enforced. Gwen, like many students at the college, stated there was not much to do outside of class and the need for alcohol was important to have fun. Being 21 allowed one to drink “legally” on campus and allowed one to go to bars in Chelsea and around Nantes without difficulty.

Joan reported that the college “is just not a very social campus. That’s kind of what the college is known for. It’s not like a real fun school – unless you are 21 and go around to the bars and stuff and spend all your money because it is so expensive.” Since there was nothing [to do] on campus, Joan visited her friend's apartment off-campus to hang out and went into Nantes. While Joan was disappointed with the social life of campus, she validated her decision to attend Prairie College by stating, “I am here to get a degree. I am not here to party. If I want to, I can always leave. So as much as I don’t like that this is not a social campus, I almost do because it keeps me on track because there is not a lot to do to distract me.”

A reason alcohol was used frequently was that there were few places for students to congregate on campus. Residence halls, the dining center, and the Student Union were the only places where students could congregate socially in larger numbers. Joan reported the Student Union was not a place students frequented other than the Cage, the campus snack bar, and once the money on your dining card had run out, there really was no

reason to be in the Student Union. Further, she said she didn't particularly like the food in the dining center. If she stayed on campus in the residence hall, she or her friends might get written up for underage drinking, noise, or something else. So Joan stated, "It's like, why would I stick around?" Joan's comments affirmed the need for programmatic efforts that can draw students in larger numbers without the use of alcohol.

While students were frustrated with the lack of non-alcohol-related activities on campus, it did not mean that they did not connect with other students and form some enclaves. Deirdre indicated she was disappointed that not more students were on campus for her to interact with on a regular basis. Still she reported, "You get to know the people in [a particular] group really well. So you get a very close network of friends to work with. But at the same time, it is hard to organize events that are going to attract a number of people or have a big impact."

Sophie affirmed Deirdre's observation that many students see the college as a suitcase campus. Sophie was involved in planning activities for the campus and stated, "You can't program for Saturday concerts because no one is here. Now there's been a big push and financial incentive for weekend programming. So we have a ton of weekend programs. But unfortunately, people don't market them very well. There are flyers everywhere, but people don't pay attention to flyers very well. So everyone says, 'there is nothing to do on this campus.'"

The activities that were planned come across as "very high school," Kelly said. She stated, "I think some of the activities are just sort of lame. They are not college kind of activities." Sandra explained what "lame" meant as she talked about the College Union Activities Board, CUAB, and the activities they planned. Sandra was once a part of

CUAB but when she saw what was being planned, she decided to leave the organization. She felt that poker tournaments or X-Box nights were pretty high school in spirit. One of the events that CUAB planned for a number of years was beta fish night. When asked what this was, Sandra informed me that CUAB “buy beta fish and little bowls for them. [Students] get to decorate the bowls. I always feel it is like very elementary school.” It was clear that Sandra as well as the general student body would prefer entertainment for young adults like live comedians and popular music artists on campus.

The social life could lead people to leave the college, according to Sandra and other students. Sandra reported that “a lot of people come here expecting college to be what college looks like in the movies or like they expect it to be not that difficult. Their expectations of the social life isn’t what it is so they leave for those reasons.” Further she said the “whole idea of feeling like it is high school all over again [which it] is in some ways, because it is such a small community, especially for students who come from really large high schools. Some of them feel like they really haven’t changed.”

As Kuh and Love (2000) articulated, finding an enclave is important for student persistence. An enclave can be socializing with a group of friends with similar interests or something more formal like joining a student organization. The college’s marketing materials suggested how easy it would be to get involved in structured organizations on campus, and many students are involved in campus life at some time during their college experience. One of the college admissions brochures stated that the college “offers hundreds of opportunities to explore budding interests and to answer the call to leadership and responsibility.”

In the same brochure, the college portrayed how easy it was for a student to become involved in an organization highlighting a white female who spoke to her experience in starting a student organization. She stated, “I helped start the student organization called STARS (Students Together Achieving Real Support). Myself and another student were both battling eating disorders. We decided that the best thing we could do to help ourselves was to help others first. STARS raises student awareness of everything from alcohol abuse to what it’s like to be visually impaired. It’s serious stuff, but we try to keep it fun.”

Contrary to the college’s portrayal of ease in getting involved, Kelly said her experience with a student organization was that the students had to do a lot of work because there were not a lot of students to share the load. She stated that it was not uncommon for one person to be “doing the work of 20 people. Easily.” That was one thing Kelly did not like about being involved in a student organization at a small school. That said, she did like how easy it was to get involved in a structured group that allowed her to meet others and form relationships. Further, Kelly shared there were “activity” people and “non-activity” people. She reported that she had been to only one or two activities in her two years at the college. She stated that activity people go to everything and know everyone, and the non-activity people do not know as many people and do not find the campus “very friendly.”

Joan compared her experience to being in high school. She said it was “like your first day, [you] meet your group of people, and you hang out with that group of people all four years. It’s almost like high school.” Being involved takes time and energy.

Subsequently, some students just avoided co-curricular involvement due to the time it took and their own lack of interest.

While not many students got involved in organizations, college athletics played a major role in the student life program of the campus. Athletics played an important role for students and formed enclaves for many students at Prairie College. Since the early days of the college, athletics have been an important part of student life and celebrated. The college viewed itself as competitive in sports and desired students who could help the college remain so. Contrary to student organizations and activities, college athletics were viewed as a structured student life program with 19 intercollegiate sports teams at Prairie College. “We rank seventh all-time among Division III schools for most national championships,” stated a college admissions viewbook.

A benefit of a student being involved in college athletics was that fellow students, staff, and faculty recognized them. Being an athlete provided a student with certain “advantages” socially, academically, or both. Further, students perceived that male athletes can receive special attention from faculty and administrators in course registration or academic assistance. They also believed that it could provide a more relaxed stance in conforming to college student conduct policies. Female athletes received recognition from faculty and staff as well, but not as much as males.

Sandra asserted that the importance the college places on athletics was high and she found it “ridiculous.” She stated, “We are a Division III school but for some reason, ...the athletes are just regarded as super humans or something.” Sandra cracked a joke with me, saying, there is a FaceBook site called “I go to [Prairie College] but I am not a runner,” alluding to the national championships the college has won in cross-country

running and the fact that not every student who attends the college is an athlete or overly interested in athletics.

Kendra confirmed that athletes on the campus got special treatment or “advantages,” noting that a senior Student Affairs administrator served as an academic advisor to the football team. She provided an example where one of football players didn’t feel like writing a paper on time and asked the professor for an extension. Sandra stated, “Usually the teachers here are fine with giving an extension. ...But in this particular instance, the teacher said no. So the football player goes to [this senior administrator] and [the administrator] writes him a letter. So, he got an exception. And I have friends, actually my friend’s friends, who are on the football team. The [senior administrator] can see the average scores per teacher per class, so he can see which are the easy graders and which are not. And that’s how they figure out their schedules. So if I had that on my side...” Being involved in athletics provides an avenue to be recognized so that interventions could be made to keep the student academically on track and retained.

Involvement in athletics also helped students connect with other students. Alex, a relatively introverted student, said, “I know a lot more people than I would if I weren’t on the track team. It’s kind of more relaxed, more than I thought college athletics would be.” While Alex perceived the athletic environment as not too challenging, it provided him with the opportunity to establish meaningful relationships with other students. He was able to form an enclave through his participation.

When discussing the student life program at Prairie College, Angela made it clear that the college really values athletics. She stated, “They put a lot of money into sports.

Both men and women's. Like 70 percent of the students are in sports. I love sports. I am not in it here but that is obviously a value. And that is great. You can learn so much through sports. There is leadership involved in that. But is it because of the leadership or is it because of the sport? I think it is just valuing sports because it is sports. And they draw people here." Angela, as well as many other students, clearly viewed the benefits of athletics in the recruitment and retention process of the college. And the value on athletics and sports is why many, including Tom, decided to come to the college. His main reason was to play football. During his freshman year when he was not playing much and the football team was losing, he almost left. He wanted to be on a team that could win all the time. But through connections with his coach, he decided to stay, and he was very glad that he did.

Rationale for Student Withdrawal

Tinto (1987) stated that the withdrawal process from college is analogous to suicide. If the student is not willing to work towards educational or occupational goals in the educational enterprise, he or she is likely to depart from the institution or, using his metaphor, commit suicide. A suicidal person is frequently under significant emotional pain. Using the Tinto analogy, students have a choice to make regarding any pain they might feel. They can eliminate the pain by withdrawing from the institution or they can acquiesce to the pain or things that are not congruent with their expectations and motivations, and persist at the institution.

The ability to transfer academic credit out of the term to a semester schedule was reported by students as both a pro and con for the college when a student thought about withdrawing. Students quickly realized that if they were not going to persist at the

college, they needed to transfer sooner rather than later due to the way the academic semester colleges received academic credit from term colleges. Most schools outside of Prairie College are on the semester system. The credit transfer issue prevented many upperclass students from withdrawing from the college, as they understood it would require them to take more classes at a semester college and subsequently prolong the process toward a degree.

Outside of the economic and “time to degree” factors of withdrawal, an overwhelming number of students believed their peers left the college for academic reasons. Students consistently reported that those who left the college did not perform well academically and failed. Yet students also reported that some students did not find enough academic challenge or changed their major to something not offered at the college and subsequently chose to attend another institution. There was a mismatch between what the student perceived the college’s academic environment to be and what it was in reality. This mismatch was exacerbated when a student did not assert him- or herself in the academic culture. Students reported that one must be fully engaged in the academic environment in order to succeed.

For example, Kendra informed me stated that students end up withdrawing from the college primarily for one reason: grades. “All the people I know that [went] here and don’t go anymore are due to grades.” Deirdre, like the majority of the interviewees, agreed that the inability of students to do well academically was the reason students ended up leaving. “Most people are not here because they just couldn’t handle the academic challenge anymore. Not that it’s strenuous. Because I don’t think that the college is necessarily a very strenuous place with three terms and you can only take four

classes. Depending on what you take, obviously. I just don't think that people apply themselves the way that they should when they first get here. They think, especially as a freshman, that they are invincible. That they don't have to put in that extra effort. My freshman roommate is a prime example. She got to college and [was] like 'woo, its college!' and forgot about what she was really in for. I think that this is the reason she is not here anymore. The same goes for a few of the freshman who came in with my basketball recruiting class. We lost three freshmen. I think most of them left because of academic standing."

Summary of Student Culture

Prairie College student beliefs, values, and basic assumptions follow. Beliefs are what students believe about themselves and their culture. Values are the strategies, goals, and philosophies regarding how students engage in the college environment. Basic assumptions are the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Schein, 1992) students have about Prairie College.

Beliefs

Students believed that the college was about academics and not a "party" school. When students compared their experiences with that of their peers who attended other institutions, they believed Prairie students studied more and partied less. This was both a positive and a negative factor for students as they took pride in the fact that they were learning and getting an education but wished they could have more social fun, or use more alcohol, as well.

Many students believed that they were not as academically gifted as some of their peers who attend national colleges/universities or schools with more brand recognition or

academic prestige. While many students received superior grades in high school and relatively high scores on college entrance exams, they did not perceive themselves as scholars. Students' academic self-esteem is rather low.

Students believed that social life on the campus was very limited. While Prairie provides student activities, clubs, and organizations on campus, these did not appeal to a large number of students. Students desired social outlets that matched those of larger colleges and universities. They wanted large-scale entertainers, campus student organizations with a larger membership base, and campus bars. At the same time students believed that the small student body would not allow for such activity as it would cost too much money. Most students believed that students went home on the weekends or somewhere off-campus to socialize.

There was a belief that the college was a second installment of high school. At Prairie College students were not attending an institution much larger than many of their high schools, most students were close to home, and students did not participate in activities much different from high school. Many students reported their experience was not much different from high school. Students did not leave their culture of origin too far behind to attend the college. They continued their college life in a familiar and comfortable way, similar to when they were in high school.

Students believed that peers who departed from the college did so primarily because they did not apply themselves academically. This did not correspond with the research of Tinto (1987) who found that only 15 to 25 percent nationally of college student departure was due to poor academic performance. Overall, students did not believe their peers left for any other reasons than poor academic performance.

Students believed that faculty and staff provided preferential treatment to certain students within the student body as a whole. Students believed that if you were a “favorite,” you received preferential treatment in getting into classes, achieving better grades, and exemption from some college policies. Students believed the connection to faculty or staff could be helpful, but some were concerned about the equity of treatment for all students.

While students found campus culture to be friendly, they believed they had to be assertive in order to make friends and be successful academically. In order to move outside of a student’s clique, he or she must be determined to meet other students. Otherwise, students stayed with the friends they made initially from the first day of school. Further, while there were students who were relaxed in the approach to academics, most believed students must be actively engaged in the educational process or they would fail out of school.

Espoused Values

Students valued attending a small school. On the whole, students understood that Prairie College could not provide as many options as a larger institution. Still, the decision to attend was based on the size of the school and the relationships they assumed they would be able to make with fellow students, staff, and faculty.

Individual attention was a student value. Students wanted to be recognized by faculty. They desired the attention of their faculty. Students wanted to be seen as partners in the educational enterprise and to know that when help was needed, it would be there because of the focus on the individual student.

Staying close to home was an important value to many students. Students did not value moving too far from their frame of reference or origin. Being able to visit with family or friends at home was valued. Students wanted a somewhat different experience from home and high school but did not want an experience that was too far from their own frame of reference. Staying near home provided a valued comfort factor for students.

While there were students who desired to do the minimum academically, most students desired to learn and wanted to experience academic success. Being academically successful was important to and valued by students. Students chose to come to college to learn and grow in knowledge that would lead them to gainful employment or graduate school. Even though some students were not confident in their academic abilities, most students desired to learn.

The students valued strong teachers. They believed that strong professors helped them learn and potentially provided a competitive edge over their peers at larger institutions. Students who attended Prairie College paid significantly more money for their education than students at many public colleges and universities that traditionally have larger class sizes and courses taught by graduate assistants. One of the “value added” components of attending Prairie College was that students know they are being taught by scholars and leaders in their area of interest.

A large percentage of the student body was involved in student athletics. Students involved in athletics valued their involvement and time spent with teammates and coaches. Being involved in athletics kept students engaged in the college and connected with their peers. Without athletic teams, many students would not attend the college. The ability to participate and compete retained many student athletes at Prairie College.

Large-scale social activities (concerts, comedians, etc.) that had less of a high school feel and more of a young adult interest was desired. Students wanted to be seen as adults and wanted to do “adult-type” activities. These adult activities could involve the use of alcohol. Although the college did not provide many social activities, students valued student activities and desired more.

Across all areas of the college, students valued equality and fundamental fairness. They did not want to be treated differently because they were not an athlete, a departmental major, a Student of Color, a member of specific religious group, or some other classification. Students did not want to be discriminated against because they did not belong to a specific group.

Basic Assumptions

An underlying assumption among the student body was that they were not “true” scholars. Many students had low academic self-esteem because they assumed they were not as academically gifted as their peers at other institutions or because they attended an institution that was not as well known for academic excellence to the population outside of the college.

Many students assumed that the academic rigor of the college would be similar to that of their high school. While some students were adequately prepared to handle the academic rigor, others experienced culture shock when they learned what was expected of them. Students who assumed that high school modes of learning would be productive at Prairie College were often confronted with academic problems and potential withdrawal.

When students were asked about the culture of the college, they rarely identified administrators and other staff members. Unless asked directly, students did not even mention administrators or staff members. Hence, the researcher concluded that students do not find college administrators and staff a significant socializing factor in the student experience at Prairie.

Corroboration

After reporting and analyzing the data, I sought corroboration from two esteemed members of the faculty and staff in 2011. As significant time elapsed between data collection and the final writing of this report, and the students involved were no longer attending Prairie College, the data and my analysis needed to be confirmed.

In seeking corroboration I met with one faculty member with more than 30 years of teaching and public service to the college. I also met with a staff member with over 20 year of administrative experience at the college. Both the faculty member and the staff member had attended the college as undergraduates. Each of their personal and professional histories with the college was deep and rich. In my interviews with these two individuals, I asked them to tell me their understanding of the college and how they interpreted the history, faculty, staff and student cultures. Through information they provided, I found my data were confirmed. For example, the college's relationship with the church, the desire to keep the college "teaching" focused, the changing of faculty due to impending retirements, a desire to keep the student body small while continuing to obtain more and brighter students, student affairs staff that can feel marginalized within the college, and a student body that does not hold many social enclaves were all affirmed through these discussions. Hence, the analysis of the data conducted was supported.

Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the institutional and student cultures of Prairie College within a conceptual framework based in student retention (Tinto, 1993; Braxton, 2000), educational anthropology (Spindler, 1967, 2000), and organizational development (Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1992). The institutional culture was described as three distinct parts: historical, faculty and staff. Each part of the institutional culture was described using historical artifacts, personal observations, and interactions with various actors of Prairie College. After describing the institutional culture, the student culture was described using similar methods to the institutional culture but with specific detail from 11 students from Prairie College. The description presented of the overall Prairie College culture, that includes the institutional and student cultures, is representative of the culture during the 2005-2006 academic year. Chapter 5 concludes this report and provides a summary and implications for practice based on the data collected utilizing the conceptual framework used in this study.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

Introduction

The focus of this study was on understanding how students experienced the history and culture of Prairie College; what experiences allowed a student to feel she or he belonged or did not belong; and the decision-making process regarding withdrawing or persisting. To understand the student culture at Prairie College, a conceptual framework was applied with a review of the literature related to organizational culture, socialization, and student retention. Using qualitative methods, the institutional culture of Prairie College—historical, faculty, staff, and student—was explored. A discussion of the findings is thus presented together with the theoretical concepts and implications of the study on student persistence at Prairie College. Finally, the conclusions are summarized and suggestions for future research are offered.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to better understand and explain the overall culture and subcultures of Prairie College and how these cultures socialize students to persist or depart. In accordance with the higher education student retention theory and research of Braxton (2000), Kuh and Love (2000), and Kuh (2001), there is potential for an institution of higher education to serve and retain greater numbers of students when administrators understand the institutional culture (Morgan, 1996; Mintzberg, 1979; Spindler, 1988) in which they work and those of the students they serve. Understanding how students were socialized within Prairie College will assist administrators and staff in clarifying and improving the overall socialization process and may lead to increased student retention.

Conceptual Framework

Prairie College is a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979) with four distinct subcultures—historical, faculty, staff and student—within the organization. The core technology (Morgan, 1997), otherwise known as the institutional culture (historical, faculty, and staff), socializes (Wanous, 1992; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) students to either persist or depart from the institution. It is through the socialization process, the dissemination of values, beliefs, and basic assumptions by organizational actors, that a student makes a determination if a match (Wanous, 1992; Schein, 1979) has been made between the institutional and student cultures. A successful match results in a student persisting, while an unsuccessful match results in student departure.

Methodology

The researcher's conceptual framework was used to examine the organization's culture, including the mission, values, beliefs, and norms of the organization, while a simultaneous examination of the values, beliefs, and norms of the individual student was explored. Seeking to understand the values beliefs and norms of the organization and that of its students, I identified where there was cultural match or mismatch. It was presumed that a cultural match would lead to persistence while incongruence in the cultural values, beliefs, and norms would lead to departure.

The study followed research traditions in organizational development (Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1992, Van Maanen and Schein, 1979), cultural anthropology (Spindler, 1988), and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). How students experienced the Prairie College culture was the primary focus. Theory needed to be developed through direct observation of how students interacted with various actors within the college

culture (Blumer, 1969). During the exploratory fieldwork, students were observed in a wide variety of social settings within the culture. This fieldwork included observing students in the library, dining hall, Union, Fieldhouse, coffeehouse, academic buildings, and other settings around campus. I read the weekly college newspaper, attended new student orientation, reviewed admissions materials, read literature about the history of the college, attended public events at the college (basketball games and campus lectures), and reviewed alumni publications. Through these observations, I applied an organizing conceptual framework based on the concepts and theories developed by Schein (1978), Wanous (1992), Van Maanan and Schein (1979), Spindler (1988), Tinto (1982), Braxton (2000), Kuh (2001), and Kuh and Love (2000).

Summary

Socialization is everything that happens to a person—students, for this study—after entry into the organization (Wanous, 1992; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). This research focused on the socialization of students into Prairie College’s culture and the ways in which that socialization insured or inhibited satisfaction and persistence leading to overall student retention. My observations and interviews conducted with faculty, staff, and students both validated and challenged assumptions about the socialization process and culture of Prairie College. The result of the historical examination; review of artifacts; observation of faculty, staff, and student actors within the college; and semi-structured interviewing of 11 students formed the basis for my conclusions on how students experienced the Prairie College culture. Individual faculty, staff, and student interviews brought greater clarity to the researcher’s conceptual framework and where

there was a cultural match between the historical, faculty, staff, and student cultures promoting student persistence.

Three specific research questions were explored in the Prairie College context:

- How did students experience the environment/culture?
- What experiences allowed the student to feel she or he belonged or did not belong?
- How does a student decide whether or not to persist?

In response to these questions, the following summary about the student experience at Prairie College is provided.

Prairie College was founded as a higher education institution to induct men and women into the Evangelical United Brethren tradition, now the United Methodist Church. The founding and charter of the institution is very similar to Mintzberg's (1979) "missionary organization" form of professional bureaucracy. Over time, Prairie College had drifted away from its mission as a college linked to the church. Part of the shift in mission was demonstrated in the financial resources the United Methodist Church provided Prairie College toward its operating expenses. But more than the financial resources, the organizational shift in United Methodist Church values could be seen in the selection of the student body. The college no longer consisted of students primarily from United Methodist backgrounds as was true in the college's early history. Students attending the college were now primarily Roman Catholic, with numerous other denominations and faiths represented. While both faculty and students recognized Prairie College's historical roots with the United Methodist church, students did not report that the primary reason for attending Prairie College was based on a need to affirm United

Methodist values or beliefs. Still, the mission of the college, admission materials to students, and the continuation of a United Methodist Chaplain on campus continued to place emphasis on religious doctrine in the organizational culture. For example, students matriculating and desiring a “United Methodist education” would be disappointed by the lack of religious tradition at Prairie College. Overall, students were not socialized into the historical religious values and beliefs of the college, which resulted in a mismatch in the historical and student cultures with possible student departure.

Throughout the history of Prairie College, there had been many discussions about how large the college should become and how many students should be accepted. Prairie College had no qualms about representing itself as a small liberal arts college to prospective students. Being a small college was valued within the organizational culture. It was believed that through smallness, intimacy in interactions between faculty and student could occur. Further, intimacy in faculty and student interactions was a key and valued element of the socialization process at Prairie College.

Students who attended the college were cognizant that they were going to a small school that did not have as many faculty, staff, students, and programmatic opportunities (academic and social) as a large university. Students understood and believed that academic offerings and social and co-curricular opportunities for students were limited. While these limitations were occasionally disappointing for students, and they wished they could have more faculty and classes to choose from as well as more social opportunities on campus, most Prairie College students still valued the smallness of the college. A cultural match between the institutional culture and the student culture resulted

when a Prairie College student valued the interpersonal intimacy of a small institution that did not have the “social atmosphere” of a larger institution.

The most significant socializing agent of students to the institutional culture of Prairie was the faculty. Student retention research conducted by Tinto (1987) supports this finding. The importance of faculty in socializing students within the institutional culture was outlined in the conceptual framework of this study and was demonstrated at Prairie College in the tenure review process, admissions materials, individual faculty comments, and student feedback.

The institutional culture of Prairie College valued highly credentialed faculty who were successful teachers. The culture within the faculty, as well as the institution, did not place high regard on individual faculty scholarship and research typical at many research-based institutions. Students believed that the high quality teaching would make them strong professionals upon graduation. The teaching environment was valued by faculty and students overall and created interpersonal intimacy. The institutional value on teaching was a cultural match between faculty and students and supported the cultural proposition of Tinto (1987) and Kuh and Love (2000).

Contrary to the student relationship with faculty, students reported that staff was not significant in their overall experience or decisions to persist at Prairie College. In a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979), staff and administrators are actors who are appointed to support the operating core of the institution. In the case of Prairie, staff were charged with supporting the academic mission of the college. Students reported that support staff, secretaries, mail clerks, and food services workers were helpful to them in their day-to-day life, but senior administrators, “staff with doors,” were not. Students

frequently reported that administrative staff did not interact with them in positive or helpful ways. They experienced administrators as distant and removed from the day-to-day student life culture of the college. The removal from the student culture created socialization issues for students. Spindler (1955) stated that administrators are responsible for shaping the environment in which students interact with institutional actors the school. Students at Prairie College perceived the administrative staff as removed and uninterested in their experience, resulting in a cultural divide and mismatch. This mismatch in administrative and student cultures did not encourage students to depart but did not assist in affirming students and further did not foster a culture of hospitality for students to persist. At best, students found administrative staff to be effective rule-enforcers who were more interested in creating order than fostering the interpersonal intimacy they affirmed from the faculty.

The operating core (Morgan, 1997) of Prairie College is education and producing students with knowledge and skills in specific disciplines. Since its founding, the college sought to be a premiere academic institution, modeling itself after one of the best liberal arts colleges in the U.S.: Oberlin College. The college's marketing materials made clear that the college was about academics. Most students were socialized to understand they were not going to a "party" school. Students understood and believed they needed to do academic work in order to succeed and persist. Further they reported that faculty, on the whole, provided the academically challenging environment they sought while providing the knowledge and skills that were desired and valued. There was a match in the historic and faculty culture values regarding academic and that of students. While students believed they were being provided an academically challenging environment by faculty,

they also believed they needed to individually assert themselves as scholars. Students reported minimal faculty and staff socialization to becoming an academic scholar at Prairie College. Although faculty were willing to be of assistance to students, the student had to initiate that help. Faculty did not reach out to them. And even though Prairie provided a new student orientation program, supportive faculty, and a generally welcoming student body, the individual student was consistently left to initiate his or her own success. Outside of grades, the college provided no student assessment to assure they were taking the necessary steps to be successful in the academic culture. This left some students surprised with their academic performance at the end of the semester. To combat the surprise, some students desired greater intervention of institutional actors in the process of acclimating to the academic culture. While the chief socializing actors of the college, the faculty, were willing to be of assistance to students, students had to initiate the help from them. Failure of some students to be assertive resulted in a mismatch and student departure.

Many students attending Prairie College lived within a 60-mile radius of the institution. Students reported the total enrollment of the college, class sizes, campus facilities, the number of athletic teams, and the academic rigor made the college similar to what they experienced in area high schools. There was not much distance from the culture of origin, home, and the culture of immersion at Prairie College (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Most students found the similarity of cultures comforting and made the overall socialization process by institutional actors easier. Students reported overlap in the home and college environments. As stated by Kuh and Love (2000), familiarization with the culture of origin helps a student successfully navigate the college's cultural

milieu and further enhances the ability to retain students. The location of Prairie College to the home communities of students enhanced student persistence.

The close proximity of the college to the students' home communities was reported positively by most students. Many students visited with family on a weekly basis during the academic year. Students reported going home for a meal, to do their laundry, or possibly visit friends from home. Students had a strong connection to their families. Tinto (1987) stated that in order for students to make a successful transition from the home culture to the institutional culture, they must sever ties to the home community. Without severing ties to the home culture, a student is more likely to depart. With Prairie students frequently returning home to family and friends, many did not become fully immersed in the college culture. This was particularly true for a significant number of commuter students. It was reported the college had not created an environment in which most students would like to remain on the campus at the conclusion of classes. With a lack of opportunity for students to further engage in the student culture, students reported dissatisfaction with the college and a push to depart.

The academic program provided structure and engagement for students, but students continually reported there was little structured social life on campus. Students found the out-of-classroom experience at Prairie College difficult. Student social life at the college had been an issue since it was deemed important to students and the overall health of the college in the early 1900s. Having inadequate numbers of students at most social activities was challenging for the planners of the activities as well as for those attending. The result was frustration and dissatisfaction among students. Overall, students desired more social enclaves (Kuh and Love, 2000) on campus. At the time of the study,

residence halls provided the only true opportunity for social networking and social activity on campus. With approximately 50 percent of the campus not living on campus, students reported a void in social connections with fellow students. Faculty and staff did not create socialization activities for students, which resulted in dissatisfaction. The lack of a social life was not a major determinant for student departure but led to student dissatisfaction and may enhance some student's decision making to depart.

The exception to overall student dissatisfaction with the student life program at Prairie College were the athletic programs. College athletics had served as a major socializing effort of the institution with students. Since the early days of Prairie College, athletics were an important element of the student life program. Athletics were celebrated and valued by faculty, staff, and many students. Athletic teams created structured enclaves (Kuh & Love, 2000) for students. Additionally, athletic teams created environments where faculty and staff could socialize students in ways that led to persistence. If a student was falling behind academically, having interpersonal issues, or not finding a match with the institutional culture, a coach could intervene. Overall, athletics were valued by students and served as a significant recruitment and retention program for Prairie College.

Implications of Study

Implications for Practice at Prairie College

Students were socialized by Prairie College in many different ways. The socialization process began when admissions materials were mailed to students, garnering interest in the college, and subsequently continued through school visits and a pre-college orientation. Through this pre-college socialization process, students began to

learn the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of Prairie College. Once classes began for the first-year student, the values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the college culture intensified and became clearer to the student.

College faculty and staff who coordinated programs through admissions, academic, and co-curricular life of students were actors who understood and shared the common values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the institutional culture. An understanding of and the ability to articulate the culture was valued in the socialization process but was not consistently shared with students.

Many students attended Prairie College because it was viewed as a safe haven – not too far from home, not too different from high school, and providing an acceptable level of academic rigor. Students valued a college that was small and not that different from what they experienced in high school. They valued relationships with their professors similar to what they experienced with high school teachers. The resulting equilibrium kept the student in a safe comfort zone. Validating a student's culture of origin, while at the same time creating avenues for assimilation into the new values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of the college, may require new programs and efforts.

Collaboration between Prairie College faculty, administrators, staff, and students can create an effective socialization process for students. Only through the examination of the institutional and student cultures can student persistence be improved. Effective matches between students and the institutional culture can only be obtained through a clear understanding of each culture. Better recruitment and selection processes alone will not create stronger persistence rates. Understanding how students experience the Prairie

College culture will necessitate more student enclaves and support systems that will assist students in persisting within the college environment.

One goal of this study was to advance understanding and knowledge about student socialization that might help administrators in planning programs and initiatives for student persistence and graduation. In summary and in congruence with the findings of this study, the following items are offered to facilitate discussion to improve student persistence at the college.

1. Students were satisfied with their relationships with faculty. Prairie College should continue its efforts to affirm the cultural norm of placing importance on faculty and student relationships.
2. Faculty was the most influential socializing agent of Prairie College's institutional beliefs and values upon students. Prairie College should continue to utilize faculty to indoctrinate students into acceptable norms for becoming a full member of the academic community.
3. Faculty teaching and advising was highly valued by students and led to student persistence. The college should continue to place high value on faculty teaching among its current and future members. Faculty teaching and advising are beneficial for the recruitment and persistence of students at Prairie College.
4. Students valued the interpersonal intimacy Prairie College provided though being a small school. When making determinations about the class size of any incoming cohort of students, Prairie College needs to make certain that the overall size of the institution does not take away from the ability of students to have meaningful relationships with faculty and fellow students. The Enrollment Management

- Office of the college needs to make sure there are appropriate numbers of faculty, student housing, and student clubs and organizations to support needs for inclusion and close personal relations so the college remains intimate and small.
5. Students valued their relationships with family and home communities and do not want to lose those connections. While Tinto (1993) stated that students must leave the home culture and become a member of the college culture to persist, Prairie College needs to support students' ability to maintain the home culture in addition to the college culture. A blending of the two cultures should occur similar to the research of Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000). The college should develop an assessment of what assists students in staying connected and what takes away from students being connected to their home culture.
 6. Most students desired continuation of the "high school" cultural experience at Prairie College. Similar to the work of Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000), Prairie College should continue to monitor the activities of area high schools to ascertain which activities of the college match those of area high schools. Doing so will reduce the cultural disconnect and affirm student persistence.
 7. Students did not perceive administrative staff supporting the operational core nor student culture of Prairie College. Greater administrative leadership should be provided to administrative staff at the college in providing direction to staff in ways they can support the operational core of the college and provide greater support to students.
 8. Students desired more social enclaves to improve the overall student culture of the college. The student life program did not support the social needs of students.

9. Student athletics provided a positive socializing environment for students, but many students within the student culture were excluded from this socialization through lack of athletic participation. Prairie College should continue to provide structured student athletics at the college. This should be supported through quality coaching staff. To allow greater participation in college athletics, Prairie College should assess the interest in adding additional sports to the college environment or consider an increase in intramural activities.

Implications for Further Research at Prairie College

This study explored student persistence and departure at a small private Midwest college. Presently, there are no conclusive data as to why college students depart from small private Midwestern colleges. To examine why students depart from Prairie College, this study used the leading theorists on student retention (Tinto, 1993, Braxton, 2000, Kuh and Love, 2000) to come to greater understanding of how the organizational culture of Prairie College was socializing students in or out of the institution.

Tinto (1993) asserted that there are four different modes of student departure: those due to lack of institutional fit, lack of institutional structure, too much institutional structure for the student, and no interpersonal structure for the student. This study found that institutional fit, the matching of student and institutional cultures, was important to student persistence at Prairie College. The mode was also important in the conceptual framework of this study and proved an effective means of determining whether a student might persist. Further research could be conducted on how faculty could create the teaching and advising environments that students desire, which could then be replicated for new faculty to support student persistence. Additionally, research could be conducted

in how college administrators provide greater support toward supporting the mission of the college.

The three major components of Tinto's (1993) retention model could use some further clarification. This study found there was a strong institutional commitment to students through faculty socialization of students. Students also reported that the college was committed to educating all students, and failure to get engaged in the academic environment would lead to student departure. What deserves greater research attention is how student affairs staff and other administrators can more effectively contribute to the academic mission of Prairie College. Students reported not feeling valued by many administrative staff. This takes away from the social and intellectual community Tinto (1993) asserts is a fundamental component of student persistence and retention. Prairie College would benefit from enhancing ways in which the administrative staff can support the social and educational communities of the college.

Implications for Theory

This study took an interdisciplinary approach to looking at student persistence and departure from Prairie College. Leading student retention theories were used as well as theorists in the area of organizational socialization (Schein, 1978; Wanous 1992; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). The "matching process" and "the learning of the ropes" processes were highly transferable to the higher education setting. Unfortunately, the organizational context of businesses and educational organizations did not prove to be as helpful in understanding student persistence at Prairie College. The need for social enclaves within the business culture is not as significant as it is among 18- to 23-year-old college students. While faculty socializes students in a fashion similar to how some

supervisors socialize new employees, the context in which this is done is different. In a business setting, supervisors may be disciplined for poor socialization of new employees. Faculty, especially tenured faculty, have a choice as to whether they will assist in creating a welcoming environment for students.

Limitations

This study followed qualitative standards to insure a sound qualitative study through the use of triangulation and allowing outside readers to corroborate or disconfirm my data. I have sought to provide what Glesne (1998) calls trustworthiness in my interpretations of the Prairie College culture.

For over a year, I engaged in the Prairie College environment, but I did not meet with every student, faculty, or staff member of the college. I did not review every artifact the college had for public display. My review and the interactions I had were representative of the general population of the college and were no more and no less valid than any scientific inquiry into the culture of this college. My subjectivity (Peskin, 1988; Glesne, 1998) was kept in check through prolonged engagement in the Prairie College environment, triangulation, clarification of biases, and frequent review and debriefing with my dissertation advisor. While there was time between my engagement in the Prairie culture and the final research, I confirmed my findings with institutional actors during the past year.

As to generalizability, I sought to understand the lived experience of students attending Prairie College. In this qualitative study, I did not desire to make known the probability of certain variables that might lead to the persistence or departure of students at Prairie College. Rather, I sought to make known the lived experience of students at

Prairie College. It is through understanding of student values, experience, and expectation that administrators at Prairie College may be able to add or adjust programs and services to assist students in improving persistence and graduation rates.

While this study may be representative of similar private Midwestern colleges, readers are encouraged to apply a conceptual framework of history, values, beliefs, and basic assumptions of their own institutional culture. Some findings may be recognizable, while others will have little relevance. Through the use of rich, thick description in this study, educators from other institutions may view one or more similarities with their own institution. While no two educational institutions are identical, the similarities between organizational cultures may have impact on administrative practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided information regarding the lived experience of students at Prairie College. Student information gathered in the study was based primarily on the successful socialization and transition process of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. A future study is suggested to explore how first-year students experience the socialization process.

Similarly, a study of students who have withdrawn from Prairie College warrants exploration. At most private colleges, exit interviews are frequently conducted with departing students. Information gathered from such interviews as well as tracking and interviewing students who have withdrawn six months previously may be worthy of study. Such interviews may produce greater insight to institutional and student cultural mismatches.

Kuh and Love (2000) stated that when students are able to join an enclave, they are more likely to persist. A study exploring student enclaves may be helpful in understanding how students form connections or matches with the various subcultures of Prairie College. Greater understanding of student enclaves could direct how the Prairie College markets programs and services, as well as determine where monies to support enclaves should be spent.

Exploration of these recommendations may provide further clarification and understanding of cultural match or mismatch at Prairie College and other private colleges.

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Appendix A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
[Prairie] College Students

Principal Investigator: Matthew Rader, Doctoral Student, Eastern Michigan University
Supervising Instructor: Elizabeth Broughton, Ed.D., Associate Professor, Eastern Michigan University

I have been invited and agree to participate in one or more individual interviews about being a student at [redacted] that will be conducted by Matthew Rader as part of his dissertation research during the Winter and Spring 2006 terms. I understand that the purpose of the study is to understand how [redacted] has assisted me in my transition from High School to College. This research protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee and the [redacted] Institutional Research Board. If you have any questions on the approval process, please contact Eastern Michigan University representatives Dr. Patrick Melia or Dr. Steven Pernecky at 734-487-0379 or [redacted] representative [redacted] at [redacted].

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. I understand that the only anticipated risks to me involve the inconvenience of responding to the investigator’s questions and the time to participate in the study during the 2005-2006 academic year.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is having the opportunity to contribute to research that may enhance the ability of students to persist and graduate from [redacted]. I also understand that I will be compensated \$10 for my participation.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary; that I may choose not to answer certain questions, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time if I choose to do so involving no penalty, and still be awarded compensation. I further understand that my confidentiality will be protected at all times and that fictitious names will be assigned to me in any future reports. In addition, I may request copies of my taped interview and/or transcriptions and that I may request that portions of the tape or transcriptions be deleted if I find that necessary.

I further understand that portions of my interview(s) may be included in a dissertation submitted to Eastern Michigan University and that prior to submission all identifying characteristics will be erased. The interviews (notes and tapes) will be retained for three years in a secure locked file cabinet at the principal investigator’s residence, and then destroyed.

If I have any further questions I may contact Dr. Elizabeth Broughton, Dissertation Committee Chair. She can be reached at 304 Porter Building, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197 or (734) 487-7120 ext. 2682 or Elizabeth.broughton@emich.edu.

By signing below, I acknowledge my understanding of the purpose and requirements of the study and agree to participate.

Interviewee: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____