

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT CUSTOMIZED TRAINING PROGRAM

by

SUSAN O'REAR

NATHANIEL BRAY, COMMITTEE CHAIR
BEVERLY DYER
DAVID HARDY
MICHAEL HARRIS
STEPHEN KATSINAS

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2011

Copyright Susan O'Rear 2011
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

Across the United States, partnerships have formed between business and industry and rural community college workforce development customize training programs to meet the demands of the 21st century labor market. For many business and industry managers, a partnership has become a necessary means to train the unskilled as well as update skills required for the current workforce. This research study examined the business and industry manager's perceptions of their partnership with the Wallace State Community College workforce development customize training program. Qualitative methods were used to gather and analyze data obtained from semi-structured interviews. Katz and Kahn's Open System Theory, which stressed the environmental influence on an organizations survival, provided the theoretical framework for this research.

The results of this study revealed the necessity of a fruitful partnership for the maintenance and growth of a business or industry. Moreover, partnership strengths and weaknesses between business and industry managers and the Wallace State Community College workforce development customized training program were indicated in this research. The results of this study may set a benchmark for current and future workforce development customize training programs with their partnerships with business and industry by providing information of the strengths and weakness of a partnership.

DEDICATION

For all of her love and support I dedicate my work to the loving memory of my mother, Jeanette Berry. Also, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my loving husband Brian O'Rear, my beautiful daughter Katelyn O'Rear, my faithful father Robert Berry, and my supporting brother Dr. Todd Berry. My dissertation came to fruition because of the support of my family. I love each one of you very much!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Richard B. Sheridan stated, “The surest way not to fail is to determine to succeed.”

Through my educational journey I have had several roadblocks but I have been determined to finish what I began. My journey in the doctoral program began with Susan Beck and to her I say THANK YOU. I would not have made it through the program without her initial encouragement. Dr. Rebecca Reeves, THANK YOU for all you have done. You have played a tremendous role in my educational accomplishment. I could not have done this without you cracking the whip. Also, thank you Dr. Kathy Buckelew and Dr. Mary Barnes for all of words of wisdom you both shared, I will never forget them. Likewise, I would like to thank the employees at Wallace State Community College who made my journey possible. In addition, I would like to recognize my family and friends for all of their prayers and support that allowed me to accomplish my goal of completing the doctoral program.

Lastly, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Nathaniel Bray, as well as my other committee members, Dr. David Hardy, Dr. Stephen Katsinas, Dr. Michael Harris, and Dr. Beverly Dyer for all of their guidance and support throughout the process of my dissertation.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Background and Rationale for the Study	5
Significance of the Study	8
Chapter Summary.....	8
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	10
Community College History	10
Occupational Education.....	13
Alabama Community College.....	15
Rural Community College.....	16
Workforce Development	17
Trends and Demographics	18
Workforce Development in Rural America.....	22
Training Initiatives.....	25
Collaborative Partnerships	34
Business and Industry	36

Alabama Workforce Development Statistics.....	37
Community Collaborative Partnerships.....	37
Government Collaborative Partnerships	38
Collaborative Partnership Summary	40
Role of Community	41
Community Leaders and Stakeholders	42
Financial Support for Community Colleges	42
Conceptual Framework	47
Conclusion.....	49
3 METHODS	50
Setting.....	50
History and Demographics of Wallace State Community College	52
Cullman County Demographics.....	54
Study Design and Research Questions.....	55
Researcher Positionality	56
Participants	57
Data Collection and Analysis	58
Interview Methodology.....	59
Interview Questions	59
Interview Protocol	60
Trustworthiness	62
Delimitations	62
Limitations and Assumptions.....	63

Summary	64
4 RESULTS OF THE STUDY	65
Participant Descriptions	65
Bill.....	66
Bob.....	66
Sam	67
Peter	67
Lance.....	68
Judy	68
Guy.....	68
James.....	69
George.....	69
Rick.....	70
Data Analysis	70
Theme 1: The Importance of Proximity and Cost.....	70
Theme 2: Role of Education/Training Skills in Industry	76
Theme 3: Communication	83
Theme 4: A Shift toward Alabama Technology Network Services.....	87
Summary	90
5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	93
Discussion of Findings	94
Research Question 1	94
Research Question 2	96

Research Question 3	101
Research Question 4	103
Overarching Question	105
Discussion of Findings	108
Implications for Practice	112
Recommendations for Future Research	116
Closing Remarks	118
REFERENCES	119
APPENDICES:	
A IRB APPROVAL	126
B INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT	133
C PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AT WALLACE STATE	139

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday, February 4, 2010, the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, Dr. Frieda Hill, addressed the employees of a community college with the following statement:

Everything we do is . . . part of workforce development. . . . Vocational colleges must be responsive to the needs of employers both new and old in order to lead the state through a down economy. . . . The economic recovery of our state is on the shoulders of our community colleges. (Bullard, 2010, p. 1)

Dr. Hill's comments reflect the national focus on the role of community colleges in preparing American workers for the challenges of the 21st century (Alabama Community College System [ACSS], 2009). Dr. Hill does not stand alone in her belief that community colleges will be instrumental in strengthening the economic backbone of the United States. According to President Barack Obama, "Our community colleges can serve as 21st century job training centers, working with local businesses to help workers learn the skills they need to fill the jobs of the future" (ACSS, 2009, p. 1). Without a doubt, community college workforce development programs will have a tremendous impact on the economic future of the nation.

Increasingly, the mission of the community college is to provide education and skills training for individuals and to serve the community as a whole, including business and industry needs (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2010). According to the AACC, community colleges should continue to develop partnerships and collaborations with business, industry, government, and other sectors of the community to create a strategy to achieve a

higher-quality, better-prepared workforce (Orr, 2001). The White House press recently announced an excellent example of this type of collaborative effort. President Obama's billion-dollar community college initiative was the first significant financial proposal since President Lyndon Johnson earmarked funds for community colleges during the late 1960s (Calefati, 2009). President Obama established a goal of an additional 5 million community college graduates by 2020, many of which will complete skills training programs (Lothian, 2010). According to Lothian (2010), White House correspondent for CNN, President Obama was quoted as follows: "We will not fill those jobs, or keep those jobs on our shores, without the training offered by community colleges" (p. 1). Partnerships between government, business and industry, and community colleges have the potential to make a powerful and positive impact on the achievement of American economic goals for the 21st century.

Partnerships, also referred to as collaborations, may be described as the development of a form of strategic cooperative relationship among two or more organizational entities (Orr, 2001). Partnerships as a form of social exchange have always been part of community endeavors and may develop in different forms such as formal and informal, public or private, and individual or organizational (Thio, 2005). According to the Merriam-Webster (2010) dictionary, a partnership is "a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities." Partnerships may provide a key role in building bridges between business and industry and the labor force. For partnerships to be successful, all parties must maintain a cooperative effort and share responsibilities.

There have been numerous business-industry-community college partnerships within the last 20 years (Lancaster, 2005). Some of these partnerships have had a remarkable and positive impact on local economies. The partnerships between the state of Alabama, the Alabama

Community College System, and German and Japanese manufacturers provide an excellent example of how this collaborative networking system can have a positive effect on the local economic climate (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, & Liston, 2006). German and Japanese industries located factories in Alabama, due in part to the workforce development programs sponsored by the state and local community colleges. Skills-training programs were developed in community colleges to specifically address the needs of a partnership between local, state, and federal government workforce development agencies and the new industries, and hundreds of Alabama workers gained employment.

With mounting demands for a skilled labor force, a partnership between business, industry, and local community colleges can provide necessary skills training to meet the demands of a dynamic labor market (Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, 2009). The competitive advantage for business and industry is grounded upon training and retaining a skilled and innovative labor force. Business and industry depends upon a continuous supply of skilled workers. A community college should be keenly aware of the needs of local employers as they develop workforce and training programs. Creating social and communication networks between business, industry, and community college workforce development programs will maximize job opportunities for area residents.

Problem Statement

Economic development is a top concern for most community colleges and is formally included in the community college mission statements (ACSS, 2010). The three areas of focus for community college workforce development programs are most often centered upon employment, training, and literacy programs. More often than not, workforce development

programs for this population are short-term and financed by the employer. Because the employer finances the training the employee is often left without a voice as to participation, and the means used in training is often not developed by the local community college faculty. Moreover, the training is noncredit for the employee (Kenamer & Katsinas, 2011). Given that these programs are often developed to meet the needs of specific industries, they are typically called “customized training” programs. A study conducted by the League for Innovation in the Community College revealed nearly all community colleges service business, industry, government, and labor with workforce training for existing employees. Community colleges have afforded a service to the residents and communities that would otherwise have no access to higher education. Likewise, the business community has received local services to build a workforce, attract new jobs, and help support entrepreneurship and small business development.

According to Minic and Varney (2001), “Worker knowledge and skills . . . are the new determining factors in economic growth and prosperity” (p. 52). This statement reflects the vital importance of providing the skills training for an ever-changing economic climate. Workforce development is an ongoing challenge for corporations and businesses across America as they struggle to cope with rising costs and scarce resources. According to the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD), industrial corporations spend approximately \$109.25 billion annually on learning and development activities (ASTD, 2010). The average annual expenditure per employee increased to \$1,424 in 2005, which represented a 4% increase from the previous year and the average cost per learning hour received has decreased slightly from \$54 in 2004 to \$42 in 2005 (Rivera & Paradise, 2006). According to Miller (2009), community colleges will play a pivotal role in workforce and economic development. The Spelling Commission reported that 90% of the fastest-growing jobs would require at least some postsecondary education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to provide a snapshot of a workforce development customized training program from the perspective of area business and industry managers. This snapshot may provide a means to progress into an innovative 21st century rural community college workforce development customized training program. This study examined the multi-faceted elements of an existing customized training workforce development program, including community partnerships, networking collaborations, and the reciprocal relationship between postsecondary workforce development and business and industry. Stake (1995) proposed that the primary function of case study research is to examine a specific phenomenon with the expectation that the case analysis may provide important information that can be applied to other cases. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this research study, as it provided an in-depth analysis of a rural community college customized training workforce development program from the perspective of area business and industry managers.

Background and Rationale for the Study

The concept of workforce development as a training tool came about after World War II (Katsinas, 1994), and by the 1960s technical and medical occupational programs were part of the community college curriculum (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). A more recent trend has occurred at community colleges in contract or customized education. Indeed, the 2008-2009 Alabama Chancellors Report presented information that underlined the significance of community college workforce development programs in providing skilled workers for the labor force (ACCS, 2009). The Chancellor reported numerous options found in workforce development programs within the

Alabama postsecondary education system such as the following: Training for Existing Business and Industry (TEBI), continuing education, Ready-to-Work services, WorkKeys job profiles, skills certification assessment, and short-term classes for existing companies for a fee. From 2008-2009, these programs served 58,177 individuals and 899 companies thus allowing numerous Alabamians to enter or reenter the workforce. For example the Ready-to-Work programs have been particularly successful in providing the skills and education required by business and industry for entry-level positions. Ready-to-Work programs are offered at 53 sites by 21 colleges. Of the 2,494 individuals enrolled, 55% gained employment. Moreover, WorkKeys, a certification program that provides a uniform measure of key workplace skills, awarded 9,315 certificates.

In 2000, the American Association of Community Colleges identified a serious need for an increase in the partnerships between business, industry, and other educational entities to offer a salient solution for a better-prepared labor force (Oates, 2009-2010; Orr, 2001). Consequently, community colleges have adopted a new philosophy with business and industry to meet the demands for a skilled labor force. The environment of a community college offers the ideal location for partnerships between business, industry, and potential employees (Coulter, 2007; Orr, 2001). Consequently, businesses in Alabama have partnered with community and education leaders to develop workforce development programs (ACSS, 2010).

One particularly successful program, Alabama Industrial Development Training Institute (AIDT), identifies qualified potential employees for new and expanding businesses through recruitment, screening, and training services. The AIDT also offers job-specific pre-employment as well as on-the-job training programs, customized technical training programs, and leadership training programs for Alabama workers. In 2009, the AIDT effectively provided services to more

than 52,000 people in 84 companies. Despite the success of workforce development programs in Alabama and across the nation, many political and community leaders undervalue the rich resources community colleges can provide in training a skilled labor force (Dembicki, 2010). Senator Robert Casey of Pennsylvania stated that community colleges are “unheralded, underrated, underestimated, and unappreciated” (p. 1).

In 2008, the Alabama Governor’s Office presented a strategic plan for workforce development (Governor’s Office of Workforce Development, 2008). To achieve Alabama’s strategies for workforce development, two ambitious goals were established. The first goal focused on establishing successful employment and therefore encouraging prosperity for Alabamians. The second goal is directed toward the employers who want to hire and maintain skilled workers. To meet these goals, Governor Riley and the Workforce Development Commission created seven strategic initiatives: (1) increase the efficacy and responsiveness of the Alabama Career Center System, (2) ensure workforce development programs coordinate with future needs of the labor force and employers, (3) increase the number of trained workers in Alabama’s labor force, (4) develop a collaborative network of state resources, (5) dispersing information and marketing the Alabama Workforce Development Center, (6) effective use of state and federal funding, and (7) strengthen the partnership between workforce development and economic development. Given the current emphasis by both federal and state governments, Alabama community colleges will likely play an increasingly important role in workforce development. Therefore, research on specific community college workforce development programs and the impact of these programs on the local economic sector will provide important information for improving and developing future programs.

Significance of the Study

According to Alabama Governor Robert Bentley (DothanFirst, 2011), community college workforce development programs will help secure the economic future of the nation by providing necessary skills training to meet the labor demands of the 21st century. This vision for the role of community colleges is echoed around the nation as business and industry face the challenges of training and updating the skills for workers (Minic & Varney, 2001). Viable partnerships between community college workforce development programs and area business and industry managers will play an important role in offering cutting edge training for the current and future labor market. For this reason, research on how business and industry managers perceive their partnerships with a community college workforce development programs will provide information and direction on improving and sustaining robust training initiatives for American workers. By giving a voice business and industry managers, a group that has often been overlooked in previous research, it is hoped that the knowledge gained from this qualitative study will provide a unique insight into how a rural community college can provide effective training for current and future workers.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the workforce development program at a rural community college from the perspective of business and industry managers. To accomplish the goal of the study, one must understand the importance of the interdependence, partnerships, and networking between a community college workforce development program and the business and industry it serves. Chapter 2 includes a literature review focusing on a community college workforce development program and the role of community and business, industry, and

community leaders in shaping and developing these programs. Additionally, Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical framework on which this qualitative study is grounded. Chapter 3 presents the qualitative methodology and the method of data analysis that was used in conducting this research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, and Chapter 5 provides an analysis of data with reference to the study, suggestions for future research, and a summary of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For many Americans, a training experience in a community college workforce development program will provide a basis for obtaining employment, updating skills, and retaining jobs in the challenging economic climate of the 21st century (Davidson, 2005; Feldman 2001; Grubb, 2001; Katsinas, 1994; Orr, 2001). Community college workforce development programs will offer the skills needed to augment a labor market that is constantly evolving and changing. Any scientific study conducted builds on the knowledge of other work done before it. With that in mind, a literature review provides an understanding of studies that have shaped and influenced the current research. The following sections were explored to explain the relevance of the study: the history of the community college as it pertains to occupational education, workforce development (training initiatives and collaborations), collaborative partnerships (business, government, and community colleges), the role of community (community leaders and stakeholders and financial support for community colleges), and conceptual framework.

Community College History

The community college has evolved to meet basic educational and skills training needs of a community. For decades, the community college has provided a means to obtain desired educational goals. The American community college began in the early part of the 20th century in Joliet, Illinois, in 1901 (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), the community college system initiated its efforts as a transition to

higher education to help part-time students, women, disadvantaged students, and disabled students and older students achieve success in college. The idea of community colleges expanded throughout America and gave access to higher education for many Americans.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the expansion of community colleges was influenced by the nation's developing high school system (Gleazer, 2000). In order to engage the community in educational pursuits, these early high schools offered teacher institutes and other educational opportunities to all residents. These institutes offered occupational education programs and night school classes to working and older students, allowing these individuals to earn a high school diploma. Interestingly, the pioneer community college, Joliet Junior College in Joliet Illinois, was originally established as a secondary community institution (Roueche, Johnson, & Roueche, 1997). By and large, these early community colleges rarely enrolled more than 150 students and offered a core curriculum of academics. A distinctive characteristic of the first American community colleges was their accessibility to women to further their educational opportunities and join the professional workforce. A significant number of these young women trained for careers as grammar school teachers (Rorty, 1990). In fact, more than 60% of community college students in the early 20th century community colleges were women training for jobs as teachers (AACC, 2009).

The expansion of the community colleges progressed rapidly after World War II when returning veterans made use of the G.I. Bill, which offered federal money for tuition for soldiers entering a post-war job climate (O'Banion, 1997). Over seven million returning veterans took advantage of the G.I. Bill and a large percentage flooded into community colleges across the nation. The G.I. Bill initiated government contribution in making education available for Americans who could not afford higher education. In fact, the current grants and loan programs

established by the government developed from the G.I. Bill (Roueche et al., 1997). The influx of thousands of veterans into community colleges created a need for more institutions across the nation. American community colleges would emerge as a driving force for postsecondary education and become the pathway for many Americans striving for a college degree (AACC, 2009).

Major federal assistance on behalf of the community college did not appear until the late 1950s and early 1960s (Milliron & de los Santos, 2004). The federal government was slow to support the community college concept. State governments are constitutionally vested with the responsibility for sponsoring and regulating education. Hence, the federal government for many years largely restricted its involvement in education to funding research, subsidizing the land grant colleges established under the 1865 Morrill Act, and underwriting occupational education following the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Cohan & Brawer, 2003). In the 1950s, the federal government took a greater interest in the policymaking of postsecondary institutions, and the community college was a beneficiary of the newfound interest. In 1963, Congress passed the Higher Education Facilities Act, which provided aid for the construction of academic facilities. Nearly one-quarter (22%) of the funding under Title I, which provided grants for undergraduate facilities, was earmarked for community colleges and public technical institutes (Dougherty, 2001). The landmark Vocational Education Act also passed in 1963, reserved one-third of the funds provided under Section 4 for the construction of area occupational schools (including community colleges). Under this act, funding for underprivileged and disabled students had been made available. By 1972 the Basic Opportunity Grant (Pell Grant) became a gateway for many to enter a higher education institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

As more Americans took advantage of government education funding programs and entered community colleges, course offerings expanded to include occupational education (Shure, 2001). Initially, content changed to meet the students' needs and reflected changes in areas such as accounting and secretarial work (Dougherty, 2001). Additional technical and medical occupational programs came about in the 1960s. Common offerings were "computer programming, associate degree nursing, and medical technology" (Dougherty, 2001, p. 175). A more recent trend has occurred at community colleges in that "contract" or "customized" education geared toward the needs of employers. The training is often at the employers' work site and employees are conducting the training. According to Dougherty, studies carried out by the American Association of Community Colleges revealed that 75% of community colleges polled in 1985 participated in at least one type of contract employee training for the private sector.

Occupational Education

World War II and the passage of the GI Bill led to the advancement of occupational education within the community college system. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), "the terminology of vocational education has never been exact; the words terminal, vocational, technical, semi-professional, occupational, and career have all been used interchangeably or in combination as in vocational-technical" (p. 222). During the war era, most male students enlisted or were drafted. As a result, for institutional survival, training courses had to be contracted with the military (Gleazer, 2000). The growth of occupational education was spurred by the veterans return from the war. Indisputable growth of the community college after World War II reached a climax in the 1960s and 1970s. Enrollment of military veterans increased 40% between the years

of 1959 and 1968 (Dougherty, 2001). The 1960s were significant for occupational education because during this decade, business and industry expanded. By the autumn of 1959, occupational education students comprised 20% of all community college students nationwide.

In its early years, the community college offered occupational programs as a response to problems or demands within the economy (Dougherty, 2001). For example, pioneer occupational education programs in California provided training or re-training for displaced workers during the Great Depression of the 1930s and prepared thousands of workers for war production during World War II. Consequently, California led the way in occupational education and established a blueprint for the development of occupational education programs in other regions. Although other states were slow to follow California's example, the concept of occupational education provided through the local community college gained acceptance and support across the United States. In response to the success of early occupational education initiative, community colleges were given allocations by the federal government in 1963, 1968, 1972, and 1974, allowing institutions to develop and advance occupational education programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Dougherty (2001) indicated that businesses are

faced with increasing competition and wishing to cut back their internal training costs, businesses have increasingly approached community colleges to provide training that is closely geared to the needs of particular firms or industries but yet is heavily subsidized by the public. (p. 200)

The student paying tuition and the taxpayers picking up the burden of cost displaces the burden of the cost to the employee. Currently, occupational education is the foremost program in the community college with an estimated enrollment between 40% and 60% of all community college students.

Alabama Community College

Historically, George C. Wallace is considered to be the father of Alabama's publicly controlled two-year colleges (ACCS, 2010; Katsinas, 1994). The two-year college system in Alabama has 41 educational institutions and a single board, the Alabama State Board of Education, governs them. The Alabama two-year college system has been a great asset to Alabama because it has provided access to higher education for thousands of historically underrepresented individuals. The placement of the two-year colleges has been based primarily on social power in the rural areas (Katsinas, 1994). For instance, two-thirds of the 41 two-year educational systems institutions were developed in the southern third of Alabama. At that time in history, the social powers in control of the state the school superintendents and principals and the college and university presidents, opposed the expansion of education. Also, there were no state-supported postsecondary educational institutions in the rural third of the state south of Montgomery. Although there had been opposing challenges for two-year systems in Alabama, the idea was not new, on the contrary, in 1958 the Alabama Education Commission's Report of the Committee on Higher Education strongly urged the creation of a system of community colleges, with local boards of lay governance, to provide access to adults, baby boomers, and to provide Alabama industries with technically skilled workers. In the 1960s, the baby boomers demanded access to higher education. To meet the demand, an average of almost one new community college campus opened each week between 1965 and 1975 (Katsinas, 1994). To fund the educational demand lawmakers passed Public Act 92 that supplied the funding necessary to create the two-year colleges. Public Act 92 made it possible to place a new two-cent tax on beer and malted beverages. Also, to help fund the institutions Public Act 93 provided for the creation of the Alabama Trade School and Junior College Authority gave them the right to administer \$15

million in bonds. To govern the two-year educational system in Alabama, Public Act 94 gave the Alabama State Board of Education the authority to assign a nine-member board chaired by the governor. There were three limitations placed on the power of the Alabama School and Junior College Authority: (1) No more than \$1.5 million could be spent on the physical construction of a single trade school or junior college; (2) Authority funds could only be spent on “original,” new equipment; and (3) Authority funds could not be spent on real estate. With the above-mentioned limitations, legislative authority was removed from the two-year system and placed in the hands of the governor (the two boards are rubber-stamp boards).

Rural Community Colleges

Nearly one-third of all community colleges are located in rural regions across the United States (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). The vocational education programs offered by rural community colleges have and continue to play a critical role in meeting both local workforce demands and in promoting economic development (Kenamer & Katsinas, 2011). Vocational education has two separate areas that are at risk in the rural setting: the viability of a trained pool of potential candidates for employment and the importance of economic development in rural areas. Economic development, as an institution, serves as a means for expanding the economic base of local communities (Fitzgerald, 2004). In the past, community colleges have provided the foundation for economic development in rural areas, often creating a reliable pool of qualified employees ready for work. Vocational programs have the ability to both sustain and maintain rural labor markets. Moreover, offerings within vocational and occupational programs should provide new skills training as well as continue education opportunities for rural industries. The challenge for many rural community college workforce development programs lies in offering

skills training opportunities that reflect the needs of business and industries in the area (Melendez, Falcon, Suarez-Boulangger, McCormick, & de Montrichard, 2004; Orr, 2001; Stoll, 2004).

Workforce Development

In order to meet the demands of the 21st century economy, the public workforce system must develop collaborative partnerships between employers, labor representatives, business, industry, and educators to promote economic development in communities across the nation. Workforce development was designed to assist business and industry in locating skilled labor to meet their current and future needs (Brown, 2001; Matthews, 2005; Orr, 2001). Sutton (2004) defined workforce development as follows: “workforce development . . . encompasses . . . employee training [as well as] . . . inter-organizational collaboration, recruiting job seekers, job matching, mentoring, and addressing issues of retention and follow-up. . . .” (p. 448). The expression *workforce development* means more than employment training; it means significant employer involvement, meaningful community relationships, support services, industry-driven training programs, and social networks (Giloith, 2000). Moreover, the definition of workforce development encompasses education and training programs for interested participants and the means of delivery are formal and informal. Workforce development is designed to enhance the skills of people to gain or maintain socioeconomic status (Katsinas, 1994). The definition includes new entrants into the labor market, temporarily dislocated workers, and currently employed workers, and specifically includes the traditional vocational/occupational/technical for credit curriculum of community colleges, as well as noncredit customized training for business

and industry, as well as employment and training programs for the temporarily, dislocated and long-term unemployed.

Over the latter half of the 20th century, the goal of workforce development policy in the United States has been to improve the job prospects and salaries of low-income and less-educated workers (Stoll, 2004). In response to government policies and the demands of the volatile economic climate, community colleges have consistently provided innovative educational programs for short-term and long-term occupational training (Dougherty, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2004). Changes in the structure of the labor market, demographic trends, and economic growth will expand the role of community colleges in providing skills training for American workers (Giloth, 2000). Rural community colleges have an advantage for meeting the needs of industry in providing skills training for the labor market (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). They are able to respond more quickly in developing curriculum, and generally have a structure, lower costs, and a closer personal local relationship to employees to depend upon.

Trends and Demographics

According to Squires and Case (2007), the need for a highly skilled workforce in the areas of business and industry has not been met. Wolfe (2007) predicted the lack of skilled labor in a publication entitled *The Perfect Labor Storm*. Wolfe presented a disturbing forecast of the 21st century labor market and described a bleak labor situation of a labor force with few skilled workers and an aging population. In his discussion of future global trends, Wolfe presented a situation in which business and industry would compete for an increasingly shrinking skilled labor force. For example, Wolfe theorized that the working population of people between the ages of 20 and 59, in both the United States and the European Union, would likely shrink by

25% by the year 2050. Moreover, it is predicted that the population of nations such as China, India, and Mexico will continue to grow, surpassing both the U.S. and Europe. Reflecting the grim economic forecast discussed by Wolfe, the former secretary of education, Richard Riley, stated that the United States educational system is presently training laborers for jobs that do not exist that will use technologies that have not been invented (Thibodeau, 2007). In 1991, fewer than 50% of jobs required skilled workers; however, by 2015, it is predicted that 76% of U.S. jobs will demand employees who are highly skilled (Wolfe, 2007). American business and industry will likely face a shortfall in labor created by a demographic shift in the population. For example, the American Welding Society Foundation will use the donations of \$1 million to fund increased training of entry-level welders and specialized training of existing welders, and to address the shortage of trained welders in the United States (Welding Design and Fabrication, 2006). According to the American Welding Society and other industry research, the current average age of a welder is in the mid-50s. Fewer graduates entering the profession, coupled with the projected retirement of half of the experienced welding workforce, has led to the shortage of skilled welders that could weaken U.S. manufacturing and the overall economy.

There are several causes for the gap between the skills needed for the labor force and the lack thereof; however, one is the changing job market (Speizer, 2011). Twenty years ago, 80% of the jobs were classified as unskilled. Today 85% of the jobs require a higher skill level than in 1950. Recently, the U.S. education has been keeping up with the higher demands. Between 2000 and 2020 the growth of workers prepared for the labor market trained with education or needed skills will only grow by 4%. Moreover, there are not enough younger workers to replace the slots vacated by the retiring Baby Boom generation. The deficit in skills is evident in four areas and they are: basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic; technical and professional skills;

management and leadership skills and emotional skills like persistence, self-discipline and self-awareness. The highest skills gap is management and leadership.

The United States is facing a critical shortage of trained workers in both industrial and information technology and currently needs more than a half-million people in our skilled worker training programs now (Gillette, 2006; Industry News, 2006; Wolfe, 2007). There are not enough young people choosing to be trained in these areas, and compounding the problem is the reality that the average age of our current skilled labor force is 55 and will be ready for retirement soon. Recruiting high school students into technical programs is crucial. In the past, older workers would come to tech schools for retraining. However, as the job market strengthens, these workers are more able to find employment when layoffs occur and are less likely to seek formal training for new skills. To overcome the stigma of working in manufacturing, high school counselors must realize the earnings potential of technical workers and how important these skilled workers are to the nation's economy (Thibodeau, 2007; Wolfe, 2007). Also, students must learn about the work of skilled technicians, the opportunities for advancement or the possible incomes.

Since the late 1990s, there has been a rising demand for skilled laborers in the knowledge-based economy we call information technology (Katsinas & Moeck, 2002; Servon, 2004). Internet access soared by 58% with 116.5 million Americans online at some location in August of 2000 (Katsinas & Moeck 2002). The rapid increase of new technologies is occurring among most groups of Americans, regardless, of income, education, race or ethnicity, location, age, or gender suggesting that digital inclusion was a realizable goal for traditional have not groups. The difference between the groups that have high quality information technology and education to use the technology and the groups that do not have it is called the digital divide.

Concern over the digital divide grew as the personal computer and information highway revolution swept America beginning in the 1980s. Rural community colleges are often the leading postsecondary institution within their service area. Often, they are the only institutions of postsecondary education within their service delivery areas.

Information technology such as software development, hardware repair and maintenance, digital video editing and mapping, and technical support have become a necessity in the 21st century. Jobs in this sector are growing rapidly. There are many workers who do not qualify for these jobs because they lack the necessary skills training. About 40% of information technology jobs do not require a college degree. Thus, community colleges have an outstanding opportunity to offer training to these lower-skilled workers (Coulter, 2007; Dobrzeniecki, Poole, & Troppe, 2006; Stoll, 2004). Case in point, IBM and the Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, Nebraska, have partnered to develop the first green data center management degree using IBM hardware, software, and online training sources (Crossman, 2009). The courses offered for the two-year associate's degree trains students in technical and business skills to prepare them for careers in the design and management of energy-efficient data centers. Metropolitan Community College's data center is funded through a 3-year \$1.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, to increase the number of students in IT education.

Research conducted by Coulter (2007) revealed interesting employment statistics concerning the retirement age of Americans and the role they will play in the next 2 decades. It is expected that the total employment across the United States will grow by 13% over the next 10 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Additionally, 40% to 60% of the jobs that will be available in 2015 do not exist today. Research also revealed that most outsourced workforce development training is currently provided by community colleges, a trend that is expected to

continue. Coulter (2007) also predicted that within 10 years a shift in population would create dramatic changes in the workforce. The population of the United States is expected to grow by over 23 million, with over 10 million people aged 55 to 64. Many economic experts believe that retirement-ready Americans will continue to contribute to the labor force. “Whether it is job training, volunteerism, or enhancement, the still active retirees, who have many more productive years ahead of them, will be at the door steps of 2-year colleges” (Coulter, 2007, p.6).

Workforce Development in Rural America

For decades, characteristics of rural America have been low total population, low educational attainment, high rates of illiteracy, slow job growth, low per-capita income, and high poverty (Green & Galetto 2005; Kennamer & Katsinas 2011). Since WWII, rural America has greatly improved in educational attainment. For example, the percentage of high school graduates had been 44 in 1970 and only 7% graduated from college. In 2000, more than 75% had received a high school diploma and 16% graduated from college. However, educational attainment continues to lag behind other areas. In the rural South, there was only a 1% growth in college-educated residents from 1990 to 1999, and just one in seven adults are college educated.

According to the USDA, in 2000, the rate of poverty in rural areas has consistently increased every year since the 1960s and more than 88% of poor counties are rural counties, moreover, 72.5% are in the rural South (Kennamer & Katsinas 2011). Today high unemployment rates continue in many rural areas of the country. Some even compare to the high rates of the 1990s. For example, in June 2010 unemployment in Wilcox County, Alabama, was 23.6%. Because economic and social conditions in rural America have deteriorated the communities look to their community colleges for help. Community colleges serve populations and

communities that otherwise did not have access to higher education as well as serve the business community. To alleviate rural poverty, rural community colleges offer access to higher education and invest in workforce training. Rural areas are generally more dependent on extractive industries for income (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Examples of extractive industries are natural resource-based industries such as agriculture, forestry, and mining. For the rural South, there has also been a dependence upon textiles and heavy manufacturing. The south did not fare well when the goods from these industries declined in the 1980s.

The rural areas across the United States face the challenge of recruiting business and industry and providing a highly skilled labor force (Besser, Recker, & Parker, 2009). Rural areas saw the largest increase in population during the 1990s due to locations that provided high natural amenities such as lakes, rivers, a good climate, a solid infrastructure, and commuting distance of metropolitan areas. However, rural residents in general remain economically disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in metropolitan areas. According to Zimmerman (2009), products and services in rural areas are equivalent to urban areas. The basic means for economic development is the recruitment of employers. As rural areas compete for high-wage employers and in retaining employers, it is vitally important to reinforce business networks and create strong workforce development programs. For instance, to help meet the industrial needs in Central Iowa for start-up industries and primarily for the expansion of existing industries, the Iowa Department of Economic Development has provided \$175,000 to launch the Ames-Des Moines Business Accelerator (Gardyas, 2005). This is a collaborative effort comprising the partnership with Iowa State University, Des Moines Area Community College, and the Ames Chamber of Commerce. This partnership allows greater economic growth in the Des Moines area by providing access to skills training.

Green and Galetto (2005) presented the challenges that rural areas face in attracting employers who demand high-skilled labor. Employees in rural areas tend to have less formal education and skilled training and usually earn lower wages than their counterparts in urban areas. Workforce development programs based in local community colleges can provide a powerful incentive for employer competitive markets and create a networking link between business and industry and labor (Orr, 2001). Workforce development networks focus on the obstacles of local labor markets and can face numerous challenges that community college workforce development programs can positively influence. For instance, Hurricane Katrina caused massive damage thus rebuilding efforts have been required along the Gulf Coast and through Mississippi. There is a labor shortage in construction in Mississippi (Gillette, 2006). There has been a shortage for the past 15 years; however, the disaster has compounded the problem. The Mississippi Construction Education Foundation (MCEF) was formed in 1996 to promote careers in the construction industry. Community college partnerships have also flourished with the MCEF over the past few years. Various campus sites have been selected around the state where MCEF training has been conducted by either MCEF or campus instructors. In November 2005, the MCEF staff assisted Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in establishing fast-track training programs to assist in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast. The Project Outreach and Project Retrain programs are designed to provide entry-level training and assistance in job placement on the Gulf Coast. Pearl River Community College and Jones County Junior College implemented similar programs in 2006. The State Board of Community and Junior Colleges continues to give the MCEF guidance in working with community colleges in a joint effort to provide a growing workforce for the construction industry.

Green and Galetto (2005) provide an excellent example of collaborative efforts of education, business, and industry. This case study focused on Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance located in Greenville, Mississippi. The Alliance began in 1995 when a group of community leaders presented a workforce development proposal encompassing the rural areas of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The alliance was created to assist with communication among employers, educational and training institutions, human resource services, and community-based organizations. By working together these entities were able to assess local workforce development needs and utilize existing but untapped resources. In a similar collaboration between business and education, St. Louis Community College's Center for Business, Industry & Labor partnered with Proctor & Gamble to play a critical role in production (St. Louis Business Journal, 1994). To outsource training in an effort to be more cost efficient, Proctor & Gamble created a partnership with St. Louis Community College to maintain a competitive edge. This collaboration is ongoing and has proven to be a time-honored success.

Training Initiatives

Stoll (2004) examined policy and practice to find the best means to achieve proficiency for training low-skilled laborers for the information technology field. The results revealed the following components were needed for a successful workforce development program: employer-employee connections, community colleges, flexible skills training, networking and collaboration among training providers, and post-employment assistance (Bragg, 2001; Green & Galetto, 2005). Providers who deal with employers often update information on skill requirements, work standards, and current technology. The field of information technology is dynamic, thus requiring necessary updated skills that should be relevant to meet training needs

and conducted in a timely manner (Wolfe, 2007). Additionally, the study presented by Stoll (2004) revealed a need for a component to the training that includes assisting workers with job placement and training in workplace norms. Soft-skills training have been found to be essential for low-skilled workers. Partnerships with community colleges will continue to be important in workforce development (Orr, 2001; Ryan, 2010; Spilde, 2010). Community colleges are a better fit for training than smaller training facilities and have more resources available. Changes at the community college, such as flexibility, must be developed in order to become a force in local economic communities (Bragg, 2001; Brown, 2001; Matthews, 2005). Stoll (2004) stated, “no single organization usually has the internal capacity (size, resources, equipment, facilities, access to clients, and expertise) to complete the training process from beginning to end; thus collaboration is necessary for success” (p. 204).

Training initiatives sponsored by government funding have created partnerships between business, industry, and the workforce (Jacobs, 2001; Wolfe, 2007). In Ohio, the Lorain County Community College and local workforce development agency combined a donation of \$50,000 with existing federal money from the Workforce Investment Act to develop a program called Stimulate Your Career program (Ashburn, 2009). This program focuses on three high-growth fields: health care, information technology, and manufacturing. The college has also created three short-term, intensive programs in wind-turbine technology, computing applications, and information-systems support (Baring-Gould, Flowers, Kelly, Barnett, & Miles, 2008). These training programs offer certificates that allow qualified students to gain entry-level employment in those fields. If students choose to continue their education, all credits gained from the training program can be applied to an Associate’s degree.

In June 2008, the Governor of Virginia, Timothy M. Kaine, announced an agreement had been reached with the region's largest employer, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, on a \$200 million modernization and reinvestment in key machinery and equipment and facility to expand production capabilities (Hickey, Andrews, & Miller, 2008). The collaboration among Goodyear, Danville, and the Commonwealth of Virginia facilitated the retention of the company in the area with approximately 2,000 employees. The Danville Goodyear plant manufactures medium radial truck tires (tires for 18-wheelers) and aircraft tires. Community representatives from economic development, Danville Community College, and the Chamber of Commerce worked together extensively on workforce development issues regarding the availability of qualified workers. Danville Community College has created a manufacturing technician-training program, whereby participants take 10 weeks of classes and have hands-on experience so that the student becomes certified documenting that he/she can operate factory equipment. After completion of the course, all of the graduates from the first class were immediately hired. The placement rate for graduates has continued to be higher than 80% (Wright & Stratton, 2009).

Federal policies in employment training and assistance for the nation's low-income population have changed dramatically since 1996. A major component of federal welfare reform has been the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grant (Meléndez, Falcón, Suárez-Boulangger, McCormick, & de Montriachard, 2004). These programs were initiated to transition welfare recipients to the workplace. Also, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 created a new program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that combined funding and changed welfare system (Katsinas, Banachowski, Timm, Bliss, & Short, 1999). This act states that states may use funds to support families after their 5-year cut-off. The act indirectly mentions vocational education as a means to reform individuals;

however, states are left to interpret the law. Funding for higher education is dependent upon student access to curricula such as developmental education--a necessary prerequisite for community college involvement in welfare-to-work programs. These programs target the TANF participants who are regarded as the most difficult to employ. Developmental deficiencies in mathematics is most common for all new community college students nationwide (Katsinas, 1994). In other words, individuals who did not graduate from high school, have inadequate reading and math skills, substance abuse problems, or may have a poor work history. Community colleges are in the unique position to benefit from federal programs.

The Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in 1982 was based on a labor attachment model, which promoted the immediate re-connection of the long-term unemployed to jobs. Instead of professionals assessing and placing hard-to-employ citizens in subsidized public-sector jobs, JTPA allowed governors to submit state plans for the expenditure of federal funds that allowed for the creation of some 628 Private Industry Councils (PICS). By statute, and based on the premise that employers knew more than training professionals about local labor markets, the majority of members of local PICs had to be from the private sector. Community colleges possessed a significant measure of influence over the allocation of JTPA funds, likely due to the fact that community colleges themselves often placed representatives on the PICs. Under JTPA, practical incentives to learn how to effectively collaborate with community colleges to meet the goals of state plans were created for the employment and training bureaucracy within the 50 states.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 offered vocational-technical education to prepare students for a paid or unpaid employment in current or future job markets (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The current and future jobs require other skills

than a baccalaureate or advanced degree (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Programs offered include competency-based applied learning for an individual's academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning, problem solving skills, and the occupational-specific skills necessary for economic independence. There are initiatives from the Perkins act to help individuals become a productive and contributing member of society and they are: acquire at least two years of secondary education and two years of post secondary education (nonduplicative sequence of study; integrate academic, career and technical instruction; provide technical preparation for areas such as health occupation, industrial, agriculture, or business; build student competence in mathematics, science, and communications in a sequence of courses. These will hopefully lead to an associate degree or certificate and to high skill, high wage employment or higher education attainment (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The course offerings are often referred to as the 2+2+2 programs. These programs allow students to begin to attain their higher education goals with two years of vocational education in high school, two years of training at a community college in a vocational area, and two years of baccalaureate work at a four-year institution (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). These programs have given rural areas the challenge of maintaining a qualified pool of employees while projecting employment opportunities.

Community colleges serve as vital means in restructuring local labor markets and have a long history of supporting training programs focused on both disadvantaged workers and the needs of local industry (Fitzgerald, 2004). Community colleges achieved state and regional welfare reform initiatives; however, the local level is met with greater challenges. According to Melendez et al. (2004), these challenges are met with

internal factors such as college leadership's commitment to a comprehensive mission for the college, the existence of programs and prior experiences serving the disadvantaged at the college, favorable faculty and staff attitudes toward non-degree programs, and a

proactive leadership promoting and articulating ongoing relations and collaborations with local labor, businesses, industries, and social service agencies. (p. 294)

To determine the role of welfare reform initiatives in community colleges, a study was conducted with 251 community colleges across the United States (Meléndez et al., 2004). The results indicated that 80% of community colleges nationwide offer some kind of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Additionally, community colleges provide college preparatory courses for the short-term training that would provide the student with a stepping-stone to meet future education goals. Other studies indicated that training programs supported by federal and state welfare initiatives serve an important role in meeting the needs of the disadvantaged working population (Bragg, 2001; Brown, 2001; Jacobs, 2001; Matthews, 2005). The community college system has the potential to provide the education and skills training for building a strong regional workforce and enhancing economic development (Brown, 2001).

Community colleges offer a great advantage over community-based organizations and employer-based training in that they offer an opportunity for academic and career advancement. Fitzgerald (2004) gives the following as examples:

The Job Ladders program at Shoreline Community College has pathways (curricula) in manufacturing, customer relations, health services, and information technology and the Essential Skills Program at Community College of Denver has several job ladder career tracks but has been most successful in early childhood education and medical instrument technology. (p. 692)

Community colleges have often shown employers in various parts of America that their programs are working as a source to train workers. Numerous state labor and social service agencies consider community colleges as a vital force in assisting disadvantaged students with skill training and retraining (Sutton, 2004). Community colleges have shown that they can form reciprocal partnerships with business and industry groups. Above all, community colleges can

provide numerous educational programs for any partnership and can connect short-term occupational training with long-term education.

It is estimated that there are between 4 and 5 million working poor in the United States (Fitzgerald, 2004; Kimmel & Aronson, 2007). This social phenomenon is caused by low-skill, low-wage employment mostly driven by a shift in work from manufacturing jobs to service jobs. Community college occupational programs are uniquely poised to provide the training needed for low-wage workers to advance into these better paying jobs. Most of the nation's community colleges have developed short-term training programs, some specifically for TANF clients (Melendez et al., 2004). Community colleges are uniquely positioned to succeed at creating career ladders and wage progression opportunities because they have the potential to influence the structure of employment. Many community colleges engage in economic development activities that provide technical assistance to businesses to help them become high performance work organizations. These programs are not connected to occupational education; community colleges act as labor market intermediaries that not only connect supply and demand but also attempt to influence demand.

About two-thirds of community colleges have short-term occupational programs geared to welfare recipients (Fitzgerald, 2004). Most training programs last from 3 to 6 months, are noncredit, and do not articulate with related degree programs. Community colleges form partnerships to provide the intensive support services needed by this population to finish programs and adjust to the world of work. The employment and training industry as a whole provides necessary support services, connections to employers, skills training, and other programs that facilitate job readiness, placements, and career advancement for disadvantaged workers and job seekers (Meléndez et al., 2004).

To remain competitive in the international market, American business and industry must be able to employ highly skilled workers, many of who will require specialized postsecondary training (Spilde, 2010). According to Feldman (1991), finding and retaining skilled laborers has become a challenge for American business and industry. An excellent example of this overwhelming challenge was reported by the American Institute of Banking. The institution discovered that more than 80% of their banks reported problems with tellers that included counting incorrectly, transposing figures or decimal points, and being unable to calculate interest because they did not understand percentages. Additionally, Indiana University reported that as many as one out of five American workers read at or below an eighth-grade level. Given these serious skill deficits, the United States will struggle in the intensely competitive global economy.

Perhaps the best hope for preparing American workers for knowledge-driven economic challenges of the future may be the workforce development programs located at local community colleges (Oates, 2010). Partnerships with community colleges are a vital element in the public workforce system and may potentially provide a bridge between American workers and the skills they need to obtain for higher wage employment. Community colleges offer a “unique blend of education and career training and allows them to serve students seeking the skills needed to enter the job market for the first time, those who are training following a layoff, and transfer students” (p. 1). Moreover, community colleges tend to be responsive to the needs of the communities they serve; developing career and technical programs that meet the specific demands of the local labor market (Kent, 2010; Miller, 2009; Spilde, 2010).

The flexibility of community colleges and their ability to partner with local business and industry will be strategic in maintaining a competitive edge into the 21st century (Fernandez,

2010; Miller, 2009). Partnerships are critical in creating positive workforce and economic development initiatives. These partnering relationships may vary. For example,

a small, family-operated business may require customized training that keeps the company viable; it might mean attracting a large manufacturer to the area by offering start-up training; it might mean helping a local company stay competitive by responding to evolving needs or by creating partnerships. (Fernandez, 2010, p. 1)

Without a doubt, community colleges have become important stakeholders in economic development (Fernandez, 2010).

Another excellent example of the viability of a business-community college partnership was provided by the CEO of Grainger, a business-to-business maintenance, repair, and operating supplies company that distribute a range of products from nuts and bolts to solar panel analyzers (Ryan, 2010). Grainger partnered with a local community college to develop workforce training to meet the company's needs. In working with local proprietors, the CEO of Grainger became a vocal advocate for technical education. According to the CEO, postsecondary education is vital for anyone interested in any job in industry. To ensure a competitive workforce development program, business, industry, and the community colleges must continuously evaluate the labor market, conduct robust program reviews, and keep current with economic demands of an economy (Spilde, 2010). For the labor market of the future, workers must be aware that the greater the learning, the higher the earnings (Ryan, 2010).

The role community colleges play in economic development must not be understated (Miller, 2009). The presence of a community college is often the deciding factor when a company considers location. When community colleges network with business and industry to define their relationship, determine methods of collaboration, and establish shared goals, all can reap the benefits from the partnerships (Dougherty, 2001). The economic viability of a community is intricately connected to the efficacy of the community's college and vice versa. In

fact, according to Miller (2009), a healthy economic climate exists best when business and education work together

Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborations (and partnerships, as they are often classified) refer to some form of strategic joint relationship between two or more organizational entities (Decastro & Karp, 2008; Orr, 2001). Partnerships between business, industry, community leaders, and the community college is the key to successful workforce development programs. Business and industry are progressively seeking new community college instructional training to provide occupational education (Cable, 2010). Partnerships between community college workforce development programs and business, industry, and community institutions have the potential of meeting labor skill shortages for the 21st century (Dobrzaniecki et al., 2006; Fowler & Chernus, 2005; Orr, 2001). Excellent examples of successful partnerships have been developed over the last 2 decades between community colleges and business and industry. Community colleges have participated in many successful partnerships within various business and industry sectors of society. This section of the literature review will examine components of diverse collaborative partnerships in the following areas: business and industry, community, and government.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) announced in 2000 that community colleges need to increase their partnerships with business, industry, and other educational components as a means to produce a higher-quality, better-prepared workforce. In order to train a higher-quality workforce, the community colleges have recognized a need to develop the resources and expertise from the partnerships and eliminate duplication of services (Orr, 2001). Orr indicated that community colleges needed to redesign their programs and

services to enhance their collaborations within communities, particularly business and industry. The business community may also promote community college collaboration as strategic more advanced academic and technical skill development, thereby improving competition in the global workforce development. Businesses, including Texas Instruments, have turned to community colleges to develop industry-specified occupational programs. Based on his knowledge of business-community college collaborations, Swindle (1999) argued that collaborations between business and industry and community colleges are fundamental in the improvement of workforce development.

According to Sutton (2004), firms with high levels of both connectedness and cohesiveness are more likely to provide good jobs. If one examines workforce development collaborations from an employer perspective, external connectedness seems to matter less than internal cohesiveness in producing good jobs for disadvantaged job seekers. The corporation may choose to integrate workforce development programs into its core operations or instead it may promote a strategic alliance or structure programs as joint ventures. The intent of workforce development is much more comprehensive than merely training employees; it includes services such as collaborating with other organizations, recruiting job seekers, job matching, mentoring, addressing issues of retention, and follow-up reviews (Cable, 2010). Because workforce development extends beyond employment training and job placement into areas of retention, supervisory training, and advancement, it has become increasingly important to integrate the supply side of labor market participation--training, education, and job search strategies--with the demand side, employer needs and expectations. As community organizations attract employers by leveraging longstanding relationships to community members, employers capitalize on these preexisting relationships and provide job seekers with economic opportunities. Demand-side

strategies seek to address employers' needs, wants, and expectations, and to be sensitive to how employer's hire workers and what stimulates employer interest in additional semiskilled applicants.

Business and Industry

According to Mosier, Richey, McPherson, Eckhol, and Cox (2006), strategic industrial partnerships with community colleges will provide an important way to bridge the skills gap between American workers and the needs of industry. For instance, a partnership between Metropolitan College, UPS, Jefferson Community and Technical College, and the University of Louisville, has created a successful program that allows UPS to hire students to fill the part-time Next Day Air night shift. The program provides funding for tuition and full benefits for the part-time employees (Soares, 2010). In a similar successful collaboration, Calhoun Community College, located in Alabama, joined with the Institute and the Partnership for Biotechnology Research to create the first associate degree in Biotechnology in the state of Alabama (Calhoun Community College, 2010). Another example is provided by the collaboration between community colleges and business in 2000 when the Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance was formed as an entity to organize industry, community colleges, and local government to prepare a workforce in process technology (Raley, 2000). Partnerships between business, industry, community leaders, and the community college are the key to successful workforce development programs. Business and industry are progressively seeking new community college instructional trainings to provide occupational education (Cable, 2010).

Alabama Workforce Development Statistics

According to current statistics generated by the Alabama Regional Workforce Development Council, more than \$2 billion have been invested in education and training facilities on community college campuses across Alabama (Bradham, 2009). Operating with an almost \$1 billion budget comprising 10,500 employees, workforce development programs serve 300,000 students a year. Alabama students prepare for high-skill, high-wage, high demand jobs that attract businesses such as Toyota, Honda, and Mercedes-Benz. Case in point, the Alabama Industrial Development Training (AIDT) program sponsored 136 projects that trained 19,771 workers for Alabama businesses and industry (AIDT, 2011). Additionally, community college collaborations with Alabama Technology Network (ATN) helped create 196 jobs for Alabamians and provided over \$1 billion in economic impacts. Considering the fact that half of working age Alabamians between the ages of 25-54 has only a high school diploma or less, workforce development programs will be an important element in the economic stability of Alabama.

Community Collaborative Partnerships

Partnerships between community colleges and the community as a whole may take a variety of forms (Fowler & Chernus, 2005). Community partnerships are diverse and involve a multiplicity of organizations. Community colleges workforce development programs have partnered with businesses and associations such as the local Chamber of Commerce, environmental alliances, public school systems, workforce boards, non-profit job training centers, libraries, ex-inmate assimilation programs, and faith-based and community organizations as well as other civic/community organizations (Marrow & McLaughlin, 1995; Nolan, 2007; Servon, 2004; Soukamneuth & Harvey, 2008; Walker, 2009).

Community college partnerships with various community entities usually follow one of several different partnership models including recruitment, training, work-based learning, post-placement support, and corporate philanthropy (Soukamneuth & Harvey, 2008). The most frequent way in which a community college partners with community-based organizations is through workforce development programs. Community colleges across America provide job training that may include soft-skills training, basic education, or technical skills training for specific jobs available within the community. An excellent example of a community college-community partnership is provided by the Warren County Community College located in Washington Township, New Jersey. This institution, in partnership with the Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce, offers free training sessions for employees of local businesses and organizations in several Microsoft Office programs (Warren Reporter, 2010). These training sessions offer local residents instruction on using Microsoft Office, helping many to gain or retain jobs that require computer skills.

Government Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborative partnerships between community college's and state and federal government agencies have provided broad-based economic advantages for both the labor force and employers (Rosenfeld et al., 2006). For example, several states have benefited from established workforce development programs in state community colleges. Case in point, Alabama and Mississippi were able to secure significant investments from German and Japanese manufacturers due in part to training programs provided by the state. Many of these skills training programs were the result of a partnership between local, state and federal government workforce development agencies and the community college. In an additional example of

government-community college collaboration, Elizabethtown Community and Technical College partnered with the Workforce Investment Board of Kentucky in 2003 (Lederman, 2006). The result of this partnership was a successful program that identified available jobs and provided training to fill these positions.

Some community colleges have multiple collaborative partnerships that include government agencies. These relationships, sometimes called triad partnerships, represent education, government, and industry (Mosier et al., 2006). Currently, a triad partnership exists between two Washington State community colleges, Edmonds Community College and Everett Community College, and two government agencies, the Snohomish County Workforce Development Council and the Snohomish County Economic Development Council, and an industry represented by the Boeing Company. These triad partnerships attract new and under-skilled workers to the manufacturing field through targeted strategies offering an array of training options. Community colleges are vital partners in workforce development and serve to foster economic growth (Dobrzyniecki et al., 2006). Community colleges implement these and other roles in collaboration with local economic development organizations, regional planning councils, business associations, chambers of commerce, and public and private training providers.

Research data from the Workforce Strategy Center state that community colleges provide a strong basis for a comprehensive workforce development system (Lewis, 2003). Indeed, community colleges provide a seamless system that incorporates skills training, upgrade training, and support for both high school graduates and dropouts. More than 1,100 community colleges have met Workforce Strategy Center criteria for the following reasons: first, to be financially independent individual's need some form of postsecondary education and training, second,

community colleges are the greatest providers for education and skills training, enrolling more than 10 million students. Currently, nearly 50% of students begin their education at community colleges (Quirk, 2001). Third, individuals can become employed with the proper skills even in an economic downturn (Lewis, 2003). Community colleges enroll more than 10 million students and almost 50% of students begin their education at a community college.

The primary point of workforce development is much more all-inclusive than merely training employees; it includes services such as job matching, mentoring, collaborating with other organizations, addressing issues of retention, recruiting job seekers, and following up reviews (Cable, 2010). Because workforce development extends beyond employment training and job placement into areas of retention, supervisory training, and advancement, it has become increasingly important to integrate the supply side of labor market participation--training, education, and job search strategies--with the demand side, employer needs, and expectations. As community organizations attract employers by leveraging longstanding relationships to community members, employers capitalize on these preexisting relationships and provide job seekers with economic opportunities.

Collaborative Partnership Summary

Millions of Americans have taken advantage of community college continuing education and job training (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Workforce development has benefited from the inherent strengths of the community colleges such as organizational flexibility, low cost, technical expertise, and experience in teaching adult learners. Despite these benefits, demands have been made for changes in college workforce development programs. Increasingly, employers are not putting money into employee training, increasing the financial burden on the

community college system. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in state economic development programs. Government officials and the public continue to consider workforce development as an essential mission of the community colleges (Rosenfeld et al., 2006). Without doubt, community colleges must adapt to the changes of the 21st century economic climate in order to continue to meet the needs of American workers.

Role of Community

The term *community* has been defined as an area in which groups and individuals interact in a relationship of mutual interdependence (Hassinger & Pinkerton, 1986; Lyon, 1989). A community is a very complex entity consisting of individual social interactions that take place within specified boundaries. The social interactions found within social institutions of each community are interrelated and interdependent (Thio, 2005). According to Orr (2001), community colleges have had a strong influence in forging formal and informal relationships between workers, business and industry, and other community agencies to create effective workforce development programs.

According to Dougherty (2003), larger business and industries utilize the contract training from the community colleges more often than smaller business and industries. Location plays a key role in contract training offered to business and industry by community colleges. For example, urban community colleges tend to offer more workforce development-training programs than many rural community colleges. Dougherty also noted that the support of workforce development programs by community college administrators is vital for community economic and political gains. Rural communities that house community colleges are reliant upon community support for survival (Miller & Kissinger, 2007). Economic development and

continuing education are vital elements in the success of a rural community college and can therefore affect the entire community intentionally and unintentionally. Rural community colleges are the link between the college, the community, and the individuals in the community.

Community Leaders and Stakeholders

Community and education leaders as well as other stakeholders in rural areas play an important role in sustaining workforce development training initiatives (Kenamer & Katsinas, 2011). In order for education to promote economic growth, community and education leaders must be proactive in establishing collaborations with area educational institutions, local and state government agencies, and area businesses. Through communication and a strong networking system, these stakeholders have an opportunity to offer occupational education and academic education for a diverse student population. Local school superintendents and high school principals often provide the driving force behind the development of the community college skills training initiatives at the local level (Dougherty, 2001). According to Hassinger and Pinkerton (1986), community leaders and stakeholders, especially in rural areas are instrumental in creating job opportunities for workers who might otherwise leave the area. By partnering with local community colleges, rural community stakeholders can create a larger candidate pool for potential workers, helping rural areas retain their population and often recruit new industry to the region.

Financial Support for Community Colleges

Community colleges across the country are being asked to educate more students with less money (Fischer, 2009). Economic development experts say community colleges can be a

pivotal partner in efforts to “recast” a local economy. Community colleges have the ability to help a region move forward in difficult economic times. Nationally, there is a growing recognition of the critical role community colleges can play in economic recovery. The economic stimulus bill signed by President Obama in 2009 called on community colleges to help deliver \$3.95 billion in job training (Gonzalez, 2009b).

When the Workforce Investment Act was signed into law in 1998, legislators expected it to streamline the clutter of government efforts for the unemployed into one program that would give job seekers more opportunities to pursue career training (Farrell, 2002). One goal of the Act was to increase the number of colleges and other providers that train unemployed workers (Fischer, 2009). Policy analysts say the downturn in the economy since the Workforce Investment Act was enacted in 1998 has supported the need for training, as unemployed people find they need more or new skills to be considered for fewer jobs with far more applicants (Gonzalez, 2009a). The workforce law was created in 1998 to encourage public-private partnerships to modernize workforce development services and serve at-risk youth, undereducated and unemployed adults, youth and adults with disabilities, and English-language learners. The law has essentially lain dormant since 2003, when it expired, although Congress continues to appropriate money based on the current version. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed versions of the bills to reauthorize the law in 2006, but legislators never convened a House-Senate conference to iron out their differences, and the bill died.

David S. Baime, vice president for government relations at the American Association of Community Colleges, stated there are inconsistencies in community college’s participation in workforce development (Gonzalez, 2009c). He contributed it partly to the fact that representatives of businesses rather than of community colleges usually dominate local

Workforce Investment Boards, which develop policies under the law and oversee the operation of the one-stop centers. While the law requires that representatives of education agencies sit on the boards, it does not stipulate that they be from a community college (Dougherty, 2001). More often than not, community colleges end up nothing more than vendors in the federal workforce system, policy experts say. For legislation to work there has to be recognition from states to view the community college system as the national infrastructure for workforce development.

Initiating change in the economy came in the economic-stimulus bill signed by President Obama, February 2009 (Gonzalez, 2009b). The stimulus bill changed the financing of federal training services by allowing local workforce boards to sign contracts with institutions that provide job-training services and these institutions include community colleges. The government has given vouchers to people to use at various institutions of choice (Fox, 2009). But students with those vouchers trickle in for services at various times and in differing numbers, making it hard to plan for coursework and programs. As a result, community colleges often choose not to participate as job-training providers. Their new ability to sign contracts gives them a better handle on planning. It also allows them to use federal funds to cover more of their costs. Vouchers given to individuals typically cover only tuition. Through the contracts, community colleges can use the money in other areas, such as hiring faculty members, paying for equipment, and providing new curricula. Some community colleges limit their involvement or decide not to participate in the federal workforce system because of the law's reporting requirements, which many college officials consider burdensome. For the colleges to receive money, they must report on the employment and earnings outcomes of all of a program's students even if only a few were financed through the federal Workforce Investment Act.

Dr. Stephen Katsinas and Dr. Terrence Tollefson surveyed 49 state directors from the National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges to determine the overall functioning of the community colleges. The survey, conducted by the Education Policy Center at The University of Alabama, collected data from July 5 through August 12, 2009 (Gonzalez, 2009b; Katsinas & Tollefson, 2011). The survey results highlighted the struggles of community colleges facing the most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression. Since the recession began, community college enrollments have increased yet budgets were cut. Only noncredit federal workforce training programs have been strengthened. The directors predicted that general education and occupational education will continue to weaken over this fiscal year. According to Gonzalez (2009c), “if state operating budgets are cut as predicted, it may be difficult for community colleges to change their program mix to help America’s workforce retool from recession” (p. 3).

Although the public workforce system is federally funded, most of the services for businesses are available at the state and local levels (Gonzalez, 2009a). Under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), each state establishes a state workforce investment board. The board identifies high-growth industries, develops a workforce investment budget, and establishes local workforce investment areas across the state. They have several important functions in the public workforce system and they are to determine how many One Stop Career Centers are needed in their area, where they may be located, and how they will be operated. One Stop Career Centers offer a flexible program of services and support for career seekers with diverse needs (National Center on Workforce and Disability [NCWD], 2008). By law, more than 50% of the workforce investment board is made up of employer representatives from the community. One Stop Career Centers are located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. One Stop Career Centers

provide multi-faceted resources for both businesses and potential employees in one setting (Gonzalez, 2009b). They typically serve thousands of individuals who are seeking employment, changing jobs, reentering the workforce, or learning new skills.

Community colleges are held accountable to the three government levels concerning funding to the institutions--the local, state, and federal (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Fiscal support has been decreasing for higher education while funding for workforce has increased. Community colleges are currently funded by local tax dollars, tuition, and state revenue. Two-year institutions require more than \$21 billion dollars to operate efficiently (Dougherty, 2001). Due to these financial constraints, community colleges place a greater demand on the attention of the legislative body. State and federal aid became a necessity by the mid-1980s, and by the year 2000, billions of dollars in student loans and federal grants were required to operate community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Despite financial support of state and federal governments, the addition of special programs for disadvantaged and minority students, financial aid, instructional innovation, new teaching methods, and technology have increased the cost of education, placing many community colleges in a financial crisis (Lombardi, 1973).

Private foundations have had a significant role in the development of the community college (Adams, Keener, & McGee, 1994). A 1956 report of the Carnegie Corporation endorsed the community college as an important component in the diversity and growth of the postsecondary system. Currently, the majority of colleges with foundations have a median annual income of around \$250,000 and a market value of \$2 million. College foundation funds are derived primarily from local businesses, foundation board members, and fundraising activities (Schuyler, 1997). Foundation funds are primarily used for scholarships, student and program support, and equipment and often contribute significant financial support to community colleges.

In the current economic shortfall of funding, community colleges foundations have proven successful in meeting financial demands (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

This study been viewed through the lens of the Open System Theory (OST) developed in the 1960s by social psychologists Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn (1978). OST was initially developed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1956 as a way to understand the symbiosis of organisms. However, this theory was immediately determined to be applicable across all disciplines and adapted by Katz and Kahn to provide a framework for viewing social systems. According to OST, all systems are characterized by a combination of interrelated parts that make them interdependent. Because the parts are interrelated and interdependent it is important to have a close relationship between an organization and their supporting environments. OST offered a new view point for organizations by recognizing an important maintenance source for social structures as “human effort and motivation” (Katz & Kahn, 1978, 3). Open Systems, the term coined by Katz and Kahn, reflected a new principle that all organizations are distinctive and should therefore be structured to adapt to dynamic unique challenges and opportunities. For example, research conducted during 1960s revealed that traditional bureaucratic organizations often fell short of meeting the demands of a rapidly changing technological society. Additionally, the research indicated that organizational managers often failed to realize the importance of regional cultural influences in motivating workers. Because this research study focuses on the partnerships between business and industry managers and the workforce development program of a rural community college, OST will provide a strong framework for

examining the external components and relationships of managers and a workforce development program.

According to OST, a social structure may be examined using four environmental influences that are derived from the geographic area in which the organization operates (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The four environmental influences are as follows: (1) cultural values, (2) economic conditions, (3) political conditions, and (4) educational conditions.

Cultural values, the first element of OST, provides the foundation for understanding how an organization views cultural norms (what is right or wrong, good or bad, and important or trivial). For example, business and industry in the United States may be influenced by the principles such as individualism, democracy, individual rights and freedoms, and the work. Moreover, regional and local ideals, customs, and traditions tend to have a powerful effect on organizations. For instance, workers and consumers in southern states are usually more politically and religiously conservative than their counterparts in other regions.

Economic conditions of a region provide the second element of the OST framework. Economic influences include national and local recessions, unemployment, underemployment, and other factors that affect a company's ability to be successful.

Legal and political environment may also shape an organization's ability to operate effectively within societal boundaries. According to OST, the legal and political structure in which an organization operates can impact the long-term stability and security of the organization's future. For example, a local or national government can impede the success and stability of a business or industry by increasing safety or environmental.

OST identifies educational conditions as the fourth influence on a social organization. For instance, businesses that operate in areas with a lower education level will have a limited candidate pool for hiring a competent, skilled labor force.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the history of community colleges, and the impact of community colleges on workforce development. Additionally, the review presents a synopsis of current workforce development programs; collaborative partnerships between industry, business, government, and community colleges; and the role of the community in shaping the 21st century workforce. According to Walker (2009), collaborative partnerships exist between multiple sectors, all-striving to improve the economic development opportunities within their community, and ultimately provide the appropriate skills training for local workers to compete in the marketplace. Community college partnerships exist to provide the community with an excellent training initiative program focused on preparing workers for the challenges of the future. This study seeks to add to the literature on community college collaborative partnerships with business, industry, and government agencies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Across the United States, community college workforce development programs offer American citizens unprecedented opportunities for the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the economic challenges of the 21st century. Community college workforce development programs will enhance a labor market that is constantly evolving and changing. This qualitative research study focused on a rural community college customized training workforce development program from the perspective of area business and industry managers. This research examined the complex elements of an existing customized training workforce development program, including community partnerships, networking collaborations, and the reciprocal relationship between postsecondary workforce development and business and industry. Chapter 3 presents information concerning research questions, research design, the setting and population of the study, data collection and analyses, researcher positionality and bias, trustworthiness and generalizability, delimitations and limitations, and a summary of the chapter.

Setting

The workforce development program at Wallace State Community College (WSCC), an institution located in North Central Alabama, was the focus of this research. WSCC currently enrolls nearly 8,000 students and offers a wide range of technical and academic programs. This basic qualitative study was developed from the perspective of the business and industry

managers drawn from the service area of the institution. WSCC has housed a workforce program since 1986. Currently known as Training for Existing Business and Industry (TEBI), this workforce development program served 1,850 individuals during the 2008-2009 fiscal year ("Workforce development," 2010). To date, more than 100 area businesses and industries work with TBI at any given point. In coordinating efforts, WSCC offers various training opportunities to meet business and industry needs. For instance, offerings range from welding courses to Spanish courses. In addition to technical training and academic courses, WSCC annually offers "more than 50 customized TEBI courses to hundreds of employees of agencies, businesses, and industries like Rehau, Topre, American Proteins, and the Alabama Department of Transportation" (Wallace State brochure, 2005, p. 1). The stated goals of TEBI include providing opportunities for advancement in the workplace, supporting business and industry in new technologies, customized training, improving individual labor skills, and helping people maintain employment. According to the former program director, collaborative efforts between local workforce development programs and business and industry managers and/or supervisors are required to meet the above-mentioned goals (Morrison, 2009).

According to the Vice President in charge of the WSCC workforce development program, workforce development does not have another funding source thus the program is self-sustaining. Furthermore, "workforce training provides a unique opportunity for local industry/companies to gain training at a low cost and specific to the individual needs" (Cleveland, 2011). Also, the Dean of Institutional Outreach and TEBI liaison for the WSCC workforce development program stated that the majority of the customized training provided by WSCC is oriented around soft-skills such as computer programming, Spanish, and interview skills. Classes are offered based on the needs of local business and industry and may be taught at

WSCC or at the industrial site. These courses may be taught by a WSCC instructor or by other qualified personnel.

The WSCC customize training workforce development program exists in partnership with Alabama Technology Network (ATN) (Alabama Technology Network, 2010). ATN became part of Alabama's community college system in 2004 (Alabama Technology Network annual report, 2009). The network consists of higher education institutions, businesses and government agencies. ATN, as part of the Alabama Community College System links two-year colleges, The University of Alabama System, and Auburn University together to resolve workforce issues that exist within the manufacturing industry. The mission for ATN is to "continually improve Alabama businesses and industries" (Alabama Technology Network annual report, 2009, p. 2). ATN offers hands-on technical assistance and training to small and medium sized manufacturers (250 employees or less). ATN offers complex training such as: industrial maintenance, human resources and organizational development, environmental safety and health, and engineering and technical services. ATN has 15 centers all through Alabama and WSCC has been the home of one ATN center since 2005.

History and Demographics of Wallace State Community College

In its infancy, the establishment known today as Wallace State Community College was originally entitled George C. Wallace Trade and Technical School (*The Cullman Times*, 1973). Since the college was established in 1966, there has been an undeniable connection between the Cullman community and the growth of WSCC (Wallace State Community College, 2010b). According to Dr. Ben Johnson, former president of the college, the original trade school of the 1960s was desperately needed to train workers for area industries. In 1972, Dr. James C. Bailey,

president of WSCC from 1971 until 2003, added a Registered Nursing Program, which has contributed to the current college status. With the implementation of the new programs came needed academic courses that led the way for the trade school to become the third largest community college in Alabama.

In order to meet the needs of an ever-expanding and diverse student body in a dynamic economic climate, WSCC has developed groundbreaking programs to meet the multi-faceted needs of 21st century employers (Wallace State Community College, 2010a). The campus has the most advanced technology and state-of-the-art equipment available for teaching and training, and offers an ever-increasing array of distance learning opportunities. For example, WSCC recently established a virtual technology program that will allow technical, academic, and health divisions to use three-dimensional images to engage students. The word “community” resonates throughout the mission of WSCC and the college has traditionally developed strong collaborative partnerships with business and industry to produce skills training opportunities for area citizens. The Wallace State Community College mission is to create a “world class, internationally recognized, entrepreneurial learning college” (Hawsey, 2010, p. 3).

At the time of this study, WSCC had an enrollment of 7,926 students (“Workforce development,” 2010). Of this number, 887 students were served by TEBI and received skills training for various occupations. Additionally, 411 students completed the Ready-To-Work (RTW) skills training programs that provided training in specific skills associated with area manufacturers and industries. WSCC students also participate in WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system that helps employers select, hire, train, develop, and retain a high-performance workforce (WSCC, 2010a). WSCC students seeking technical certificates and degrees were awarded scholarships and financial aid through federal, state, and local programs.

In 2008-2009, 94 students received \$131,523.46 through the Workforce Investment Act (WIAA/TAA) and technical scholarships were awarded to 44 students in the sum of \$41,599.56. Although Wallace State Community College offers numerous opportunities within the workforce development program, this study will focus on TEBI, the customized training portion of the WSCC workforce development program. Participants will be drawn from business and industry managers and/or supervisors who play a role in the TEBI-WSCC partnerships.

Cullman County Demographics

The major service area of WSCC is Cullman County. Cullman County is located in the northern half of Alabama on Brindley Mountain, 35 miles south of the Tennessee River (Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce, 2010). The county covers 743 square miles and includes 11 municipalities, including Cullman, Hanceville, Holly Pond, South Vinemont, Garden City, Good Hope, Fairview, West Point, Baileyton, Dodge City, and Colony. Currently, the total population of Cullman County is 80,013 comprising a labor force of 38,372. The unemployment rate in Cullman County is 7.8% as compared to the Alabama unemployment rate of 9.0%. The Cullman Economic Development Agency (2010) reports 12.1% of Cullman area residents are underemployed. An examination of the educational levels of Cullman area residents reveal that 31% are high school graduates, 14% have attended college, 6% have an Associate's degree, 5% have a Bachelor's degree, and 3% have a graduate degree.

Cullman County has approximately 120 manufacturing/distribution companies employing from 9 to 1,300 people "producing a variety of goods ranging from automobile bumpers to dungarees, kitchen cabinets to printed circuit boards, and pleasure boats to ultra-precise parts for the aerospace and defense industry" (Cullman Chamber of Commerce, 2010, p.

1). Cullman County is also ranked as one of the top 60 counties in America for total agricultural production. Significantly, Cullman County was ranked in the top 10 national for new and expanding industries between 2001 and 2003. Additionally, the Cullman area received the following rankings from *Site Selection* magazine: first in Small Community out of 17 southeastern states by SEDC; first in all of Alabama for new and expanding industries; third in expanding jobs; fourth in expanding investments, fifth in total jobs; and seventh in total investment out of 17 southeastern states by SEDC.

Study Design and Research Questions

Qualitative research is an investigative process that explores a social or human problem (Creswell, 1998). The qualitative researcher constructs a multifaceted, in-depth description, analyzes words, and reports detailed views of participants. A basic qualitative study presents the following characteristics: the researcher is interested in understanding how participants perceive a situation or phenomenon, the researcher is the primary instrument of research, and the outcome of the study is descriptive. In conducting a basic qualitative study, the researcher seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives of the people involved, or a combination of these. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. These data are analyzed to identify the recurring themes that cut across the data. A rich, descriptive interpretation of the findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature review that provide the foundation for the study (Merriam, 1998).

The Open System Theory (OST) proposed by Katz and Kahn (1978) provided the framework for this research study. OST examines how external influences, such as cultural norms, economic conditions, political conditions, and educational conditions, impact the overall

functioning of an organization. Research questions were developed on the basis of the OST external influences found within the rural area that provided the focus of the study. OST provide a multifaceted approach that revealed the cultural, economic, educational and political dimensions of a complex phenomenon and produced rich, thick data concerning the perceptions of business and industry leaders on community college workforce development initiatives.

This basic qualitative study sought to answer the overarching question “How do business and industry managers perceive their partnership with the customized training workforce development program at Wallace State Community College?” In an attempt to further explore additional insights within the context of the overarching question, the following sub-questions were also addressed:

1. How did the collaborative partnership form between business/industry managers and the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

2. How do business/industry partners communicate and share information with the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

3. How do business and industry perceive the shared benefits of the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

4. What, if any challenges, have arisen between the partner organizations and how were they resolved?

Researcher Positionality

I am currently an instructor at WSCC and teach sociology and psychology. The disciplines I teach have numerous topics related to group behavior, including leaders, management styles, and bureaucratic structures of institutions. The subject areas I teach are for

credit and are transfer courses. The workforce development customized training program offers noncredit and non-transferrable course options. Therefore, I realize that my teaching experience provides me a diverse perspective on the relationship between business and industry partnerships and the customized training workforce development program at WSCC.

Moreover, I have worked at the Cullman County Chamber of Commerce where I became acquainted with the economic development programs. During that time I toured local industry and became familiar with the social networking that is required for industry to exist. Through these experiences, I realized how necessary a successful workforce development program is to the survival of a community's business and industry sector. It is my hope that data gained from this research project will extend knowledge on workforce development and will help improve the quality of life in my community.

Participants

Qualitative research is designed to provide an understanding of how people perceive social phenomena as well as providing an explanation of the attitudes that underlie behavior (Patton, 1990). According to Merriman (1998), qualitative research methods are effective in providing thick, in-depth narratives of events and may allow the unique experiences and thoughts of individuals to be examined. In establishing an appropriate pool of study participants, Merriam (1998) advises qualitative researchers to target a minimal sample size based on the expected, reasonable coverage of the phenomenon. Participants for this study were chosen by purposeful sampling from Cullman County. Participant choices were based on the following criteria: (1) participants must be in a manager role within their business or industry, (2) participants must utilize customize training from the WSCC workforce development program, and (3) the

customized training service provided must be within the last five years. Study participants were contacted by e-mail or telephone and an interview was requested. To address any concerns the participants may have concerning the interviews, additional information was provided upon request. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Interviews were conducted at the times and locations chosen by the participants. Follow-up interviews were also scheduled as necessary.

Data Collection and Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. For efficient use of time, the researcher analyzed collected data from interviews as it is gathered. The coding of transcriptions of the taped interviews revealed emerging themes and patterns (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) “recommend sampling until the point of saturation or redundancy is reached” (p. 47). For this reason, interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted to the point of saturation. To facilitate the analysis of data, the researcher used *Atlas 5*, a qualitative research software program that identifies and categorizes patterns and themes in the interview transcriptions. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, all tapes were destroyed.

Field notes were taken during interviews and also analyzed. Field notes were transcribed by the researcher during interviews to provide additional depth and clarification of the data gleaned from the interviews. These narrative notes also provided a contextual framework for interpreting other data and provided additional insights of collaborative partnerships. This qualitative research was anchored in real-life situations and the basic qualitative study resulted in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon that should illuminate meanings that expand its readers’ experiences.

Interview Methodology

Data for this qualitative study was based on information derived from person-to-person interviews with participants. Person-to-person interviews may be defined as “a conversation with a purpose . . . what is on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). To collect the rich, thick, in-depth data that characterizes qualitative research the interviewer used a semi-structured questionnaire to ask open-ended and less structured questions designed to reveal the how and why behind the phenomenon. According to Merriam (1998), a less structured interview protocol will allow individual respondents to define their experiences in a unique way. In structuring interview questions, it is vitally important for the researcher to structure questions that are flexibly worded to allow for a deeper exploration of the topic.

Interviews were recorded on a tape recorder. According to Merriam (1998), this practice will allow the researcher to confirm that data have been preserved for analysis. In addition to taping the interview, the researcher also transcribed notes throughout the dialogue. Written reflections of the interview by the researcher was helpful in developing insights of the participant’s verbal and nonverbal contributions to the study (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). The researcher also made post-interview notes that will assist in monitoring and analyzing the research data.

Interview Questions

One significant aspect of the interview process is the development of the interview questions (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Each interview question is designed to elicit attitudes, knowledge, and opinions of the participants. Patton (1990) suggested that interview questions should be written in familiar language so that the words make sense to the

interviewee. Avoiding the use of technical jargon and unfamiliar concepts should improve the quality of data. For each of the four research questions, a series of interview questions will be included.

According to Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin (1981), interview questions may fall within one of four categories: devil's advocate, ideal position, hypothetical, and interpretive questions. The "devil's advocate" question challenges the interviewee to consider opposing views. An ideal position question would ask the interviewee an ideal situation. A hypothetical interview question would ask the interviewee what he/she would do in a hypothetical situation. Lastly, an interpretive question would present a tentative summation of what the respondent has been saying and ask for a reaction. This study utilized interview questions from each category in order to elicit detailed responses from the participants. In developing interview questions, the researcher will avoid leading questions, yes or no questions, and multiple questions that may confuse the participants. An integral element of the interview process is probing, asking questions, or eliciting comments that refine previous comments (Merriam, 1998). The researcher will use probing for clarification.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol based on the research questions for the study was developed to explore the attitudes, knowledge and opinions of the research participants.

Research Question 1: How did the collaborative partnership form between business/industry managers and the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

Interview Question 1: What role did the business/industry you work for play in the formation of the partnership with the WSCC workforce development program?

Interview Question 2: Why did the business/industry choose to develop a partnership with WSCC?

Interview Question 3: What did WSCC have to offer at the time the partnership began?

Research Question 2: How do business/industry partners communicate and share information with the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

Interview Question 1: What is the primary way you share information with the workforce development employees at WSCC?

Interview Question 2: How do you communicate with the workforce development employees at WSCC and let them know your employees need to update their skills?

Interview Question 3: How do you communicate with the workforce development employees at WSCC to let them know of new training programs?

Research Question 3: How does business/industry perceive the shared benefits of a customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

Interview Question 1: How do you think the WSCC workforce development program benefits your business/industry?

Interview Question 2: What is positive and negative about working with the workforce development program at WSCC?

Research Question 4: What, if any, challenges have arisen between the partner organizations and how were they resolved?

Interview Question 1: Describe the challenges, if any, you face working with the workforce development program at WSCC?

Interview Question 2: Were the challenges resolved? If so, how were they dealt with?

Interview Question 3: What changes in the partnership, if any, have developed over the course of the partnership?

Interview Question 4: Do you have other information you would like to share with me?

Trustworthiness

This research followed the design of a basic qualitative study. As discussed by Merriam (1998) and Marshall and Rossman (1998), qualitative research must prescribe to recommended principles and methods in order to generate authentic data. This research was grounded on the recommended methods of qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness. Thick, in-depth descriptions, a method of providing detailed descriptions that communicate the social contexts that are being investigated, were used to ensure trustworthiness. To further ensure credibility and confirmability, the researcher created an audit trail that will allow future scholars and researchers to examine both the process and results of this study. The audit trail consists of transcriptions of interviews, field notes taken during observations, and data analyses (Merriam, 1998).

Delimitations

This study was structured on the premise of the following delimitations:

1 This study considered only Cullman County Alabama business and industry with established partnerships with Wallace State Community College.

2. This study considered only those businesses and industries that had established partnerships within the last five years.

3. Only business and industry that were currently operational were included in the study.

4. Only business and industry managers were considered for this study.

Limitations and Assumptions

The researcher is the instrumental tool in data collection and brings many biases and subjective attitudes to a research project. This fact is one of the limitations of any qualitative study and was also a factor in gathering and analyzing data for this study. Additionally, the researcher can slant data analysis so that the reader may think that case studies are accounts of the whole when they are only a slice of the pie (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). As a primary tool for data collection, the researcher clearly identified personal perceptions and attitudes that may affect results (Merriam, 1998). Because the nature of qualitative research focuses on depth rather than breadth, the 10 participants who meet the criteria for the study may have limited data collection.

To address these limitations and strengthen dependability, several steps were taken by the researcher. Following the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1998) the researcher explained the assumptions and theory behind the study, the personal position on the group being studied, the basis for selecting informants and a description of the participants, and the social context from which data will be collected. Additionally, triangulation was used to gather data. According to Creswell (1998), triangulation allows qualitative researchers to make use of multiple and different sources, methods, and theories to provide corroborating evidence for data analysis. Data were triangulated through initial interviews, follow-up interviews, and researcher field notes. By using multiple sources of information the researcher strengthened the dependability of the research data. An audit trail will also be established to describe in detail how

data will be collected, how categories will be derived, and how decisions will be made throughout the inquiry.

The following assumptions were made regarding this study: the researcher assumed that the study participants would provide pertinent information regarding their perceptions of the WSCC workforce development program. Additionally, it was assumed that the data gathered for this qualitative study provided useful insights and information and added to the database for community college development programs.

Summary

Qualitative research methodologies provided an in-depth, multi-faceted description of the WSCC workforce development program from the perspective of Cullman County business and industry managers and/or supervisors. This study offered a holistic description of the unique attitudes and perceptions of business and industry managers and may help others and future workforce development programs design a successful skills training program for the 21st century. This chapter detailed the participants of the study and qualitative methodologies that were used to collect and analyze data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the partnerships between business and industry in Cullman County and the Wallace State Community College (WSCC) workforce development customized training program. To elucidate on the reciprocal relationship between business and industry managers and the college workforce development program, the researcher purposefully chose sixteen businesses and industries from a list prepared by the Wallace State Community College workforce development program. From the pool of 16 candidates, three managers did not meet the established criteria and two did not respond to the researcher's repeated requests for an interview. Of those who met the criteria, 10 individuals agreed to participate in the study. This chapter presents the research data collected from semi-structured interviews as well as observations made during the interviews. Although the researcher requested 30 minutes for the interviews, the average length of interview sessions was approximately two hours. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to clarify information. The data presented allowed the researcher to expound on individual relationships between managers and the WSCC workforce development program from the experiences and attitudes of managers.

Participant Descriptions

To gain a greater understanding of the partnerships between business and industry and workforce development customized training programs, the researcher derived data from a group of business and industry managers who have had a partnership with the Wallace State

Community College workforce development customized training program. This research demonstrates the personal reflections of the managers concerning their partnerships as well as observations on the viability and future of customized training. To highlight the personal and professional attributes of individual managers, and further clarify the attitudes and opinions described in this chapter, a brief description of the participant and his or her business or industry is provided.

Bill

Bill is a prominent, respected, community-oriented businessman who runs a member-owned electric cooperative. Currently, this business serves residential, commercial, and industrial members in four north Alabama counties. In meeting the needs of the rural area, Bill's business serves more than 42,000 members and maintains more than 3,300 miles of line. Consequently, the business has approximately 100 full-time employees. Bill graduated from a state university with a master's degree in business administration and has held his current position for 14 years. Previous to his current position, Bill has worked in diverse industrial positions for past 40 years. Reflecting his dedication to the community, Bill is active in a number of service groups and professional organizations including WSCC Alumni Association, Chamber of Commerce, and the Rotary Club.

Bob

Bob runs a well-organized, state-of-the-art business that serves the community by housing criminals. The facility houses inmates from Cullman County, various municipalities in Cullman County, and federal inmates. The institution is a \$12.5 million correctional facility that

holds 236-beds and accommodates a 10-bed juvenile facility. In his current position as warden, Bob oversees 40 employees as well as work-release inmates who fill in when needed. Bob has a master's degree in criminal justice and is presently working on a doctorate in human services. He has been in law enforcement for 20 years as a patrolman, D.A.R.E. officer, and chief of police.

Sam

Sam is a manager of a business that makes car horn switches that are mostly used by the Chrysler auto manufacturing company. Sam graduated from a local community college and has been an employ of the industry for 18 years. In fact Sam's first full-time job was in an entry-level position at the industry he now manages. At the time of the interview the industry ran a skeleton crew in preparation for permanently closing the industry. The researcher noted the depressed and gloomy atmosphere that permeated the buildings. According to Sam, the industry had been outsourced to Honduras due to the fact that Honduran workers can make the same horn switches for 15 cents less than their American counterparts. Sam, reflecting upon this aspect of the current economic climate, stated, "we made a presentation for the sale but were only given one chance to make a bid--we lost out by 15 cents." The industry closed shortly after the study research ended.

Peter

Peter is a manager of a steel company that produces frames and conveyers commonly used in the coal industry. The industry has been operational for more than 35 years and currently employs 192 workers. Throughout the interviews, Peter expressed an overwhelming desire to support his community and maintained that safety was a priority within his workplace. As part

owner of the business Peter was deeply concerned about building a better partnership between his industry and WSCC. Currently, Peter needs to hire fitters and welders, which he may have to seek from outside of the community.

Lance

Lance manages an industry that manufactures bumpers, fenders, and thermoplastic sealing systems and is a supplier for all major automotive manufacturers. This industry was founded in 1948 in Germany and located a branch in Alabama in 1995. Currently the industry has approximately 500 employees, including the 27 under Lance's supervision. Lance is friendly, approachable and devoted to both his industry and employees. After graduating from a state university with a business degree, Lance entered the automotive industry where he has worked for 15 years.

Judy

Judy is a manager for a steel fabrication industry that employs 200 workers. The industry opened in 1997 and continues to have a long-standing partnership with WSCC's welding department and workforce development program. Judy has a degree in human resources and is currently responsible for skills training initiatives for all employees. Judy is active in community service organizations including Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club.

Guy

Guy manages an industry that produces brake drum hubs and rotors for heavy-duty trucks and trailers. This industry was established in 1946 and has been an important economic factor in

the community for more than 60 years. Guy has a master's degree in business management and was recruited from a comparable business in Arkansas in 2008. Guy is responsible for supervising 46 of the 200 workers currently employed in this industry.

James

James is the human resource manager at an industry that was founded in Japan in 1935 and opened its doors in Alabama in 2004. This industry produces car parts for Honda, Nissan, and Toyota automobiles and currently employs 226 workers. James has a master's degree in human resources and has 28 years of experience in the field. James serves as the community liaison for his company and is active in numerous local, state, and national business organizations. As the industry liaison for an international company, James is "the face and voice" that represents his company in the community. Additionally, James is responsible for training partnerships with the local workforce development program.

George

George manages a family owned business that manufactures and sells heating and air conditioning units. He attended community college and has almost 10 years of managerial experience. George supervises 12 employees and has worked with WSCC on previous workforce development training projects. As a lifelong resident of the area, George believes that a strong relationship with WSCC is important to both his business and the community. Like his counterparts in the study, he is active in local business organization such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club.

Rick

Rick is the manager of a poultry product processing industry. This business was founded in Georgia in 1949 and currently operates three plants across the southeast. The company is a privately owned business categorized under the Poultry Slaughtering and Processing Act. Currently, the company shows annual revenue of \$20 million and employs a staff of approximately 250. Rick is active in a number of civic and service organizations including the Cullman Chamber of Commerce, WSCC Alumni Program, Rotary Club, and Lion's Club and, as representative of his company, sponsors a local elementary school.

Data Analysis

The participants in this study were asked to reveal personal reflections of their experiences associated with the partnership between the business/industry they work for and WSCC workforce development customized training program. Personal interviews and researcher observations were coded and analyzed. From the data analysis, four major emerging themes were identified. These themes included the following: (a) the importance of proximity and cost, (b) the role of education/training skills in industry, (c) the role of communication, and (d) a shift toward Alabama Technology Network (ATN)

Theme 1: The Importance of Proximity and Cost

The business and industry managers interviewed for this research study expressed strong attitudes concerning the role WSCC plays in offering training programs to meet their labor demands. All of the business and industry managers were located within a 10-mile radius of the WSCC. As WSCC is the only community college in the Cullman County area, alternative

options for training are located in Decatur at a distance of over 40 miles from the area, Gadsden at a distance of over 50 miles away, and Birmingham, also 50 miles away from the Cullman area. Because of the distance to other alternate training programs, each participant frequently mentioned the importance, or potential importance, of having a local community college that could provide skills training at a reasonable cost. Most of the interviewees were particularly cognizant of the positive role a local community college training facility could have for a business or industry located in a rural area. According to Lance, the manager of a large auto parts manufacturing business, “The Wallace State workforce development program has been good for my business. We are a rural area and having the college nearby, offering training we need is one of the reasons the business located here.” Lance further stressed that the customized training program was a viable option for his company because it was “cost effective and we don’t have to pay to travel--it’s convenient like a local mall and you get what you need without leaving the area.” Guy, a manager of break drum and rotor manufacturing plant, reflected Lance’s views on the importance of convenience and cost in establishing a working partnership for customized training. Guy explained: “Our employees who are alumni of Wallace State always recommend the college and they like being able to get additional training at a place close to home. I think it’s important to keep the training in the community.”

In describing their views concerning their partnership with the WSCC workforce development program, interviewees also commented on the importance of affordable training provided by the college. Each of the managers mentioned the cost of training, especially in the current challenging economic conditions, as a major area of concern for the success of their industry. According to Sam, “We have to train our employees to move forward but training costs can cut into the bottom line in my business. Without the training from the college workforce

program, we would be in serious trouble.” Sam appreciated the ability to customize both the training his employees required as well as the cost of training. He commented:

With customization, we can often reduce the cost of programs. Sometimes my employees need only part of a course or a short-term workshop instead of the full course. Wallace State was willing to work with us to give us what we need for training and adjust to cost based on what we received. A good example of this happened a few years ago when our employees needed to brush up on computer skills and some new software we were using. The college [WSCC] did a one day workshop for our people at a fee we negotiated and could afford.

Guy also identified the relatively low cost of customized training offered by the WSCC workforce development program as an important way his business has used “to overcome big obstacle in our training needs.” For instance, when Guy’s business attempted to duplicate the training they had received from the WSCC workforce development program for a branch of the industry in Arkansas, they found the comparable training sessions offered at North West Arkansas Community College was “six times the cost of Wallace State”, creating the need to reorganize and look at other training options. As Judy noted, “We are fortunate to have a community college in the area that offers training at a price we can afford.”

Reflecting on the observations, Lance, Sam, Guy, Judy, Bill, and Bob were also keenly aware of the importance of convenience and reasonable cost in providing skills training for their respective industries. Sam noted, “Wallace State’s customized training programs are local and they provide a needed service in the community at a price we can afford--we are very lucky to have a community college so close.” As the manager of a large correctional facility, Bob was adamant about the important role WSCC plays in training personnel. According to Bob:

Wallace State is an important part of our business and helps us prepare for a world that is constantly changing. Our employees have to be up-to-date on the latest technology that is available. Wallace State is on the forefront of providing that knowledge and I know our workers will receive the best training possible at a reasonable cost--and won’t have to drive for hours to get it.

The presence of a local community college with the ability to provide customized training was considered to be a vital element in the success for local business and industry.

All of the participants commented on the strong role a local community college can play in training employees, particularly for industries located in a rural area. Bill commented,

Cullman County was once a farming community but since the 1960s, more and more industry has moved in. Having a community college to train employees is one of the reasons Cullman has been able to shift from farming to industry.

Sam, the manager of a small business on the brink of closing, explained: “Wallace State was a very important asset to workforce training for us. The college is only 15 minutes away and has a great reputation--I think it also helps to bring in new industry.” Judy, a Human Resource director for a large steel fabrication plant, agreed with previous respondents concerning the WSCC workforce training program and was consistently enthusiastic about the overall customized training program provided by WSCC. She strongly asserted that the close proximity of the college allows her business “to utilize their neighbors’ [WSCC] tools for training” and consequently “build a relationship that can supply qualified candidates for employment.” According to Judy the only negative element of the WSCC customized workforce development program is that “they are six miles away.” Judy expostulated: “We are a rural community and without Wallace State our workers would have to drive to either Birmingham or Huntsville for training. That would mean extra expense and lost hours of production. Having a community college nearby, willing to work with you to train employees, is a great benefit and opportunity for the businesses located here.”

As a community liaison for his large manufacturing plant, James acknowledged WSCC and the customized training offered by the college workforce development program as elemental in his business’s ability to be competitive in a difficult economic climate. James commented,

If Wallace State wasn't there I don't know where our employees would come from. Having a college with the reputation of Wallace State lifts the general education level of the area. The college can provide lifelong skills for employment--and a nearby and cost effective place to keep skills updated. A lot of young people decide not to go to a university and having a community college in the area to help train people to be successful in industry is important, especially for a business like mine. People from the area can find good paying jobs in the community, stay here, raise a family here. The faculty and administration at Wallace State provides a service for the community by producing technically prepared workers. It's a win-win situation for all.

The interview responses of Bob and Lance agreed with James' observation of the role of proximity and cost in a strong, viable partnership between their respective industries and the WSCC workforce development customize training program. According to Lance, having a college in the community "ready and able to provide ongoing training for employees" was a key factor in locating his business in the area.

Although several of the interviewees reported traveling to other facilities out of the area for training, all managers recognized the potential value of a local workforce development program. For example, Bill commented on the necessity of having a local workforce development customize training program offer an apprentice lineman program. Bill stated,

Alabama in general has lagged behind other states in skills training for my employees and it is very expensive to send employees out of the state for training. I have asked Wallace State to incorporate an apprentice lineman program into the Wallace State workforce development program for a long time but they did not respond. Calhoun agreed to offer an apprentice lineman program for the northern half of the state. There are two other programs offered in the state at community colleges, one is in Prattville and the other in Dothan. I still have to send my employees out of Cullman for training. It is an added expense monetarily as well as extra time taken off from work. Calhoun is a better option than we did have. It was not until the last two to three years that a lineman program was offered in Alabama.

Although Bill takes advantage of the local community college skills training when applicable, one of his greatest skills training needs must be met outside of Cullman. Furthermore, George's business is listed as having a partnership with WSCC workforce development program but actually utilizes the training services of Gadsden State Community College (GSCC), an

institution over 50 miles away from his facility. According to George, “Gadsden State offers the exact training we need on up-to-date equipment. Wallace State doesn’t have what we need right now.” However, George recognized that being able to send his employees to WSCC, a mere 10 miles from his facility, rather than GSCC, would be a potential “time and money saver” for his business and employees. George is reluctant to sever his unutilized connections with WSCC because he considers “it is a good marketing tool because many of our graduates come from there” and “it keeps our businesses name in the community.” George also hopes that WSCC customized workforce development program will be able to offer the training he needs in the future.

All of the respondents in this study recognized the value of a community college in close proximity to their businesses. Because the business managers interviewed for this study operated in a rural area, the proximity of the college was of particular significance. Bill affirmed, “The business and industry in Cullman County is here, in part, because of the college and the training we can get here.” In fact, several managers believed that the college not only provides the needed services of skills training through a customized workforce development program but also “lifts the educational levels of the whole community.” Managers who were not utilizing the training opportunities currently provided by WSCC, were keenly aware of the potential of a “training facility within minutes” from their industries area expressed a desire to take advantage of the college workforce development program in the future. The low cost of training at WSCC, provided by both the college workforce development program and the Alabama Technology Network (ATN), a government funded and staffed technology training program that is part of the two-year college system and a training sites is located at Wallace State, is a key factor in current or potential strong partnerships with the college. Additionally, several respondents noted that the

presence of WSCC in a rural community was a “great PR [public relations] value in getting industry in the area.” As Bill commented,

Ask any member of the Cullman County Chamber of Commerce and they will tell you . . . Wallace State and the training programs they can offer to teach and update employee skills is the best marketing tool we have. How else would we get industries from overseas to locate in our community?

Theme 2: Role of Education/Training Skills in Industry

The participants were asked to describe the training initiatives provided by WSCC customized workforce development program and examine the role these programs play in their business or industry. A majority of the participants considered the education and training component provided by the college to be an integral element of skills training for their employees and utilized the WSCC workforce development program for the majority of employee training. According the participants in this study, without the customized training offered by WSCC, their businesses would not be able to keep up with the skill demands. In describing the role of customized training in their particular industries, the phrase “long-term value” resonated throughout many of the interviews. In relating how skills training benefited his business, Bill made the following observation:

We have made several requests to Wallace State over the years to develop training programs to teach new skills to our current employees. With new technologies being introduced every day, job responsibilities are changing at a rapid rate. If we are going to keep updated, we have to have a reliable source of training and that is where the college is going to play a big role in the success or failure of the economy in this area. We have been told that there will probably be an employee shortage in the next five years or so. We will need to fill that void with competent, skilled workers and Wallace State can help us do exactly that.

The participants agreed that the WSCC customized training programs had great potential in preparing their workers for 21st century demands and expressed the hope of strengthening their

partnerships with the college as a way to help employees “stay on the cutting edge” of the skills needed for success.

In describing the types of training found most useful in their individual business or industry, interviewees described a number of initiatives that had been successful and served to strengthen the partnership with the WSCC customized workforce development program. According to Bill, some of the training experienced by his workers was “broad and non-specific, such as brushing up on computer skills or a basic math course.” At other times, the college provided more job specific instruction, such as a certification training or training for a new software program. This flexibility in adjusting to the needs of the business and industry was reiterated by several of the interviewees as a vital element of their partnership with WSCC. For example, Lance was particularly impressed by a certification program that he was able to negotiate with WSCC. This certification program was specific to his company and required a great deal of “streamlining and adjusting.” Lance explained, “The college worked with me to develop a certification program we needed . . . they adapted the course to teach my employees the skills they were lacking for certification. Wallace State changed my unskilled workers to a skilled labor force.” Echoing this opinion, Judy observed:

Over the years, whatever we needed for training, Wallace State has been there for us. Whether we needed a longer term training program for a new machine or software program or a short workshop on plant safety, the college worked with us to develop what we needed. When you are in this business, you don’t know what changes are ahead--you don’t know what new technology will come into the industry. I know that whatever changes come around, Wallace State will be there to help keep our employees up-to-date.

The interviewees with strong partnerships with the college workforce development program were vocal in their praise for the flexibility and quality of the skills training offered by the college.

When asked to discuss the types of training they had received from the WSCC customized workforce training program, the respondents described a wide range of training initiatives. Several managers had developed partnerships with specific industrial or technological programs with the college, such as drafting or welding, and training had been developed within the parameters of the specific programs. Case on point, Lance met with the workforce development program personnel and “took the catalog and created a customized industrial maintenance certification for his employees.” Another example is Judy, she requested a unique training session for a potential welding employee and it was carried out at Wallace. After the training session was complete, “we were able to hire 14 people from that pool of candidates.” Furthermore, Judy, whose business required workers who were proficient in welding and ongoing training on the latest welding equipment and safety standards, reported she has a strong relationship with the welding program director and described outstanding results in the skills training for her employees. Judy explained,

He [WSCC welding program director] is always willing to set up whatever is necessary to help train our people. He also sends good applicants in our direction, people who can go to work immediately. In return, I come to the college as a guest speaker and talk to students about jobs in the field. I also set up field trips for him and his students at the plant.

Judy considered her partnership with WSCC as reciprocal and believed the “give and take” in her relationship with the WSCC welding program benefited both her business as well as the college.

In discussing the training initiatives offered by WSCC customized workforce development program, one issue in particular was mentioned by a majority of participants--a lack of reading and math skills found among their employees. The business managers interviewed for this study agreed that workers needed to hone their math and reading skills and that WSCC

provided an excellent venue for this type of training. Peter commented very strongly on his workers deficiency in math skills. He reported, “math skills are a necessity for my industry and they do not have those skills.” Judy reiterated by reporting that her employees “lack the basic math skills such as the knowledge to use a measuring tape and that skill is essential for my industry.” Bill echoed them both, “we have a great need for trained workers however, and potential workers lack the reading and math skills necessary for my business.”

The participants interviewed for this study also discussed the importance of certification training offered by WSCC workforce development program or through ATN. Indeed, for several of the managers, the certification training was considered to be “the most important training we need from the college.” According to Lance,

Safety training is required for all personnel in my plant, even me. We have state and federal government regulations that have to be met. Everybody here has to have understanding safety standards. If you fail to get that training for your people, you can be fined or shut down. We are fortunate have Wallace State to help us with the certification process.

Certification training for federal or state requirements, such as the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), was identified as both an important and ongoing training need for the majority of the managers. Sam commented, “Not only to we have to train and certify new employees coming into the job, we have to keep our long-time employees updated. I rely on ATN at Wallace State for ADEM training.” Judy concurred, stating, “We need the college not just for training in the welding program, but for certification in ADEM and an industrial management certification. The college also helped us put together a manual for certification process that we use today.”

In conducting research for this study, the researcher discovered an interesting cultural phenomenon concerning the training needs of workers from other nations. Over the last decade,

several international industries have located to the Cullman area, introducing cultural diversity to a rural community. The cultural difference permeates into the area of skills training. According to James, who works with an automotive parts producer based in Japan, “the workers from other nations are often trained very differently than their counterparts in America.” For example, James noted a distinct cultural difference in the way the Japanese workers are trained for specific jobs within the industry. For the Japanese workers, training was often done in-house, during the evenings after work and conducted by instructors from Japan. According to James, “I know there is a language barrier but I think they [Japanese owners of the business] see our training methods of lax and inferior.” Although the WSCC workforce development program is used to train American workers for ADEM and other required training, the Japanese receive all of their training through the industry. The challenge for American managers in international industries is, in James’ opinion, “to blend the Japanese culture with the typical way Americans deliver training.”

In addition to training for specific skills and certification training, the WSCC workforce development program has also offered other opportunities to the community to improve the overall educational level of the county. For example, the college offers year-round Graduation Equivalency Exams (GED) and test preparation. Although this facet of the college is not an area that is part of workforce development, Bob was able to utilize the area in a very unique and unusual way to assist the workers and inmates in his detention facility. When Bob became aware that a large number of inmates did not have a high school diploma, he contacted his workforce development liaison at WSCC. According to Bob,

They [WSCC workforce development personnel] made phone calls all the way to Washington, DC to get permission to test at the facility. They worked with the GED program to teach prep classes and the workforce development director attended the

graduation ceremony that was held for our people. The workforce development was willing to go that extra step and open other areas of college for us.

Bob believed that expanding the workforce development scope into his facility in a unique way had allowed individuals who would not otherwise have access to education to gain education and a better chance for successful employment as well as allow federal inmates favorable standing.

Although the majority of managers reported satisfaction with the type of training received from WSCC workforce development program, several participants mentioned training needs that were not being met--or that were insufficient to the labor requirements for specific industries. According to Rick, the WSCC Development Program tends to focus on the training needs of the automotive industry, often bypassing other industries. Rick stated: "I know that there has been a move to bring several automobile industries into Cullman and Cullman County but there are many industries in the area that need something different." Rick believed that WSCC should be more alert to the training needs of all industries in the service area. George concurred with this observation, explaining,

I would like to be able to use the college workforce development program more than I do. My problem is that the courses and training offered just don't fit what my people need. I have spoken to several people at the college but haven't been able to work out a training program that will work for us. I need training for my workers on the latest, state-of-the art equipment and Wallace State doesn't have that specific type of technology on their campus. They [WSCC workforce development personnel] have not seemed interested in developing a program in my area and I'm not the only one who needs it.

Several of the managers interviewed for this study mentioned "serious gaps" in the training offered by the WSCC workforce development program. Rick, Bob, and Bill described a problem with the courses and/or training offered currently by the college and some have been unable to establish a dialogue with college workforce development personnel to make adjustments or additions to training initiatives. Peter also offered strong opinions about the WSCC workforce

development customize training programs “the lack of response to our needs.” According to Peter,

At one time, the college offered some good training for my employees. I had a contact person who worked with me but that has more or less lapsed. I use ATN for ADEM certification but I need training from the drafting department and I haven’t been able to set that up.

All of the managers who identified a problem with the services offered by the WSCC workforce development program believed the problem to be based on either a lack of communication or a seeming lack of interest from the college.

In considering the vital importance of a strong partnership between business and industry and a local community college for employee skills training, several respondents expressed a concern about future needs. Bill noted the following:

In our particular industry, approximately 50% of the people in the technical section and lower to mid management area will be eligible to retire within the next 5 years. That is a significant void to fill with qualified, competent, and skilled persons. This is not just a local issue; it is industry specific across the country for the most part. I’m not certain where that project is at WSCC but I understand three community colleges in the north, middle, and south Alabama have similar technical programs underway and are doing this training.

Bill believed that the under-utilization of WSCC as a tool for training is, for the most part, “probably beyond the control of WSCC personnel such as budgets won’t allow, instructors aren’t available.”

The managers interviewed for this study reported a varied range of training initiatives offered by the college. Most were satisfied with the level and availability of the skills training provided and were of the opinion that the WSCC customized workforce development program met their current needs. Several managers were keenly appreciative of the flexible and innovative ways that the workforce development personnel met the training requirements of their respective businesses and industries. Although the majority of respondents were positive and

complimentary in their evaluation of the skills training offered by the college, others believed that the college could do more for their current and future needs. Despite the problems identified by several managers, all of the participants concurred that the WSCC customized workforce development program had tremendous potential for preparing Cullman County workers for the challenges of the 21st century.

Theme 3: Communication

Communication between the college workforce development program and business/industry was identified as a key factor in establishing a successful partnership by the participants of the study. The ease of communication with WSCC personnel allowed for a continued and viable partnership for the majority of the managers. As Bill noted, “We simply pick up the phone and call the college to get the help we need. From time to time, someone from Wallace State will drop by the office and ask what we need for skills training. Being able to communicate easily with the workforce development people at Wallace State makes my job easier.” Echoing the importance of communication in building a strong partnership with the WSCC workforce development program, Lance described sending e-mails to the WSCC workforce development director with descriptions of training programs needed for his business. “I am able to tell them [WSCC Workforce Development Program] what we need and they always work with us to develop a training program.” Lance was also appreciative of the ease of communication between his business and WSCC/ATN concerning training initiatives. He explained, “We are fortunate to have a community college in a rural area like Cullman County and staying in touch with the college is important to us. When I contact the college about the

training we need, I get a quick response.” As an example of how a reliable system of communication benefited his business, Lance made the following comment:

Our partnership with the college began with a maintenance apprentice program offered by the college several years ago. My employees needed only part of the training offered instead of the full certification program. The workforce development people worked with me to come up with a plan that fit what my people needed. We were able to sit down with a college catalog to modify something that met our needs. Coming up with this plan--they [WSCC workforce development program] offered A-Z but we just needed A-N--required constant communication for a while. The workforce director called, e-mailed and even came to my office to talk with me personally. I was really impressed with their patience and their willingness to customize a plan for us.

Lance attributed the success of the training initiative to the ease and consistency of communication with WSCC workforce development personnel. In fact, after completing the customized program developed for his business, many of his employees were only a few courses short of an associate’s degree when they finished the certification program. A majority of these workers returned to WSCC to earn a degree, benefiting both the business and the college.

For the majority of participants, a personal relationship with a college workforce development director or faculty member was vital in maintaining communication and a resulting strong partnership with the college. As Judy commented, “I know who to call for what I need. I have developed friendships with several of the workforce development personnel and feel comfortable calling or e-mailing. I feel I have someone on my side at Wallace State who really cares about our employees.” Data analysis also revealed that study participants valued uninitiated communications from their college liaison(s) who called or e-mailed to “check and see what our training needs might be now and in the future.” This “keep in touch” approach to communication was considered to be crucial in maintaining a robust partnership with the college.

The researcher also noted that social networking often occurred due to the points of contact that were established between the college and industries. The points of contact allowed

for personal conversations and relationships to develop--this element of communication was considered a high priority for the participants. Several of the business/industry managers revealed the name of the WSCC contact person and noted that they were “confident that someone at Wallace State would help solve their skills problems.” Judy acknowledged that she had built a strong personal relationship with WSCC, in particular with the Director of Institutional Advancement and the college Vice President. According to Judy, the Director of Institutional Advancement, “is a great contact because she points you in the right directions. All I have to do is call and ask for assistance. If she can’t answer my questions she always refers me to someone who can.” For James, the WSCC Director of Career Services and an instructor in the electronics program were mentioned as personal points of contact for employee training initiatives and programs. James explained, the Director of Career Services

shares information about upcoming education programs and events. She always contacts me if there are any programs that she thinks we might be interested in--like a career day the college sponsored not long ago. I was able to set up a booth and recruit some new employees.

James also described the importance of the “personal touch” in his relationship with WSCC workforce development personnel. According to James, the instructor in the electronics department

is also someone we can rely on to help us with our needs. He actually comes to our business and asks us what we need in the way of training. We also arrange tours at our plant for Wallace State students in the drafting and welding programs. It’s a way for us to give back some of what Wallace State gives us.

This reciprocal relationship, based on a strong communication system, seems to maintain a social networking system that serves to promote both the business and the college.

Although 7 of the 10 interviewees included positive attitudes concerning their communication with the WSCC workforce development personnel, 3 participants expressed

concerns about their current communication with the college, due in part to changes in the WSCC workforce development directorship and faculty. For example, Peter, who reported a strong relationship and excellent communication with the former drafting instructor and his liaison with WSCC, had been unable to reestablish a workable partnership with the college since he had retired. According to Peter,

Since he [former drafting instructor] retired, I guess our partnership with the college has more or less dissolved. He was a great contact and source of training for our workers. Right now, Wallace State doesn't help us as they did in the past.

Peter also discussed his recent attempts to reinstate communication with WSCC, explaining,

In March of 2011 our chief draftsman went to Wallace State to try to set up another partnership. As of now, nothing has come of it. Frankly, the college just isn't servicing us and that not only hurts us but the community--we have to look outside of the community to hire and train.

Like Peter, Sam and Rick have also been unable to reestablish communication with the college workforce development program after a long-term relationship with a college liaison was terminated. According to Sam,

After our contact took another job, we just seemed to lose touch with the college. We have gone through ATN (Alabama Technology Network) instead of the college workforce development program--although some of the training could have been better provided by the welding or drafting departments.

A strong, reciprocal system of communication with a specific contact person within the college workforce development program was regarded by all participants as key to establishing and maintaining a viable partnership. For those managers who considered the communication with the college to be "easy in both directions" and "something that can be depended on," partnerships were consistently valued as successful. Participants with a strong communication system with college personnel reported using e-mail as their most frequent method of communication but also appreciated the freedom to "make a phone call when a training need

came up” and have those phone calls returned in a timely manner. When the ease of communication with a contact within the college workforce development program was lacking, participants rated their partnerships with WSCC as unsatisfactory in meeting their training needs. However, participants who reported a negative experience with communication with the college also commented that re-establishing a relationship with a contact within the workforce development program would “go a long way in getting back on track with the college.” Peter expressed his opinion best, stating,

We have a college that could meet all of our training needs less than 20 minutes away from here. We need what Wallace State has the potential to provide for us. I hope we can get that relationship back and develop some training programs that would benefit everybody involved.

Theme 4: A Shift toward Alabama Technology Network Services

When Wallace State Community College was chosen as one of the locations for the Alabama Technology Network (ATN), the college workforce development program created a partnership with ATN to meet the skills training needs of the area. Because ATN can often offer grants to cover the cost of training and can sometimes provide more flexibility in creating customized training opportunities than the college workforce development program, participants noted that they often turn to ATN for specific skills training. Indeed, the researcher noted that several of the interviewees used ATN exclusively for all of their skills training. Most of the managers mentioned that they had recently used or were currently working with ATN for at least some of their training needs. For example, Lance and James both mentioned that ATN provided the environmental training for their employees seeking ADEM certification. According to Lance,

We used classes from Wallace State in the past but training mandated such as ADEM training we use ATN. They [ATN] sent out a newsletter to all the plants in the area about setting up a time and place for ADEM training. They were willing to accommodate us

and actually came on site to do the training. With the Wallace State training, you have to bring a big group on campus to train--we would have to close down sections of the plant to send employees to the college to get certified. With ATN, we can train a few at a time on site. It's just easier and more efficient for us.

According to Lance, his company currently uses the ATN training initiatives for more for short-term skills training and WSCC workforce development for the more in-depth, long term training initiatives. It was noted by the researcher that ATN was used exclusively by all managers for ADEM compliance certification training. However, Lance, like other interviewees, considered ATN part of the WSCC workforce development program and a valuable resource for employee training needs. As Bob commented, "We are lucky, living in a rural area like Cullman County, to have choices for training. We can use the Wallace State training program and facilities or ATN and between the two we have the bases covered."

For three of the respondents, ATN provided for all skills training needs and their partnerships with WSCC were based fully on ATN contacts. Rick, who manages an animal by-product factory near the college, described his reasons for working with ATN for all his skills training with the following statement:

My workers need short-term training for specific reasons--like ADEM certification or software training for computers, things like that. ATN works with us to develop what we need and will work with any size group, large or small. Instructors with ATN will come on site or arrange classes at the college. The flexibility is what I like as well as the fact that ATN contacts us on a regular basis and asks about our needs. So far, ATN has filled our requirements for training and we have not needed to contact anyone with the college.

Because ATN currently meets all of his training needs, Rick has had little contact with the WSCC workforce development program personnel. According to Rick, "That needs to change--with the college so close and some of my employees needing to better their math and technical writing skills, we need what the college can offer. ATN doesn't teach English or math classes."

Like Rick, James also utilizes ATN for all training needs, citing flexibility, cost and ease of communication as his reasons for his choice to rely on ATN. James was impressed by the ATN newsletter sent throughout the year with a listing of available training courses as well as the communication initiated by the ATN personnel. Peter commented, “I can get in touch with them when I need to, I know who to call. Sam reiterated the sentiment. They [ATN] call me from time to time to ask about what I need.” Lance also mentioned cost as a major reason for choosing ATN as his sole workforce development training. He cited the following example:

We needed a training program offered by ATN but didn't have the funds at the time to cover the expense. My ATN contact arranged a grant for us that covered the whole cost of the training. They [ATN] have resources like that and the college doesn't. For us, ATN has delivered and I hope we can keep them in this area permanently. I don't think the Wallace State workforce program can deliver what we have been able to get from ATN.

All of the interviewees agreed that ATN was able to provide training for employees at a cost that could not be matched by either the WSCC workforce development program or other training opportunities further afield.

Although the majority of the respondents viewed ATN as an “arm of the Wallace State workforce development customize training program” and an integral part of their partnership with the college, others considered the agency as a separate entity. For example, Sam stated, “We don't actually have a partnership with the college, our partnership is with ATN.” This opinion was echoed in interviews with Rick who commented, “We have let our partnership with the college workforce development program lapse because ATN provides all we need.” In preliminary interviews with WSCC workforce development personnel, the researcher also discovered some confusion as to “where the line between ATN and the college” was drawn and that occasionally, “ATN and the workforce development customize training program on campus will overlap.” For those participants who rated their WSCC workforce development partnership

as strong and satisfactory in meeting their training needs, ATN was considered a vital component of the “whole package” of their partnership with the college. Bob commented, “With this down economy and government cuts, I just hope the college can keep ATN in the area. We need what both of them give us.”

For the study participants, ATN delivered a flexible and cost-effective method of training employees, especially for short-term skills training programs or certification initiatives. Data analysis revealed a shift toward the services provided by ATN in these areas as well as the managers’ explanations for the shift. Although participants had previously used the skills training services of the WSCC workforce development program in short-term and certification programs, the majority of managers interviewed for this study believed that “There are some kinds of training that the college workforce development program does a great job on . . . but other types of training are best handled by ATN.” Additionally, respondents recognized the importance of consistent communication with ATN, including a newsletter with information on upcoming training opportunities and other pertinent information. Several respondents had also been able to take advantage of grants to cover the cost of ATN training programs. Although, a majority of the interviewees considered ATN as part of the WSCC customized workforce development program and therefore an integral part of their partnership with the college, other managers, such as Rick and Peter, viewed workforce development partnership with ATN rather than the college.

Summary

The managers interviewed for this study displayed strong views on the role the WSCC customized workforce development program played in their respective businesses and industries.

Data analysis revealed that close proximity and cost effectiveness were considered key elements in their decision to utilize the skills training available at WSCC. Additionally, respondents were aware of training problems associated with their location in a rural area and the potential WSCC workforce development initiatives could have in training employees. Respondents also recognized the broad range of skills training programs provided by the college through workforce development programs and ATN. Several managers made suggestions for how these training programs could be improved through building better partnerships through communication. The role of communication provided a theme that resonated throughout the interviews. Those managers who viewed their communication with WSCC workforce development as strong and positive, were generally satisfied with their partnerships. However, if communication was lacking, partnerships between managers and the college workforce development program was often rated as unsatisfactory and unable to meet the needs the business. Lastly, data evaluation revealed a definite shift toward ATN services, especially in the areas of short-term and certification training.

The respondents expressed strong concerns about the ability of the current and future labor force in meeting their labor requirements. The participants in this study recognized the strong need to have an institution that would train workers for the dynamic labor force as well as retrain and update current employees. Many were positive about the role of WSCC in provided the necessary training for their business or industry and look forward to a continued partnership. However, several of the participants revealed a level of dissatisfaction with the types of training WSCC provided, citing “holes” and “gaps” in the workforce development services. The researcher noted that managers who were satisfied with their partnerships with WSCC workforce

development either required less complex training or relied on ATN for the majority of the skills training needs.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A community college workforce development customized training program can provide the necessary skills training to meet the demands of a dynamic labor market (Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, 2009). Currently, community colleges across the United States are developing partnerships with business and industry to prepare a skilled workforce in meeting the demands of the 21st century. The current focus on workforce development has generated numerous studies on skills training initiatives and community and government roles (Rosenfeld et al., 2006). While these studies present valuable information on diverse aspects of community college workforce development programs, little research exists specifically on the partnerships between the community college workforce development customized training program and business/industry managers from the manager's perspectives. Understanding how these business/industry managers view their partnerships with a community college and how they utilize this service to benefit their business or industry will add to the knowledge base of how effective customized training workforce development partnerships are formed and maintained.

This research focused on how business and industry managers viewed their partnerships with the customized training workforce development program at WSCC. The results of this study highlighted the personal reflections of individuals who had utilized the workforce training services provided by the college within the last five years. The findings of this study indicated that the business/industry managers recognized the important role of customized training in

preparing a skilled and successful labor force, as well as the impact that competent workers can have on the economy of the community and nation. Additionally, four recurring themes emerged from data collected by the researcher. These themes include (a) proximity and cost, (b) education and training initiatives, (c) communication, and (d) a shift toward Alabama Technology Network (ATN).

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

How did the collaborative partnership form between business/industry managers and the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

Research revealed that partnerships were established between the WSCC customized training workforce development program and the managers selected to participate in this study in one of two ways. Five of the nine participants reported an initial contact instigated by the college. According to these managers, college officials initiated contact by visiting their businesses and offered the services of the college in meeting their employee training needs. For instance, James reported the WSCC President and the college Vice-President, “visited our industry when it first opened and told us of available training programs,” and introduced Wallace State to the international industry. Also, Judy reported that the Vice President “made several trips to my business to ask what type of training we needed.” Four of the participants described seeking out WSCC customized training to meet specific skills training. The participants expressed the importance of a partnership with the local community college workforce development customized training program and reported that their viable partnership was due to the fact that they have a relationship with a contact person. Conversely, those participants who

did not have a reliable contact within the WSCC workforce development expressed dissatisfaction with their partnerships with the college. These findings support information by the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education (2009) emphasizing the importance of a strong partnership between business and industry grounded upon training and retaining a skilled and innovative labor force.

In exploring Research Question 1, the researcher asked the participants to reflect upon their major goals in establishing a partnership with WSCC customized training workforce development program. For all of the participants, proximity to the college was vital and provided a recurrent theme throughout this study. The managers viewed the location of WSCC as an ideal training institution for their business or industry. This reflects the work of Dougherty (2003) who stressed that location plays a key role in customized training offered to business and industry by community colleges. Because Cullman County is located in a rural area, viable skills training opportunities would be limited without the assistance of the community college workforce development customized training program. Moreover, a low-cost training program was determined to be just as important as proximity and an important motivation in establishing a partnership with WSCC customized training workforce development program. This information reflects current research that stresses the importance of community colleges and workforce development. Case in point, a partnership was formed between St. Louis Community College's Center for Business, Industry & Labor, and Proctor & Gamble to outsource training in an effort to be more cost efficient (St. Louis Business Journal, 1994).

Additionally, the participants in this study identified the need for skills training as reason to initiate and/or continue their partnership with WSCC customized training workforce development program. They view Wallace State as an important educational tool for training

workers. Likewise, it is not common for a business or industry to have the internal ability to complete the training process from beginning to end; thus collaboration is vital for success (Stoll, 2004). Although four of the managers perceived WSCC as not currently meeting all of their skills training needs, the participants voiced a belief that the rural community college had tremendous potential for meeting future labor training demands. These attitudes reflect the fourth element of the Open System Theory (OST) that identifies education as an influential factor in the economic success of a business or industry (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Rural community colleges such as Wallace State, being an important external influence to local business/industry, offers basic education courses and skills training programs that may meet the labor demands of the current rural workforce. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to create partnerships to develop a skills training program for American workers (Bragg, 2001; Green & Galetto, 2005; Melendez et al., 2004; Stoll, 2004).

Research Question 2

How do business/industry partners communicate and share information with the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

Research Question 2 examined how the participants communicated with the WSCC customized training program as well as shared information concerning their respective business/industry skills training needs. The participants represented a diverse group of industries and reported a variety of unique skills needed to meet the demands of their industries for the 21st century. The perceived importance of communication and networking was apparent in the analysis of the data generated by participant interviews.

According to Galetto (2005), an alliance is created to assist with communication among employers, educational and training institutions. All of the respondents reported their primary means of communication was a telephone and e-mails. Both means of communication worked very well to reach their contact person at WSCC. Regardless of the means of communication, the most important element of communication for all of the participants was personal communication with their contact person. According to the managers, WSCC and ATN often send newsletters out to area businesses with information concerning the programs and training available at WSCC. Additionally, workers were able to take advantage of the Internet and apply online for training sessions that corresponded with their work and personal schedules.

The research in this study revealed successful continuous communication as well as the lack thereof and both play a role in the partnerships. It is essential to have continuous communication as well as create social networks between business, industry, and community college workforce development programs (Green & Galetto, 2005). Also, communication to inform the industries of continuous training initiatives is vital. The industries that James, Lance, and Sam work for require a yearly environmental training session and they need a certificate of completion. Through the use of Internet technology registration information is sent. It is with the ease of the Internet that ATN contacts industries and informs them of the environmental training. Furthermore, all participants have a “go-to-person” and that is the primary source of communication found within the partnership. For example, James contacts the Director of Career Services while Bill and Rick contact the Director of Institutional Advancement to make their requests for training known. The researcher found that the greater the communication level, the stronger the partnership. For example, both Judy and James recognized that personal visits from the college Vice President tended to solidify their relationship with WSCC. In addition, Judy

commented, “WSCC is available and has a willingness to be of service.” In contrast, there has been a lack of communication between WSCC workforce development customized training program and some of the participants. Peter currently has no communication with the WSCC workforce development program. He has no partnership with WSCC because his contact person retired. According to Peter, no effort has been made to reestablish contact with him or anyone at his business. Peter reported a sense of frustration based on a lack of partnership with the college and the potential training that could be useful for his employees. The lack of communication and the loss of the partnership may also be seen monetarily. Peter, “we have to pay the workers from Birmingham more than they are worth because they want extra money for driving the distance.”

Moreover, four of the participants stated that the WSCC workforce development program should develop a vision for future training initiatives. Several managers believed that the college needs to focus on preparing for the needs of the 21st century worker. This attitude reflects the views of current research by Wolfe (2007) that predicts a serious labor shortage of skilled workers in the future. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), over half of the jobs in 2015 do not exist today. The managers interviewed for this study were keenly aware of this problem and expressed concern for the impact this lack of skilled workers would have on their businesses. For instance, Bill stated that his business would likely lose a number of “baby boomer aged employees” to retirement, resulting in a dangerously reduced labor pool of linemen. Furthermore Bill stated that there are three higher education institutions in Alabama preparing for this “labor gap,” and he doubted that WSCC was making the necessary changes to meet the labor demands of the 21st century. Peter, whose more experienced workers were expected to retire in the next few years, feared that nothing would be done to help offset the training gap that his business requires. Lastly, participants, like Judy, who viewed their partnerships as successful,

they nevertheless, conveyed a sense of gloom when speaking about academic deficiencies in her workers and potential candidate pools and was uncertain how to communicate this problem.

For those respondents who considered their partnership with WSCC to be successful, a more optimistic view was expressed. For example, Judy remarked that her partnership with the director of the WSCC welding program has been very successful in training employees for welding. Judy discussed her plans to strengthen her partnership with WSCC and hoped to maintain a strong reciprocal connection to the college. Judy was also impressed by the fact that WSCC workforce development personnel would “point you in right direction” if they were unable to provide training needs. Like Judy, Guy’s experience with WSCC workforce development program had been successful because the software training provided by the college “fixed the root cause” computer problem. Both Judy and Guy believed that WSCC would continue to provide flexible and up-to-date training for their future needs.

Furthermore, ease of communication was an important element in building a strong partnership with the WSCC workforce development program. Although the majority of participants expressed positive views of the ease of communication between their business and WSCC/ATN, several managers were dissatisfied with the training initiatives and the level of response of the college to their training needs. A community college workforce development customized training program should be fervently aware of the training needs of local employers as they develop training programs (Kenamer & Katsinas, 2011). For example, Peter, who had established a partnership with the WSCC welding and drafting departments in the past, did not view the college workforce development program as a current partner in training. Peter believed that WSCC had “dropped the ball” in communicating with his business and no longer provided beneficial skills training services for his workers.

All of the participants in this study reflected upon the importance of personal communication with their contact person representing the WSCC customized training workforce development program. Although, several managers were dissatisfied with the communication within their partnerships, all recognized the importance of established and continued communication effort. The managers discussed communication within their partnerships and their expectations for a reciprocal social exchange within their partnerships. Social norms of appropriate communication, such as face-to-face contact, e-mails, and phone calls were described and determined as an element that either weakened or strengthened the partnership. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), understanding how business/industry perceives cultural norms has an important influence on relationships between social institutions. OST identified cultural values as an important external influence. It is because American business/industry place great value on capitalism, the managers in this study expect continuous communication in their partnerships with community college workforce development programs. Moreover, Americans value education; therefore, managers of business/industry expect academic and skills training to occur at the local community college. When a manager communicates a deficiency in the labor pool, it is the responsibility of the community college to exhaust all resources to meet that need.

A reciprocal relationship, such as the partnerships formed between business and industry managers and the WSCC workforce customized training development program, requires ongoing communication from all parties within the social network. Often, the lines of communication are broken if the contact personnel on either side of the partnership is lost for any reason.

Participants who reported a lack of communication with the workforce development program often ceased attempts to communicate with college employees after establishing a relationship with ATN or when their training needs were met by other out-of-area programs or institutions.

Although two managers described contact with the college via visits from the administration and other college personnel, most of the respondents reported instigating a majority of the contacts with varied results.

Research Question 3

How do business and industry perceive the shared benefits of the customized training workforce development program at WSCC?

The participants interviewed for this study identified a number of shared benefits resulting from their partnership with the WSCC customized training workforce development program. Some of the benefits were viewed as immediate solutions to problems that arose in the workplace such as environmental training for ADEM certification and local training. Other benefits were considered more long-term and focused on securing a strong and skilled workforce for the future and the security of a local customized training program.

In addition to training current and future workers for 21st century industry and business, all of the participants noted that proximity of a community college workforce development facility was an important benefit. Several of the managers, noted that, despite their location in a rural region, their workers had the opportunity to gain needed skills training at WSCC. Because their workers were not required to travel out of the area for training, businesses and industries were able to see large cost benefits. In particular, Lance commented on his employees' positive responses to local training, stating that they did not have to leave their jobs or families for an extended period of time. The attitudes of the interviewees concerning the convenience of a local workforce development program located on the campus of the community college reflects the

work of Katsinas and Miller (1998) in identifying rural community colleges as having an advantage for meeting the needs of industry in providing skills training for the labor market.

The participants of the research study also pinpointed specific educational and training initiatives that improved the quality and proficiency of their worker's performance. Case in point, Guy described a customized training program that provided his employees with necessary skills that improved the operation of the industry. According to Guy, the training allowed his company to meet production requirements and improved the overall performance of his labor force. Judy was also able to increase the number of skilled workers for her company due to training initiatives presented by WSCC. Several of the participants noted that WSCC is able to respond quickly in developing a curriculum to suit their needs and they were generally impressed by the lower costs of the programs. Partnerships with community colleges provide important workforce development opportunities and offer a flexible curriculum and access to resources (Bragg, 2001; Brown, 2001; Matthews, 2005; Orr, 2001; Ryan, 2010; Spilde, 2010), and this element was apparent in the data gathered in this research.

This research study asked participants to explain the shared benefits of a partnership between their businesses or industries and WSCC customized training workforce development program. In identifying benefits, participants recognized immediate solutions to deficits in skills training, flexible curriculum, cost effectiveness, and proximity as important components of their relationships with WSCC. OST may be applied to this data by examining the influences of economic conditions, legal/political environment, and education (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The managers interviewed for this study identified legal demands as a strong reason for their partnership with WSCC (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Several participants mentioned training initiatives that helped prepare workers for a certification exam with ADEM, the Alabama environmental

agency. Through ATN workers were able to update their knowledge on current environmental requirements within their businesses. Also, the participants recognized the vital role a strong workforce development program can play in a difficult economic environment. All of the managers considered the current economic recession as a challenge that affected the success of their business or industry. Case in point, Sam explained that his company had lost a recent bid to an overseas industry. His company closed shortly after this research was completed.

Research Question 4

What, if any challenges, have arisen between the partner organizations and how were they resolved?

In describing the challenges of business and industry in regard to their relationship with the WSCC customized training workforce development program, participants addressed several limitations of the program. The following challenges were identified by the participants: deficiencies in reading and math of current and future workers and the response of WSCC in addressing the needs and specific areas within the WSCC customized training workforce development program that failed to meet the needs of business and industry.

An examination of current literature revealed a shortfall of high school students who are either graduating with insufficient skills in reading and math--or who are dropping out of high school (Coulter, 2007; Dobrzeniecki et al., 2006; Stoll, 2004). This potential labor pool, many of whom will seek employment in industry, will not qualify for these jobs because they lack the necessary skills training. Workforce development was designed to assist business and industry in locating skilled labor to meet their current and future needs (Brown, 2001; Matthews, 2005; Orr, 2001). There are several causes for the gap between the skills needed for the labor force and the

lack thereof; however, one is the changing job market (Speizer, 2011). Furthermore, today 85% of the jobs require a higher skill level than in 1950. According to Peter, a participant, his business faces a large gap between needed and acquired skills. He stated as did Judy, James, Bill, and Bob that the deficiency in reading and math skills will decrease their labor pool.

Additionally, Bill and Peter stated that the employees they rely on to train workers in skill deficits will also retire within the next five years. Moreover, there are not enough younger workers to replace the slots vacated by the retiring Baby Boom generation (Wolfe, 2007). The deficit in skills is evident in basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic as well as technical skills. Even though deficits in skills exist, the former drafting instructor saw motivation and worker potential in many of his students. Peter reported that the former drafting instructor would recommend students for employment; however, as Judy stated, “there are less [people] interested in vocational occupations, welding in particular because people view it as a negative. . . .”

Referenced from the literature, workers within a community become a valuable commodity when there is a labor shortage (Dougherty 2003).

The United States is facing a critical shortage of trained workers and currently needs more than a half-million people in our skilled worker training programs (Gillette, 2006; Industry News, 2006; Wolfe, 2007). There are not enough young people choosing to be trained in business/industry, and to compound the problem, the average age of our current skilled labor force is 55 and will be ready for retirement soon. For example, Bill recognized that 50% of his employees in lower and middle management were of the “Baby Boom” generation and would likely retire within the next five years. Looking into the future, he hoped to hire workers who were competent in the reading, math, and critical thinking skills his company requires. Bill viewed his partnership with the WSCC customized training workforce development program as

necessary to meet labor demands for the 21st century. Peter and Judy concurred with this view, identifying a long-range forecast of a need for trained industry workers.

In a further reflection of OST, the managers interviewed for this study identified education demands as a strong reason for their partnership with WSCC (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Several participants mentioned the need for academic training initiatives as well as skills training that needs to be modified to meet the current and future labor market demands. Throughout the interviews, managers reiterated the importance of the educational conditions of Cullman County and lamented the lack of reading and math skills. All of the participants believed that WSCC should make a concerted effort to meet these training needs within this community.

In comparing the training initiatives offered by ATN to those offered by WSCC, several interesting factors were noted by the researcher. For example, ATN offers more complex skills training that require instructors who hold engineering degrees, such as industrial maintenance training and ADEM certification training. Currently WSCC workforce development initiatives focus on soft skills, such as Excel training and Spanish. However, the dividing line between the training programs offered by ATN and WSCC workforce development program are often unclear, even to WSCC workforce development personnel. According to several respondents, ATN has the resources to duplicate services offered at WSCC with more flexibility and at a more reasonable cost. For this reason, business and industry managers are shifting more and more to ATN.

Overarching Question

How do business and industry managers perceive their partnership with the customized training workforce development program at Wallace State Community College?

The overarching question for this study sought to look at the perceptions of the managers of the businesses and industries that utilize the workforce customized training program at WSCC. Each of the sub-questions created for this study was structured to gain insight into the partnerships between business and industry and the WSCC customized training workforce development program. Protocol items were designed to investigate the opinions and attitudes of the business and industry managers and encouraged research subjects to reveal their thoughts and personal experiences of their partnership with the WSCC customized training workforce development program. A careful, comprehensive examination of the participants' responses in relation to their partnership uncovered an intricate, well-organized program on one hand and ineffective communication and skills training gap on the other.

From the examination of the data, the results have shown six participants to have an ongoing partnership with the workforce development customized training program at WSCC. One manager stated, however, our partnership was a "one-time partnership." Another manager stated that he wants and needs a partnership; however, the lack of communication has ended his partnership with WSCC. Consequently, all managers stressed communication to be vitally important with a contact person. Additionally, all participants identified proximity to the training facility as a necessity and all but one stated cost of training was significant. Moreover, many of the participants disclosed that there is a shortfall in the customized training program because the skills needed by workers today are not being taught. The lack of basic reading and math skills permeated throughout the interviews as a mainstay that continues to be a problem within business and industry. Three participants revealed a need for a more in-depth customized training service that would meet the skills gaps between the pool of possible employees and the current and future demands of their industry. According to Speizer (2011), one cause for the skills gap is

the changing job market. Wolfe (2007) predicted that by 2015, 76% of U.S. jobs will demand employees who are highly skilled. Furthermore, two managers have a need for skilled welders in their industry and one requires “unique” training in both welding and drafting. Consequently, there are fewer graduates entering welding and the current average age of a welder is in the mid-50s with half of those projected to retire resulting in a shortage of skilled welders (Welding Design and Fabrication, 2006).

Today, most managers receive training services provided by ATN such as environmental training as well as computer skills training. One participant even commented on the good food provided by ATN. Furthermore, all of the managers that used ATN training stated that the program director and instructors are easy to deal with and flexible. Moreover, one participant stated, ATN has everything in place for the training and they do not have to pull resources (employees from other industries to help pay for an instructor) from their social network. Because of the dynamic labor market, demographic trends, and economic growth the role of the community colleges should expand to provide skills training to labor demands (Giloith, 2000; Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Rural community colleges have an advantage for meeting the demands of industry because they should be able to respond more quickly in developing curriculum, and generally have a structure, lower costs, and a closer personal local relationship to employees to depend upon. In summation, the managers’ perceptions’ of their partnerships with the WSCC customized training workforce development program is complex; however, the partnerships play an integral role in meeting the training needs for their respective business or industry.

Discussion of Findings

This research study delved into the attitudes of business and industry managers concerning the workforce development customized training programs provided by the WSCC. In examining the perceptions of the 11 managers chosen for this study, the researcher sought to give a voice to a segment of the workforce that may not have been heard. Although a great deal of research has focused on the role of the community college in workforce development (Dougherty, 2001; Kenamer & Katsinas 2011; Oates, 2009-2010; Orr, 2001), less study has been conducted on the perceptions and attitudes of business/industry managers concerning their partnerships with a local workforce development program, specifically a program located in a rural area.

This study revealed a lack of communication between the WSCC workforce development customized training program and the businesses and industries with which they shared a partnership. The lack of communication within the partnerships has resulted in academic skills deficits as well as a deficiency in technical skills. One manager stated that the absence of communication has been the primary source for deficiencies in skills required to operate his industry. Another participant stated the workers in her business need to know how to use a measuring tape as well as know how to read. These skills deficits could be a result of individuals who did not graduate from high school because in rural areas educational attainment continues to lag behind other areas resulting in deficient reading and math skills, (Katsinas et al., 1999). Training needs and academic attainment are not being met because of the lack of communication in the partnership. Governor Riley and the Workforce Development Commission noted that partnerships are crucial and form a foundation for training (Governor's Office of Workforce Development, 2008). A basic factor identified in the literature concerning successful workforce development programs is the necessity of a social networking system as well as partnerships

among training providers (Bragg, 2001; Green & Galetto, 2005). The American Association of Community Colleges has recognized a vital need for an increase in the partnerships between business, industry, and rural community colleges (Oates, 2009-2010; Orr, 2001). Current statistics reveal that only 1 in 11 adults living in the rural South hold a college degree (Kenamer & Katsinas 2011). For this reason, community colleges should initiate even greater effort to strengthen their partnerships with business and industry and find out what the businesses and industries needs are so that they may become a force in local economic communities (Bragg, 2001; Brown, 2001; Matthews, 2005). Oftentimes, rural community colleges consistently provided innovative educational programs for short-term and long-term occupational training (Dougherty, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2004); however, the needs of business and industry must be taken into consideration to meet the local market demands. Rural community colleges will expand their role in providing skills training because of the shift in the labor market and demographic trends (Giloith, 2000). Rural community colleges have an advantage for meeting the needs of industry in providing skills training for the labor market (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). Community colleges should be profoundly aware of local employers' needs because business and industry depends upon a continuous supply of skilled workers (Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education, 2009).

By examining the perceptions and attitudes of managers, this study created a viewpoint not commonly addressed in current literature. This research revealed reflections of the managers toward their partnerships as well as the need to plan for future workforce development customized training programs. Additionally, it is vital to have open lines of communication with a contact person within the community college. By establishing a strong network of communication, community college workforce development programs can understand and meet

the training needs of local business and industry. The respondents also identified a need to begin training for potential employees at a high school level. By making high school students aware of opportunities in business and industry and providing the needed skills, rural areas may be able to retain a pool of potential workers who have been successfully prepared for the current and future job market. Respondents recognized a need for local training initiatives offered at a reasonable cost. This study also reflected current research focused on the importance of social networking and collaborations as a necessity for a successful workforce development customized training program (Stoll, 2004).

Workforce development has benefited from the inherent strengths of the community colleges such as organizational flexibility, low cost, and technical expertise (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Despite these benefits, demands have been made for changes in college workforce development customized training programs. Increasingly, employers are not putting money into employee training, increasing the financial burden on the community college system. One advantage ATN has is the ability to offer grants for skills training to meet business and industry training needs. Because of the changing labor market, business and industry are ever more seeking new skills training (Cable, 2010). It has become even more essential to integrate the supply side of labor market participation--training, education, and job search strategies--with the demand side--employer needs and expectations (Cable, 2010). In looking at the demand side, WSCC workforce development customized training program should be conscious of the needs of employers and willing to go the extra mile to make sure that the curriculum is meeting current and future needs. Furthermore, workforce development customized training programs should be aware as to how employers hire and be willing adapt to the changing labor market and offer to meet business and industry needs.

At the present time, no partnership theory has been proposed that would offer a functional framework for this study. Therefore, the Open System Theory (OST) was chosen to provide a theoretical lens to examine the research data generated by this study. OST provided a strong framework for this study because it recognizes that institutions are interrelated and interdependent, making a close relationship between institutions (rural community colleges and industry/business managers) and a necessity (skills training needs). Moreover, this theory recognizes that external influences (economy, government policies, and community values) are vital for the survival of social institutions, in this case, partnerships between business/industry managers and a rural community college workforce development program. OST identifies culture as significant factor in understanding the dynamics of a social institution such as a business. Culture certainly played a key role in one of the interviews conducted for this study. The participant in question worked for a Japanese business and described the challenges of coping with the norms of a different culture. For example, the cultural difference between Japanese training and the methods used to train American workers played an impact on how the WSCC workforce development customized training program was used by the Japanese business owners. The current state of the economy also provided a crucial element in this study in that in an economic downswing, training initiatives were delayed or reduced. The political role of local, state, and federal governments also had an impact on the perceptions of the respondents. For instance, because federal and state laws designed to protect the environment require yearly certification, employee knowledge and skill must be updated annually. The business and industry managers interviewed for this study relied on ATN for this training. Lastly, the educational component of OST focuses on the training initiatives required for all businesses or industries. In

order to train workers and update skills, a reliable workforce development program is crucial for the viability of a business.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study openly shared their perceptions of their experiences with their partnerships with the WSCC customized training workforce development program. Essentially, the results of this study and the themes that emerged from the coding of interview transcripts were consistent with previous research. A preponderance of the literature suggests rural community colleges provide a necessary service in preparing American workers to succeed in meeting the demands of the 21st century workforce (Green & Galetto, 2005; Katsinas & Miller, 1998; Melendez et al., 2004; Orr, 2001; Stoll, 2004). Unquestionably, a rural community college customized training workforce development program can have a lasting impact on the economy and the community as a whole. The analysis of the data revealed the following recommendations for practice.

1. The WSCC customized training workforce development program should develop collaborative partnerships with other community college workforce development programs to develop a plan for future job skills training. Community college workforce development programs are capable of creating a networking link between business and industry and labor (Orr, 2001). This would allow programs within the Alabama community college system to share resources and information. Social networks found within community college workforce development focus on the challenges of local labor markets (Orr, 2001). This type of partnership is necessary because of the changes in the structure of the labor market and demographic trends (Gilothe, 2000). The research results have shown an aging population in Cullman County thus

there is a great demand for vocational training. It was predicted by Wolfe (2007) that there would be fewer skilled workers and an aging population in the 21st century. Realizing this trend, Wolfe theorized business and industry would compete for an increasingly shrinking skilled labor force. He stated that there would be a 25% decrease in the labor pool by 2050. Furthermore, noted by former secretary of education, Richard Riley, the United States educational system is currently training workers for jobs that do not exist and that will use technologies that have not been invented (Thibodeau, 2007). One vital contribution for the gap between skills needed for the labor force and the lack thereof is the changing job market (Speizer, 2011). Due to the fast-paced technology world, currently 85% of the jobs require a higher skill level than in 1950. With a dynamic labor market there will be a void in a highly skilled workforce in the areas of business and industry (Squires & Case 2007). Furthermore, 40% to 60% of the jobs that will be available in 2015 do not exist today. The skills deficits that resonated throughout the interviews has been highlighted in the research by Speizer (2011) and they are basic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic; technical and professional skills; management and leadership skills; and emotional skills like persistence, self-discipline, and self-awareness (Speizer, 2011). There is a shortfall of workers in areas such as welding that was reported from the interviews. As shown from the literature, a critical shortage of trained workers in the U.S. has left a void of workers of more than a half-million people (Gillette, 2006; Industry News, 2006; Wolfe, 2007). From information revealed in the interviews as well as the literature, there are not enough young people choosing to be trained in these areas. Lastly, research has shown that the trend in community college workforce development training is expected to continue (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

2. WSCC should work extensively with area high schools to improve the vocational services offered to meet labor demands for the 21st century. Because the working poor have

lower skill levels resulting in lower wages there are about 4.5 million working poor in the U.S. (Fitzgerald, 2004; Kimmel & Aronson, 2007). This has been a result of the shift from manufacturing jobs to service jobs. There are over 1,500 rural community colleges in the U.S. Undoubtedly, the over 500 community colleges in the U.S. (Kennamar & Katsinas, 2011) has the potential to alleviate the economic burden of the working poor. The vocational education programs made accessible through rural community colleges are vital in meeting local workforce demands. WSCC customized training workforce development program should form partnerships with area high schools to help high students prepare for industrial labor market. For the most part, rural community colleges are the only higher education institutions within their service area (Katsinas & Moeck 2002).

A partnership for improving the vocational education standards is essential because most of the research participants commented that their employees are lacking the basic reading and math skills necessary to perform necessary duties. Education is a necessity for economic development (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In order for education to promote economic growth, there must be trained workers. Within the boundaries of workforce development and vocational programs, business and industry are provided with educated workers as well a trained pool of potential employees (Kennamar & Katsinas, 2011). In the past, local educators from teachers to the superintendent supported the growth of vocational education (Dougherty, 2001). Initially there was a focus to advance the student with limited ambition and/or ability as well as provide a pool of trained employees to businesses and industries. From this study, the researcher found there is a need for trained labor and there is a shortage of qualified welders. Community colleges have provided local businesses and industries with a pool of qualified employees ready for work

and the welding industry is reliant upon community colleges to address the shortage of trained welders in the United States (Welding Design and Fabrication, 2006).

There has always been a connection between high schools and community colleges. From the beginning of the 20th century, the growth of community colleges has been intertwined with America's developing high school system (Gleazer, 2000). Because the two have been connected and workforce development continues to be a dominant choice for skills training, it is necessary for the two to collaborate more effectively to meet the current and future demands of the labor force. For instance, in early 1990s less than 50% of jobs required skilled workers; however, by 2015, it is predicted that 76% of U.S. jobs will demand employees who are highly skilled (Wolfe, 2007). There are many workers who do not qualify for these jobs because they lack the necessary skills training. The rural areas across the United States face the challenge of recruiting business and industry and providing a highly skilled labor force (Besser et al., 2009). A partnership with high schools for the purpose of improving vocational training may alleviate the stigma many have of working in manufacturing and realize the importance skilled workers are to the nation's economy (Thibodeau, 2007; Wolfe, 2007). Moreover, students must learn about the work of skilled technicians and the opportunities for advancement or the possible incomes opportunities that will not be available unless they have the necessary skills training.

3. In several participant interviews, this researcher found a lack of communication between the managers selected for this study and their contact liaison at WSCC. One key factor identified in the literature concerning successful workforce development programs is the necessity of a social networking system as well as partnerships among training providers (Bragg, 2001; Green & Galetto, 2005). A concerted effort by WSCC customized training workforce development personnel to make and maintain contact with local business and industry is

recommended. According to the strategic initiatives implemented by Governor Riley and the Workforce Development Commission, partnerships are crucial and form a foundation for training (Governor's Office of Workforce Development, 2008).

4. WSCC workforce development customized training program should seek additional funds and grants to improve and sustain training initiatives required by local business and industry. With additional monies, the college could organize a workforce development program that could meet the needs of the various industries located in the region. Although financial support has been declining for higher education, funding for workforce development has increased (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). According to the college Vice President, the WSCC workforce development customized training program does not receive external funding to provide training services. Reported by the participants, the services from Wallace State require a collaborative effort from the businesses and industries to pay for the training. For example, the managers have to contact others in their social networking system and ask if anyone else needs the training so that payment to the instructor is divided. According to the strategic initiatives implemented by Governor Riley and the Workforce Development Commission, there should be an effective use of state and federal funding for workforce development programs (Governor's Office of Workforce Development, 2008). Also, a survey conducted by Katsinas and Tollefson (2011) revealed noncredit federal workforce training programs have been strengthened.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications for practice as well as the overall results of this study indicate a need for further research in the role of a rural community college workforce development in the current

economic climate. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for future research were identified:

1. In researching workforce development programs for this study, the researcher found a dearth of information concerning the service currently provided by WSCC in area businesses. A quantitative study should be conducted throughout the WSCC service area to determine if the quality of instruction is meeting the needs of the current labor force. According to Thibodeau (2007) and Wolfe (2007), it is important for workforce development programs to accurately assess the current skills training needs of a community and respond appropriately.

2. A quantitative study of business and industry across the state of Alabama concerning their training needs could provide useful information for community colleges. According to the Governor's Office of Workforce Development (2008), it is imperative to understand the skills labor needs that currently exist in the state and the impact emerging labor issues could have on business and industry.

3. This study focused on the attitudes of business/industry managers and their perceptions of their partnership with a community college customized training workforce development program. According to President Barack Obama (2009), community colleges will provide the foundation for future economic growth in the United States. Given this expansion of the role of community colleges in securing a viable labor force, a qualitative or mixed method approach of qualitative and quantitative approaches that examine the perspective of community college workforce development personnel would provide valuable information.

4. A qualitative research study into customized workforce development programs should include a holistic view including the perceptions and attitudes of the employees who are trained through the workforce development initiatives. Additionally, a quantitative survey of workers

before training to assess their needs and after training to assess knowledge gained would assist in developing successful training initiatives. By understanding the positive and negative experiences of a workforce development program from a worker's point of view, business and industry leaders could create more efficient training programs.

Closing Remarks

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the partnership between a rural community college customized training workforce development program and the managers from existing business and industry in the Cullman County area. Using the lens of OST, the theoretical framework that provided the foundation for this study, the researcher examined the intricacies of the partnerships that developed between the managers interviewed for this study and the WSCC workforce development program. From this research four themes emerged that reflected the attitudes and experiences of the managers who participated in this study. These themes included (1) the importance of proximity and cost, (2) the role of education and training initiatives, (3) the role of communication, and (4) a shift toward Alabama Technology Network. It is the hope of the researcher that information gleaned from this study will add to the knowledgebase concerning rural community college workforce development programs and assist community college and business leaders in preparing skilled workers for the 21st century.

REFERENCES

- Adams, K., Keener, B., & McGee, E. A. (1994). Going public with private fund raising: Community colleges garner fairer share of support. *Community College Journal*, 65, 39-42.
- Alabama Community College System. (2009). Retrieved July 23, 2009, from <http://www.accs.cc/>
- Alabama Governor's Office, Workforce Development. (2008). *Workforce development council of Alabama operating guidelines* (Executive Order Number 36). Montgomery, AL: Author.
- Alabama Industrial Development Training. (2011). Retrieved January 10, 2011, from <http://www.aidt.edu/>
- Alabama Technology Network. (2010). Retrieved March 15, 2010, from <http://www.atn.org/>
- Alabama Technology Network Annual Report. (2009). Retrieved January 10, 2011, from <http://www.atn.org>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2010). Retrieved November 18, 2010 from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/>
- American Society of Training and Development. (2010). Retrieved June 10, 2010, from <http://www.astd.org/>
- Besser, T., Recker, N., & Parker, M. (2009). The impact of new employers from the outside, the growth of local capitalism, and new amenities on the social and economic welfare of small towns. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 23, 306-315.
- Brown, C. (2001). Two-year colleges and tech prep partnerships: a Texas perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 115(3), 51-62.
- Bullard, B. (2010, February 5). Shouldering the burden. *The Cullman Times*, p. A1.
- Cable, J. (2010, February). *Help wanted*. Retrieved June 10, 2010, from www.industry.com
- Calefati, J. (2009). Obama's plan for community colleges. *U.S. News and World Report*, Retrieved June 10, 2010, from <http://www.usnews.com>

- Calhoun Community College. (2010). Retrieved August 18, 2010 from <http://www.calhoun.edu/WorkforceSolutions/>
- Cohen, A. & Brawer, F. (2003). *The American community college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Coulter, E. (2007). Providing tomorrow's workforce. *Community College Journal*, 77(3), 6.
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing from five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce. (2010). Retrieved January 12, 2010 from <http://www.cullmanchamber.org>
- Cullman Economic Development Agency. (2010). *Industrial directory*. Cullman, AL: Author.
- Dembicki, M. (2010). Two-year colleges should be hubs for workforce development. *Community College Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.communitycollegetimes.com>
- Dobrzaniecki, A, Poole, K., & Troppe, M. (2006). Collaborating for impact. *Community College Journal*, 76(3), 50-52.
- DothanFirst (2011). Retrieved October 26, 2011 from <http://dothanfirst.com>
- Dougherty, K. (2001). *The contradictory college: The conflicting origins, impacts, and futures of the community college*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Dougherty, K. (2003). The uneven distribution of employee training by community colleges: description and explanation. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 586, 62-91.
- Farrell, E. (2002). Job-training law results in fewer federal dollars for colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49(14), A20-A26.
- Fernandez, K. (2009-2010). Back to work. *Community College Journal*, 80(3), 16-21.
- Fischer, K. (2009). As the auto industry shrinks, a community college retools. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(35), A1-A6.
- Fitzgerald, J. (2004). Community colleges in workforce intermediaries. In E. Melendez (Ed.), *Communities and Workforce Development* (pp. 357-375). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Fowler, D., & Chernus, K. (2005). The center of the web: Workforce development partnerships. *Community College Journal*, 76(6), 48-50.
- Fox, J. (2009, January 9). Will Obama's stimulus package work? *Time*. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from www.time.com

- Gardyas, J. (2005, January 13). Central Iowa to get biz accelerator: Partnership, DMACC, ISU and Ames to collaborate. *Business & Company Resource Center*, 23(24), 3-6.
- Gillette, B. (2006, December 18). Post-Katrina needs promote new workforce development partnerships for the construction industry. *Business & Company Resource Center*, 28(51), S29-32.
- Giloth, R. (2000). Learning from the field: Economic growth and workforce development in the 1990s. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 14, 340-350.
- Gleazer, E. J. (2000). Reflections on values, vision, and vitality: Perspectives for the 21st century. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 25, 7-18.
- Gonzalez, J. (2009a, December 17). A renewed workforce investment act should strengthen adult basic education, speaker says. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from <http://chronicle.com>
- Gonzalez, J. (2009b, September 7). Community colleges could win from renewal of job-training act. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from <http://chronicle.com>
- Gonzalez, J. (2009c, September 24). State directors of community colleges see bleak financial times ahead. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from <http://chronicle.com>
- Green, G., & Galetto, V. (2005). Employer participation in workforce development networks. *Economic Development Quarterly*, 19, 225-231.
- Grubb, W. (2001). From isolation to integration: Postsecondary vocational education and emerging systems of workforce development. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 115, 27-37.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsiveness and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hassinger, E., & Pinkerton, J. (1986). *The human community*. New York: McMillan.
- Hickey, G., Andrews, J., & Miller, C. (2008). *Governor Kaine announces Goodyear modernization project in city of Danville*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Office of the Governor.
- Jacobs, J. (2001). Community colleges and the workforce investment act: Promises and problems of the new vocationalism. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 115(3), 93-99.
- Jacobs, J., & Dougherty, K. (2006). The uncertain future of the community college workforce development mission. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 136, 53-62.
- Katsinas, S. (1994). Community colleges and workforce development in the new economy. *Catalyst*, 24(1).

- Katsinas, S., & Miller, M. (1998) Vocational education in rural community colleges: Strategies issues and problems. *Journal of Vocational Education Research*, 23(2), 159-167.
- Katsinas, S., & Moeck, P. (2002). The digital divide and rural community colleges: Problems and prospects. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 26(3), 207-224.
- Katsinas, S., Banachowski, G., Timm, J., Bliss, S., & Short, J. (1999). Community college involvement in welfare-to-work programs. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 23(4), 401-421.
- Kennamer, M., & Katsinas, S. (2011). An early history of the rural community college initiative: reflection's on the past and implications for the future. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 35, 234-251.
- Katsinas, S., & Tollefson, T. (2011). *Funding and access issues in public higher education: a community college perspective*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Education Policy Center.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd Edition). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Kent, N. (2009-2010). Workforce evolution. *Community College Journal*, 80(3), 4.
- Kimmel, M., & Aronson, A. (2007). *Sociology now: The essentials*. Boston, MA: Pearson Publishing.
- Lancaster, L. L. (2005). *Weaving a fabric of shared resources: Effective collaborations between higher education and business for business training*. Unpublished Ph.D., University of Denver, Colorado.
- Lederman, D. (2006, August 31). Helping communities prepare workers. *Inside Higher Ed*, Retrieved April 1, 2007, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/08/31/career>
- Lewis, A. (2003). Community college career pathways. *Tech Directions*, 62(6), 4.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lombardi, J. (1973). Critical decade for community college financing. *Wiley Periodicals*, 1973(2), 109-120.
- Lothian, D. (2010, March 31). *Obama: Community colleges can help boost ailing economy*. Retrieved November 21, 2010, from <http://cnn.com>
- Lyon, L. (1989). *Community: Sociology, urban: Gemeinschaft and gesellschaft*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books
- Matthews, L. (2005, October 17). Funding resources available for rural and urban workforce development initiatives. *The Nation's Cities Weekly*, p. 1.

- Melendez, E., Falcon, L., Suarez-Boulangger, C., McCormick, L., & de Montrichard, A. (2004). Community colleges, welfare reform, and workforce development. In E. Melendez (Ed.), *Communities and workforce development* (pp. 293-322). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, K. (2009). Working toward the future. *Community College Journal*, 79(3), 6-7.
- Miller, M., & Kissinger, D. (2007). Connecting rural community colleges to their communities. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 137, 27-34.
- Milliron, M. D., & de los Santos, G. E. (2004). Making the most of community colleges on the road ahead. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 28, 105-122.
- Minic, B., & Varney, R. (2001). The future of work. *Community College Journal*, 75(6), 51-55.
- Mosier, J., Richey, M., McPherson, K., Eckhol, J., & Cox, F. (2006). Developing a world-class workforce: Transformation, not iteration. *Community College Journal*, 76(3), 14-22.
- National center on workforce and disability. (2008). Retrieved February 10, 2009, from <http://http://www.onestops.info/>
- Oates, J. (2009-2010). The key to our economic future. *Community College Journal*, 80(3), 12.
- Oates, J. (2010). *Training and employment notice* (34-09). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Obama's stimulus package. (2009, January 5). *Time*. Retrieved August 30, 2009, from www.huffingtonpost.com
- O'Banion, T. (1997). *Creating more learning-centered community colleges*. Mission Viejo, CA: League for Innovation in the Community College.
- Orr, M. (2001). Community colleges and their communities: collaboration for workforce development. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 115, 39-49.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd. ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Quirk, K. E. (2001). A comprehensive approach to developmental education. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 129, 83-92.
- Raley, B. (2000). The international alliance for process technology: A partnership for America's future. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 24(1), 37-46.
- Rivera, R. J., & Paradise, A. (2006). *ASTD state of the industry report*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training & Development (ASTD).

- Rosenfeld, S., Jacobs, J., & Liston, C. (2006). Community college missions in the 21st century. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 136*, 53-62.
- Roueche, J. E., Johnson, L. F., & Roueche, S. D. (1997). *Embracing the tiger*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Ryan, J. (2009-2010). Building tomorrow's business today. *Community College Journal, 80*(3), 35-38.
- Schuyler, G. (1997). *Fundraising in community college foundations*. Los Angeles, CA: Clearing House for Community Colleges. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED405943).
- Servon, L. (2004). Community technology centers. In E. Melendez (Ed.), *Communities and workforce development* (pp. 213-224). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Shure, J. (2001). A modern business practice works its way into traditional industries. *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers, 76*(2), 34-37.
- Soares L. (2010). *The power of the education-industry partnership: Fostering innovation in collaboration between community colleges and businesses*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved November 1, 2011 from <http://www.americanprogress.org>
- Soukamneuth, S., & Harvey, S. (2008). *Intermediaries and FBCO's working together*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. Retrieved June 9, 2009, from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/>
- Speizer, I. (2011). Closing the skills gap. Businesstrainingmedia.com Inc.
- Spilde, M. (2009-2010). More learning, higher earnings. *Community College Journal, 80*(3), 5.
- Squires, D., & Case, P. (2007). Recruiting high students into tech programs. *Techniques, 42-43*.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stoll, M. (2004). Workforce development in the information technology age. In E. Melendez (Ed.), *Communities and workforce development* (pp. 191-210). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Sutton, S. (2004). Corporate-community workforce development collaborations. In E. Melendez (Ed.), *Communities and workforce development* (pp. 439-478). Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.
- Swindle, J. (1999). Industry/community colleges: Allies in the war for talent. *Community College Journal, 69*(6), 16-19.

- Thibodeau, K. (2007). Critical competencies for digital curation: Perspectives from 30 years in the trenches and on the mountain top. *Proceedings of the Digccur2007 conference* (pp. 1-5). Chapel Hill, NC: <http://www.emc.com>.
- Thio, A. (2005). *Sociology: A brief introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Publishing.
- U.S. Department of Education (2011). *State plan guide for the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act*. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/memo2004.html>
- Wallace State Community College, (2010a). *Workforce development*. Hanceville, AL.
- Wallace State Community College. (2010b). Retrieved January 12, 2010, from <http://www.wallacestate.edu>
- Warren county community college, Warren county chamber of commerce partner to offer free training programs. (2010, September 2). *Warren Reporter*. Retrieved October 3, 2010, from <http://www.nj.com/warrenreporter/>
- Welder workforce development program gains \$1 million boost. (2006). *Welding Design and Fabrication*, 79(11), 4.
- Wolfe, I. (2007). *The perfect labor storm*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing.
- Wright, E., & Stratton, J. (2009). Partnerships and collaborations. *Economic Development Journal*, 8(3), 30-38.

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

August 30, 2011

Office for Research
Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

Susan O'Rear
ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870302

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
RESEARCH

Re: IRB # 11-OR-273 "A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community
College Workforce Development Customized Training Program"

Dear Ms. O'Rear:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on August 29, 2012. If the study continues beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,


Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance
The University of Alabama



258 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35483-0127
(205) 348-8441
fax (205) 348-7189
toll free (877) 825-3266

IRB Project #:

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

ALUC 30 2011 FWD03-00

I. Identifying information

Principal Investigator: _____ Second Investigator: _____ Third Investigator: _____
Names: Susan O'Rear
Department: Higher Education
College: College of Education
University: The University of Alabama
Address: 275 County Road 1490
Oxford, AL 35058
Telephone: 256-708-1667
FAX: _____
E-mail: hjo@kiridge@uab.edu

Title of Research Project: A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community College Workforce Development Customized Training Program

Date Submitted: _____
Funding Source: _____

Type of Proposal: New Revision Rejected Completed Extension
Please attach a revised application
Please attach a continuing review of studies form
Please enter the original IRB # for the use of the study

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: _____ Full board Expedited

IRB Action:

Rejected Date: _____
 Tabled/Pending Revisions Date: _____
 Approved/Pending Revisions Date: _____

Approved-this proposal complies with University and Federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 8/29/12
Items approved: Research protocol (dated 8/30/11)
 Informed consent (dated 8/30/11)
 Recruitment materials (dated _____)
 Other (dated _____)

Approval signature: _____ Date: 8/30/2011

AAHRPP DOCUMENT #192

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

TEMPLATE:
Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

Study title: A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community College Workforce Development Customized Training Program

Investigator's Name, Position, Faculty or Student Status:

Name: Susan O'Rear

Position: Interviewee

Student: Doctoral student at the University of Alabama

Institution if other than or collaborating with UA:

You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community College Workforce Development Customized Training Program. The study is being conducted by Susan O'Rear, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Susan O'Rear is being supervised by Professor Nathaniel Bray who is a professor of Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama.

Is the researcher being paid for this study? The researcher is not receiving monetary payment for this research study.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study focuses on the partnerships between business and industry and a community college customized training workforce development program. In order to meet the training needs, business and industry request specific training from community college workforce development programs. The purpose of this study to investigate the Wallace State Community College (WSCC) customized training workforce development program from the perspective of business and industry managers. The objective will be to interview managers from business and industries that seek tailored training for their employee's from a community college customized training workforce development program, thus answering the following questions:

- How did the collaborative partnership form between your business/industry and the workforce development program at WSCC?
- How do business/industry partners communicate and share information with the workforce development program at WSCC?

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 8/20/11
EXPIRATION DATE: 8/20/12

- How do business and industry perceive the shared benefits of the workforce development program at WSCC?
- What, if any challenges, have arisen between the partner organizations and how were they resolved?

Why is this study important or useful?

This study will provide potentially valuable information that may help address the expected skilled labor shortages in business and industry. The knowledge gained from this research will also provide useful information on partnerships between community college workforce development programs and business and industry. The theoretical framework for this study is based on Kahn and Katz's Open System Theory (OST). Research questions have been constructed to align with the OST theory.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because your business or industry has partnered or is currently in a partnership with the customized training program at Wallace State Community College. Established criteria include:

- participants must be in a manager and/or supervisor role within their facilities and
- participants must utilize customize training from the WSCC workforce development program
- the partnership must be current or within the last five years

How many people will be in this study?

About sixteen other people will be in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in a digitally voice recorded interview

How much time will I spend being this study?

The interview should take about 30 minutes. The entire study will take about 30 minutes of your time. However, there could be some information from the interview that needs clarification. I may contact you to follow-up and clarify the information. If I contact you after the interview it will only be for the purpose of clarification.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

No risk is foreseen to you.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
 CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 8/6/11
 EXPIRATION DATE: 8/29/12

There are no direct benefits to you.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help future partnerships between business and industry and community college customized training workforce development programs because it will be a tool to improve the quality of the skills training for employees.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview will be in a location that is convenient, private, and of your own choosing. You will be asked about the partnership between your facility and Wallace State Community College customized training workforce development program, how the services received have benefited you, and the challenges you have faced or do face with the partnership.

All audiotapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's office. All tapes will be transcribed within two weeks after the recordings are made and all tapes will be destroyed following transcription.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

To protect your confidentiality all collected data will be kept in a private and locked location known only to the researcher. Digitally recorded information will be placed in a file on a computer that is password protected and will be transcribed within a two week period following the interview. Tapes will be destroyed immediately following transcription.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator Susan O'Rear at 256-796-6484.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 8/30/11
EXPIRATION DATE: 8/29/12

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0104.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Audio Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to collect data for dissertation study. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked room and only available to the researcher, Susan O'Rear. The tapes will be kept for no more than 2 weeks and will be destroyed after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped and I give my permission to the researcher to record the interview.

Yes, my participation concerning the partnership of my business or industry with the WSCC customized workforce training program can be audiotaped

No, I do not want my participation concerning the partnership of my business or industry with the WSCC customized workforce training program to be audiotaped

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 8/30/11
EXPIRATION DATE: 8/27/12

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

AAHRPP DOCUMENT #192

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM**

TEMPLATE:

Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

Study title: A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community College Workforce Development Customized Training Program

Investigator's Name, Position, Faculty or Student Status:

Name: Susan O'Rear

Position: Interviewee

Student: Doctoral student at the University of Alabama

Institution if other than or collaborating with UA:

You are being asked to take part in a research study.

This study is called A Qualitative Study of a Rural Community College Workforce Development Customized Training Program. The study is being conducted by Susan O'Rear, who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Susan O'Rear is being supervised by Professor Nathaniel Bray who is a professor of Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama.

Is the researcher being paid for this study? The researcher is not receiving monetary payment for this research study.

What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?

This study focuses on the partnerships between business and industry and a community college customized training workforce development program. In order to meet the training needs, business and industry request specific training from community college workforce development programs. The purpose of this study to investigate the Wallace State Community College (WSCC) customized training workforce development program from the perspective of business and industry managers. The objective will be to interview managers from business and industries that seek tailored training for their employee's from a community college customized training workforce development program, thus answering the following questions:

- How did the collaborative partnership form between your business/industry and the workforce development program at WSCC?

- How do business/industry partners communicate and share information with the workforce development program at WSCC?
- How do business and industry perceive the shared benefits of the workforce development program at WSCC?
- What, if any challenges, have arisen between the partner organizations and how were they resolved?

Why is this study important or useful?

This study will provide potentially valuable information that may help address the expected skilled labor shortages in business and industry. The knowledge gained from this research will also provide useful information on partnerships between community college workforce development programs and business and industry. The theoretical framework for this study is based on Kahn and Katz's Open System Theory (OST). Research questions have been constructed to align with the OST theory.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been asked to be in this study because your business or industry has partnered or is currently in a partnership with the customized training program at Wallace State Community College. Established criteria include:

- participants must be in a manager and/or supervisor role within their facilities and
- participants must utilize customize training from the WSCC workforce development program
- the partnership must be current or within the last five years

How many people will be in this study?

About sixteen other people will be in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in a digitally voice recorded interview

How much time will I spend being this study?

The interview should take about 30 minutes. The entire study will take about 30 minutes of your time. However, there could be some information from the interview that needs clarification. I may contact you to follow-up and clarify the information. If I contact you after the interview it will only be for the purpose of clarification.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

Will I be compensated for being in this study?

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

No risk is foreseen to you.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you.

What are the benefits to science or society?

This study will help future partnerships between business and industry and community college customized training workforce development programs because it will be a tool to improve the quality of the skills training for employees.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interview will be in a location that is convenient, private, and of your own choosing. You will be asked about the partnership between your facility and Wallace State Community College customized training workforce development program, how the services received have benefited you, and the challenges you have faced or do face with the partnership.

All audiotapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's office. All tapes will be transcribed within two weeks after the recordings are made and all tapes will be destroyed following transcription.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

To protect your confidentiality all collected data will be kept in a private and locked location known only to the researcher. Digitally recorded information will be placed in a file on a computer that is password protected and will be transcribed within a two week period following the interview. Tapes will be destroyed immediately following transcription.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call the investigator Susan O’Rear at 256-796-6484.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0104.

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Audio Taping Consent

As mentioned above, the individual qualitative interview will be audio recorded for research purposes to collect data for dissertation study. These tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked room and only available to the researcher, Susan O’Rear. The tapes will be kept for no more than 2 weeks and will be destroyed after they have been transcribed.

I understand that part of my participation in this research study will be audiotaped and I give my permission to the researcher to record the interview.

Yes, my participation concerning the partnership of my business or industry with the WSCC customized workforce training program can be audiotaped

No, I do not want my participation concerning the partnership of my business or industry with the WSCC customized workforce training program to be audiotaped

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AT WALLACE STATE

Original: HK
Copies: Rebecca Reever
File - President's Off
Lisa German
Susan O'Rear

Susan O'Rear, Researcher
Dr. Nathaniel Bray, Faculty Advisor
Permission Letter

RECEIVED
JAN 04 2011
BY: _____

4 January 2011

Dear Dr. Hawsey:

As a student in the doctoral program at The University of Alabama, I am conducting a research study to examine Wallace State Community College's Workforce Development program. I need your assistance in order to complete this study.

With your permission, I would like to interview WSCC staff and examine campus data that are relevant to my research. The data that I collect will be used for the purpose of my study. There are no foreseeable risks to persons involved in the study, and participation is completely voluntary. There are also no direct benefits to participants.

The results of my research will be reported in the form of a doctoral dissertation at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Research such as this is important and necessary in order to help make decisions regarding Workforce Development programs at community colleges. To society, the benefit of this study is that the results will be added to the information bank for further study.

Your signature below indicates that you will permit me to conduct research on the WSCC campus.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan O'Rear
Sociology Instructor

Vicki P. Hawsey
Name of President

Signature of President
1/4/11
Date

Susan O'Rear
Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher
1-4-11
Date