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THE NATURE OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A COLLEGE PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

A CASE STUDY

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Higher Education

by

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Abstract

This exploratory case study used qualitative methods as well as role and social exchange theoretical perspectives to understand the nature of president-board relationships in higher education. Additionally, it also probed for possible connections between the nature of this relationship and the length of a presidency, seeking to identify notable changes. The study used individual interviews with 19 individuals engaged in governance and leadership at one small, private, Liberal Arts institution. Analysis of the data revealed four core features of the president-board relationship at this college: (1) communication and transparency, (2) trust, (3) shared vision, and (4) an understanding of roles and responsibilities. The data presented here indicates that an engaged, active dialogue between the president and the board is essential to the president-board relationship. It was also apparent that trust, a shared vision, and the development and maintenance of a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities are integrally tied to communication and transparency. The study includes recommendations for future research and practical applications of the findings.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

The university president is the chief executive officer of a multi-million or even multi-billion dollar organization. The board of trustees is his or her overseer – the group of people with final legal responsibility for governance of the university. In its 2010 *Statement on Board Responsibility for Governance*, the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) declared that “The board partners with the president … to achieve the mission, sustain core operations, and attain the strategic priorities of the institution” (p. 3). Together the president and the board work to advance the institution, maintain accountability, sustain educational quality, ensure academic freedom, and respond to the challenging and rapidly changing social, economic, and political environment of which higher education is a part.

The board and the president are interrelated and dependent upon each other. Reed and Duelks (2012) argued that, “The board needs to know that if the president fails, so does the board. The board’s job is to make the president wildly successful. [Boards] must look for opportunities to provide support for the president” (p. 32). The Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) offered that “an effective presidency starts, but does not end with an effective board. We have found that the following tend to go together: an effective board, and effective chair of the board, an effective presidency, an effective president” (p. 12). The Leadership Imperative, produced by the AGB, asserts that the partnership of the president and governing board is an “essential factor” in the success of higher education, and in particular his or her institution. The report calls for “integral” leadership that “links the president and governing board closely together in an environment of support, candor, and accountability” (pp. vi-vii).
There are times this relationship does not work. Each year, close to 300 American colleges and universities conduct presidential searches, some because the president has chosen to retire, return to the classroom, or move on to a different opportunity, others because of a misalignment of vision, goals, personal style, or some other reason (Kiley, 2012b). In recent years across the United States higher education saw numerous very public failures of presidents and their subsequent removal from their posts. At Penn State University, Graham Spanier, president at the University for over 16 years, was asked to resign in November 2011 when a scandal surfaced about which the university’s board claimed to have received little or no information from the president. A grand jury indicted Penn State administrators who allegedly failed to investigate and report accusations against Jerry Sandusky, a former assistant football coach accused and then later convicted of child sexual abuse. While it was publicly suggested that the Board of Trustees and Spanier mutually agreed he should resign, it was reported that the Board of Trustees had given Spanier an ultimatum – resign or be fired (Kennedy & McGill, 2011).

In December 2011, the University of Oregon’s President Richard Lariviere was terminated despite popularity among the campus community, growth in enrollments and an increase in the quality of applicants. Contradicting edicts from the governor and state system board to hold increases to less than six percent (which Lariviere promised to do), Lariviere raised salaries for more than 1,100 University of Oregon faculty and administrators, allowed employees to work overtime to offset losses in furlough days, and continued to push for a separation of University of Oregon from the state legislature allowing state universities to have independent boards. After numerous attempts to rein him in, Paul Kelly, then-president of the state board, told Lariviere he repeatedly violated the board's trust. While Matthew Donegan, board president in
2011, committed to building a better relationship between Lariviere and the board and communicating as often as possible, Lariviere missed an important board meeting – the last straw for the board. He was fired four days after that meeting (Graves, 2011).

During the summer of 2012 the University of Virginia faced a very public crisis of leadership when President Theresa Sullivan was told by the school’s board of visitors that she was being removed, presumably because of a difference of vision and expectations about online education and faculty participation. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni who supported this popular president rallied and lashed back, vocally criticizing the highly secretive process that resulted in Sullivan’s removal. After 18 days the board reinstated her after a very public, very heated controversy (Schwartzman, de Vise, Kumar, & Johnson, 2012).

University governance fails when the board and the president do not work well together. Presidential turnover resulting from a tenuous or acrimonious relationship is costly in terms of the time and resources needed to identify a new president, but also in terms of institutional stability, continuity, and organizational effectiveness (Padilla, 2000). The visible and costly failures described above and myriad more that could be cited demonstrate the need to examine the relationship between the governing board and the president. By doing so we can better understand what constitutes a positive working relationship, one that ensures a fruitful and lengthy term of the president — and provide guidance to those people assuming these roles.

**Purpose of the Study**

There is an abundance of literature that presents the roles and responsibilities of the university president and board of trustees. The existing literature on the relationship between presidents and their boards of trustees assumes that if the board and the president effectively execute those roles and responsibilities the result will be an effective board and president.
relationship; they do not dive deeply into the relations between the two who must work together. These studies fail to ask broader questions about how role ambiguity and role conflict affect the relationship between the board and the president. Nor does the current literature attempt to identify the appropriate mix of relational characteristics that lead to the desired outcome – a presidency that not only lasts, but also ends on good terms.

Because this relationship is critical to the success of the university it is necessary to move beyond investigation of roles and responsibilities to an exploration of the relationship between the president and the board. By doing so, we can better understand the effect of that relationship on the tenure of the presidency. This exploratory research will not produce final answers or conclusions, but rather generate hypotheses about the nature of the working relationship between the board and the president – ones that can be tested in future investigations.

**Problem Statement and Research Questions**

This case study attempts to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between presidents and their boards, the extent to which an understanding of roles or lack thereof affects that relationship, and how that relationship changes related to the length of the president’s term in office. As such, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the nature of the working relationship between the president and the board?
2. How do role ambiguity and role conflict affect the relationship between the president and the board?
3. How does the nature of the relationship between the president and the board relate to the length of the president’s term in office?
Summary of the Study

To answer these questions, I engaged a small private institution in the mid-Atlantic. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with the current and immediate past presidents; the board chair; nine board members; and eight key administrators. I also reviewed pertinent documents for background and a check of consistency. Analysis of the data revealed four core features of the president-board relationship at this college: (1) communication and transparency, (2) trust, (3) shared vision, and (4) an understanding of roles and responsibilities. The literature reviewed as background to this study, the methodology, the research findings, and the discussion of these findings are detailed in the following pages.
Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

When Harvard, America’s first university, was established in 1636 the Massachusetts General Court created the school’s Board of Overseers, consisting of 12 lay and clerical leaders from the Massachusetts colony, all men. By 1650, the school lobbied the overseers to create a dual structure, one internal board, consisting of the president and academics of the institution, and one external, comprised of the leaders on the original Board of Overseers. Several other early American colleges also adopted a dual structure but Yale College, established in 1701, broke away from this structure and established a single self-perpetuating board of non-academics, which became the norm for colleges moving forward. The roles and lines of authority of the boards, the president, and the faculty of these early colleges were often unclear and fraught with conflict (Kerr & Gade, 1989).

Because the early colleges involved very few students and even fewer “faculty” (i.e. tutors not much older than the students themselves), their size and limited focus required simple governance structures where the entire faculty, often fewer than a dozen, was well represented. Governing boards and presidents of these early colleges were able to operate with few demands from external constituents or internal challenges. Over a relatively short time, the number of colleges and universities grew, their structures and foci evolved and became formalized, and the enrollments and preparation of students expanded. Governance responsibilities held by the board and the president expanded and the need for delegation of duties grew. Administrative positions, such as academic dean or provost, began appearing in the late 1800’s. By the early 1900’s the administrative posts, such as librarian, bursar, and registrar were professionalized to where many institutions had as many as 30 administrative positions running the operations of the college or
university (Duryea, 2000). In 1905, Henry Pritchett, then president of the Carnegie Foundation, observed that American universities were beginning to resemble corporations, with a board of directors, a president serving as a chief executive officer, a variety of operational officers, and specialized departments (Pritchett, 1905). By the middle of the twentieth century, Beck (1947), investigating the boards of 30 prestigious U.S. universities, found that governing boards of the day were composed primarily of male leaders of companies who neither held advanced degrees nor had careers in academia. By the late twentieth century, the role of governing boards had moved away from advocacy to oversight and public accountability, in particular for public universities (Westmeyer, 1990).

As with boards of trustees, the academic presidency has evolved over the past two centuries, changing from patriarchal supervisor to administrator and fundraiser. In the early colleges, the president, generally a member of the clergy, was very much involved in instruction, often being one of only a few “faculty” teaching the young men who would likely become future clerics. As the number of colleges grew and universities were established the clerical president was replaced by a new “more secular, sympathetic-to-science model … ‘builder’ president” (Kaufmann, 1980, p. 5). By the start of the twentieth century, the “modern” university, with business-like values and the growth of bureaucratic administrative structures, was evident, though not always welcome by the faculty (Hall, 2000; Kaufmann, 1980). The “multiversity” described by Clark Kerr (1963, 1995) is an apt name for the universities that now involve a multitude of communities, for example: undergraduate and graduate populations; humanist, social scientist, scientist and engineering faculty; nonacademic personnel and administrators. These various communities often involve conflicting interests which the president must negotiate and mediate.
American colleges and universities as organizations have become tremendously complex, operating with a shared governance structure exclusive to these institutions, involving governing boards, presidents, senior administrators, and faculty leaders, in which authority, power, and influence for decisions are distributed among campus constituents (Alfred, 1998). Central to governance of colleges and universities are the board and the president of the institution. The board holds fiduciary responsibility for and authority over the institution and is legally and legitimately required to act in the best interests of the institution over which they govern (AGB, 2010; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1982; Fisher, 1991; Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013; Ingram, 1996, 1997, and 2007; Kerr & Gade, 1989; McGuinness, 2005; Nason, 1974, 1982; Taylor, 1987). The board delegates the supervision of administration to the president and the delivery of teaching and research to the faculty.

According to AGB (2010) the president provides institutional leadership, vision, and strategic planning, and is authorized to manage the operations of the institution. The board partners with the president to achieve the mission, sustain core operations, and attain the strategic priorities of the institution, but retains ultimate responsibility. Because many of the most important leadership roles and responsibilities are shared, ambiguity of assigned roles and responsibilities can ensue and lead to tension between the board and the president. To that end the investigation into the roles and responsibilities of boards and presidents must be considered here in greater depth.

College and University Boards

Today’s college and university governing boards have a variety of monikers: Board of Curators, Board of Governors; Board of Overseers; Regents; and Board of Visitors. The name “Board of Trustees” is by far the most common (Hendrickson et al., 2013). The presence of these
governing boards, regardless of the name, is a distinguishing characteristic of American higher education. An institution’s charter and by-laws, informed by history, tradition, and needs of the institution, dictate its board size and composition (Birnbaum, 1992). As such, the size of a board can range from a few people to several dozen. At private institutions, trustees are elected by the alumni of the university or invited to serve; in the case of most public universities, trustees are appointed to boards by the governor, legislature, or system-wide education governing board (Birnbaum, 1992; Padilla, 2005). Often these individuals selected or appointed to serve on college and university boards have had little to no exposure to university governance, as their careers have been totally outside the university setting (Padilla, 2005). Board members of private institutions serve longer terms than those appointed to public university boards. As a result, “institutional memory” and a deep and thorough understanding of university culture, function, and processes is limited on public university boards (Padilla, 2005).

Some boards include representation of constituents (e.g. faculty, students, alumni, and staff) in either an ex officio capacity or as a voting member. Only a handful of university boards include the institution’s presidents on the board as a voting member; the practice is more common among private universities where more than half give their presidents a vote on their governing boards (Kiley, 2012a).

In the United States, there are over 50,000 trustees governing more than 4,000 colleges and universities (USDOE, 2003). To get a picture of the attributes of boards and board members, The Chronicle of Higher Education surveyed board members at close to 1,100 campuses or university systems (Selingo, 2007). At the time of the survey, 63.4 percent of trustees who responded were male while 36.2 percent were female. AGB reported similar statistics in 2016: 68 percent of trustees were male, while 32 percent female. The vast majority of trustees were
white (89.5 percent); only 5.5 percent were Black/African American (Seling, 2007). These are noteworthy increases from what Rauh (1968) found when he surveyed 11,000 trustees. At that time, 86 percent of trustees were men, five percent were under forty, one percent were African American, and 34 percent were corporate directors or executives. Looking at the length of service, Seling (2007) found that 53.1 percent had served on the board of an institution for three to ten years; 21.8 percent served eleven or more years. Most board members (13.3 percent) serve as a formal representative of the alumni/ae group, while only 6.2 percent represented faculty, staff, or students of the institution (Seling, 2007).

The board accomplishes much of its work through committees. An institution’s board determines the number and type of committees that they believe will meet the needs of the institution. Committees typically found at colleges and universities include: Academic Affairs, which oversees curriculum, educational programs, and approves graduates; Facilities, which reviews and recommends capital improvements and maintenance plans for the campus; Finance, whichreviews and recommends institutional budgets; and Student Affairs, which reviews issues concerning the out-of-classroom experience of students. The Executive Committee works directly with the president on issues that arise between board meetings and sets the board agenda in concert with the president while the Investment committee oversees the institution’s assets and assesses how well the endowment funds are invested (Hendrickson et al., 2013).

While higher education governing boards vary in structure, size, and composition, they serve the university in the same way and have similar roles. They have responsibilities, such as selecting, supporting, and evaluating the president, establishing policies and programs, and preserving the financial health of the institution, and maintaining the mission-centeredness of the institution that cut across most institutions.
The Roles and Responsibilities of the College or University Board of Trustees

As the legal custodians of the institution, boards of trustees have several basic responsibilities. Several contributions in the literature outline these roles and responsibilities (AGB, 2006 and 2010; Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1991; Fisher, 1991; Herman, 1989; Hill, Green, & Eckel, 2001; Houle, 1989; Ingram, 1996, 1997, and 2007; Kerr & Gade, 1989; McGuinness, 2005; Nason, 1974, 1982; Schwartz, 2010; Taylor, 1987). From these pieces, the roles and responsibilities of boards can be grouped into eight broad themes: (1) setting or reaffirming the institution's mission; (2) maintaining accountability, (3) delegating authority and defending academic freedom (4) planning, budgeting, and allocating resources; (5) conserving and protecting institutional assets; (6) preserving the health of the institution; (7) assessing institutional performance; and (8) appointing, supporting, and evaluating the president.

Mission centrality is a core responsibility of the board. According to AGB (2010) boards, working within the constraints of their charter and through consultation with the president, determine the mission of the institution, set strategic direction to ensure the resources necessary to sustain that mission, accomplish those strategic goals, and remain competitive. Taylor (1987) argues that boards exist primarily to protect the institution’s mission and the public’s trust in the university.

A basic responsibility of governing boards is to oversee the delicate balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability (Kerr & Gade, 1989, McGuinness, 2005; Nason, 1974, 1986; Taylor, 1987; Zusman, 2005). This fundamental obligation is addressed in AGB’s first principle detailed in Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance: “Boards are accountable for the mission and heritage of their institutions and the transcendent values that
guide and shape higher education; they are equally accountable to the public and to their institutions’ legitimate constituents” (2010, p. 3). The board is both ethically and legally required to preserve the trust of its constituents. Nason (1982) argued that “continuity, stability, and above all, integrity – are the trust which trustees must protect” (p. 19). Trustees must assure the public and the states of the social responsibility of the institution: that it is using resources wisely, activities are being conducted with proper academic behavior, funds are being used appropriately, and the institution is serving public interest.

Preserving and protecting academic freedom are essential board responsibilities (AGB 2010; ACTA, 2009; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Taylor, 1987). Stating that trustees have the “responsibility to be the ultimate guarantors of academic freedom and educational quality” (ACTA, 2009, p. 1), ACTA maintained that trustees “have the authority and obligation to insist that administrators and faculty examine the climate on [the] campus and, if there is a problem, take the necessary steps to correct it (ACTA, 2009, p. 8).

Boards are responsible for establishing the strategic direction of the institution (AGB, 2010; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007; Carnegie Foundation, 1982) so must be involved in institutional planning, program oversight, and budgeting. The ABG (2011) argued that while it relies heavily on the guidance and advice of the president and faculty leaders, the board is ultimately responsible for the currency of policies and their implementation, including policies related to teaching and learning. Chait (1984) suggested that board budgetary planning and policy responsibilities include four areas: setting personnel policies and procedures for faculty, establishing academic programs, ensuring that budget decisions support academic priorities, and evaluating the institution’s academic activities. The board focuses on educational quality and cost effectiveness in its program review, and performance funding or budgeting processes. They
may make decisions about which programs are expendable, where investments in program development or expansion should be made, and the allocation of resources between teaching and research (Taylor, 1987).

The board is also charged with maintaining institutional human, physical, and programmatic assets. They must make decisions about land, facilities and equipment, support staff, and faculty, and academic programs, once made, carry continuing budgetary obligations (Taylor, 1987). With regard to developing and preserving facilities, trustees should ensure that the institution adopts a master plan, specifying on-going and future needs. In addition, the board should determine appropriate levels of debt this institution can absorb in the maintenance and development of the physical plant. Taylor (1987) reminds trustees that facilities exist to support programs and that facility-related decisions must be consistent with the institution’s academic goals.

The AGB (2010) maintains that the university board of trustees is responsible for and often most intimately involved with maintaining the financial strength and stability of the institution and ensuring that their institutions remain secure yet responsive to changing economic, political, environmental, social, or technological realities. The governing board has ultimate institutional authority over decisions related to issues of education policy, the framing and execution of long-range plans, budgeting, and presidential selection. To that end, the board must manage endowments, advocate for adequate resources, and raise funds for the institution (Mortimer and Sathre, 2007). A part of maintaining the welfare of the institution is protecting the autonomy of the institution from bureaucratic, economic, and political interference from external forces (Kerr & Gade, 1989).
Several writers (Carnegie Foundation for, 1982; Fisher, 1991; Nason, 1974, 1982; Taylor, 1987) advocated that an important responsibility of governing boards is to assess institutional performance, with special attention on strategic positioning (Fisher, 1991). Seen as a corollary to the board’s responsibility for planning, assessment allows the board to gauge the institution’s progress toward achieving its established goals. But because trustees lack time and academic expertise the board’s role should be to ensure that evaluation takes place rather than to serve as the evaluator (Taylor, 1987). Benefits of such an assessment or review can be felt in the strategic planning process, attracting presidential candidates, informing the board in decision making, and preparing for accreditation evaluations. An understanding of the state of the university provides the board with a framework for presidential evaluations as well. (Mortimer and Sathre, 2007). In order to be truly effective, trustees must evaluate their own performance (Nason, 1974, 1982).

Commonly cited as the most important of board roles are the selection of and support for the president (AGB, 2006; Caven, 2008; Fisher, 1991; Ingram, 1997; Kerr and Gade, 1989; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007; Taylor, 1987). It is to the president that the board delegates significant responsibility for the day-to-day management of the university and it is the president who serves as a conduit between the board and the faculty, staff, and students of the institution. The board must determine what the institution needs in a new president, establish and coordinate the search process, and seek input from constituents of the university. But the final decision regarding the selection of a new president lies with the board. The Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) argued that the board must provide for an effective presidency, that is, not only appointing a highly qualified individual, but also offering the structure and support to enable excellent leadership of the institution. The AGB Task Force that prepared *The Leadership Imperative* (2006) expressed concerned that “too few presidents receive from their governing
boards the degree of support necessary for courageous or visionary leadership” (p. 9). The Task Force goes on to state that:

A board contributes to a successful and effective presidency in several ways: by establishing a clear understanding of expectations; by linking a new president to a network of experienced community, business, and policy leaders who can help the president assimilate the institution’s distinctive culture; by charging the president to build an effective leadership team and to develop a strategic plan; by standing behind a president on controversial matters; and by not undermining a president through the imposition of personal agendas (p. 11).

Support for the president may come in the form of monitoring and evaluating the president’s performance. Kerr and Gade (1986) observed that when the trustees evaluate the president, they are essentially evaluating their own ability to select, advise, and support the president. Evaluating the president is critical to ensuring that the president “continues to be relevant to a dynamic institution in a fast changing environment” (Michael, Schwartz, and Balraj, 2001, p. 333). McKerrow and Dennis (1989) argued that formal evaluation promotes accountability, centers presidents within an institutional context, strengthens the president's position and lengthens his/her period of effective leadership, as well as strengthens the board's position ( pp. 6-10). Yet, Taylor (1987) points out that the expectation of the president-board partnership is paradoxical: the board both relies on the president for information about the university and its activities and guidance on decision-making, while concurrently they are expected to critique the performance of their instructor and guide. In the end, board strengthens a presidency by providing feedback, both positive and constructive, at regular intervals (AGB, 2006).
Board Effectiveness

There is a body of research on board performance or board effectiveness (Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Carver, 1997; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1993; Lawler, Finegold, Benson, & Conger, 2001; Holland, Chait & Taylor, 1989; Holland and Jackson, 1998; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Lee, 1991; Zwingle, 1975). Chait, Holland and Taylor (1991) conducted early and seminal research on board effectiveness, detailing specific board competencies that contribute to board effectiveness. Researching private boards, they suggest that effective boards (1) understand the culture and norms of the organization (contextual competencies); (2) are knowledgeable about the institution they serve, their roles and responsibilities as board members, and their performance as a board (educational competencies); (3) attend to cohesiveness by nurturing the development of the board as a group (interpersonal competencies); (4) possess analytical competencies so as to recognize complexities and subtleties in the various issues they must address and accept ambiguity as necessary for critical dialogue to take place, (5) respect and guard the integrity of the governance process as well as accept their responsibility to develop and maintain healthy relationships with constituencies (political competencies), and (6) envision and shape institutional direction through strategic competencies. These six competencies can be divided into two groups: cognitive and affective skills. Cognitive skills – the contextual, educational, analytical, and strategic dimensions – involve the board’s ability to learn, analyze, decide, and strategize. Boards, they suggest, tend to be much more at ease with these cognitive dimensions and are able to perform better in these areas. Affective skills – the interpersonal and political dimensions – are more process oriented and involve more ambiguity than the others, and as a result, are more challenging for boards and their members. However, they argue, skills in all areas are necessary for effectiveness (Holland and Taylor, 1991).
A notable report on board performance was presented by Kerr and Gade (1989) who surveyed 1,400 board chairs, presidents, and faculty from a wide variety of institutional types and conducted interviews with 200 of these leaders, seeking insight into board activities and effectiveness. They found that these groups were generally satisfied with boards’ handling of legal affairs, investments, facilities, budgets, and protecting academic freedom. Specifically, they found that the roles in which the boards were ranked highly by all three groups were: preserving academic freedom, protecting the institution from external special interests, providing support to the president, detailing an appropriate role for the president with regard to academic policy, providing sufficient authority to the president to effectively administer the institution, and placing institutional needs above personal interests. Boards were rated poorly on securing adequate funding. They concluded that boards that appeared to function effectively over the long run had certain characteristics, including self-discipline, placing the needs of the organization ahead of their personal interests; acceptance of responsibility; and good conduct, involving interest in the community, tolerance, consultation of constituents, and consensus building (Kerr and Gade, 1989). Kerr and Gade (1989) also prescribe considerations around structures (i.e. size, composition, committee structures, internal operating policies, and behaviors) that can contribute to effective performance, noting that the diversity of institutions, with unique charters, culture, history and structures precludes their being one “ideal” board and set of attributes.

Several studies investigated the impact of board performance on institutional performance (Green & Griesinger, 1996; Herman and Tulipana, 1985; Holland, Chait & Taylor, 1989; Minor, 2008), but very little research is current or focused on higher education boards as opposed to non-profit organizations in general. Holland, Chait & Taylor (1989) suggested that boards that were strong in the competencies identified in their study (listed above) tended to
perform well on measures of institutional quality. In a follow-up study, they found a positive and systematic association between the board’s performance and the institution’s performance as measured against some conventional financial indicators (Chait et al., 1993). Looking at non-profit organizations, Herman and Tulipana (1985) found that the extent to which board members felt knowledgeable of their roles, responsibilities, and duties was also positively related to organizational effectiveness. In analyzing the financial industry, Judge and Zeitham (1992) found that board involvement was positively related to the financial performance of an organization, that is, active and involved boards are associated with high performance. Green and Griesinger (1996) found a significant relationship between board performance and organizational effectiveness. Among the board activities most strongly correlated with organizational effectiveness were policy formation, strategic planning, program monitoring, financial planning and control, resource development, board development, and dispute resolution.

The literature on academic board roles and responsibilities described above tends to be descriptive or prescriptive in nature. These reports provide great insight into commonly accepted roles and responsibilities, but they are often a result of investigators drawing on personal experiences or self-reported ratings of members of the organization as opposed to comprehensive conceptual models or systematic research. There is also a lack of literature on these roles in relation to those of the president of the college or university and how they intersect. Also missing from these investigations is an examination of the relationship between the academic board and president and how that relationship may affect board operations, effectiveness, or performance; institutional performance; or presidential performance and tenure.
The Academic President

American higher education has become a unique and tremendously complex system. Currently close to 4,600 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities provide educational services to 21 million students (NCES, 2012). These institutions involve a dual structure consisting of a conventional bureaucratic hierarchy very much controlled by an institution’s trustees; the other a model of collegial inclusivity involving faculty who make decisions regarding institutional activities over which they have professional jurisdiction (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). Birnbaum (1989) suggests that this shared governance is a set of the processes intended to effectively balance the competing interests of two structures (hierarchical and collegial) and two authority systems (administrative and professional). The president often is the link that serves to join the two often competing structures and systems and attempts to span the gaps shared governance presents. At the same time, Levine (2012) argued that presidents are often caught between the competing calls, on the one hand, of their boards and of government for change and, on the other hand, of faculty to maintain the status quo and their academic prerogatives. The support of all is needed to govern, but presidents are incapable of wholly satisfying everyone (n.p.).

The American Council on Education (ACE)’s American President, 2012, provides an overview of the demographics of today’s presidents, as well as personal and professional background information, career paths and experience. Gathering information from 1,662 college and university presidents to illustrate the attributes of today’s presidents, ACE reported that the typical president was male (74 percent), aged 61 or older (58 percent), white (87 percent), and married (85 percent). Nearly 75 percent held a doctorate. Slightly less than 20 percent had been a president of a college or university before and 42 percent had held the position of provost or
chief academic officer immediately prior to becoming president; nearly 20 percent of presidents held positions outside of higher education prior to assuming their role as president. The report suggests that these demographics indicate that institutions are appointing leaders with a significant senior executive experience both inside and outside of higher education.

These demographics are very similar to those presented in an earlier report published in 2007, though the number of women serving as president increased by three percentage points from 23 percent in 2006 to 26 percent in 2011. The number of presidents holding positions outside of higher education rose by seven percentage points from just over 13 percent in 2006. Another significant change is in the age of presidents; the percent of presidents 61 or older grew from 49 percent to 58 percent; in 1986 only 14 percent were older than 61 (ACE, 2007).

The Chronicle of Higher Education (2005) surveyed presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities offering at least bachelor degrees and found that only 19 percent reported that their prior position was at their current institution. When asked about preparation for the job, approximately 60 percent felt only moderately well prepared or less. At the same time, 90 percent were very or highly satisfied with their jobs, and 94 percent indicated that they would be a college president again. Those individuals who rose to the presidency from inside the institution were more likely than those hired from outside of the institution to have been in office for more than 10 years. They also identified “good faculty and staff morale,” “excellent quality of educational programs,” and “quality of the faculty” as most important to defining the success of their presidency.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Academic President

The president is the most powerful individual in the academic community. Some authors have described the president's role as two-dimensional, with some activities or functions directed
"inside" to collegiate issues, concerns, and constituencies, while others are directed "outside" the institution to external constituents, including the local community, the state, and the general public (Cote, 1985). Externally, the president represents the institution and its values, and ensures the institution’s contributions to society. Internally, the president is expected to direct and control the complex institution and all of its functions (Nason, 1980). Shaw (1999) argued that as a leader, the college president must envision and affirm, articulate, implement, and serve as the keeper of the goals and values of the institution. Offering more specificity Ikenberry (2010) suggested that today’s college and university presidents must:

- have a strategic vision and shape priorities; be able to make the difficult, sometime painful decisions; communicate and build confidence and consensus among the board, faculty, staff, students, and alumni; build bridges to the public, the news media, business and civic leaders, and policy makers; serve as a spokesperson and living logo; balance the budget; exercise power judiciously; and work in concert with the governing board to oversee the operation of a large and complex organization (p. 26).

College and university presidents must manage competing priorities and demands to prepare a diverse student body, generate innovative research, and contribute to the economy of both the states in which they reside and the nation as a whole. This must be done while facing rising costs, reduced state and federal funds, changing demographics, globalization, advances in technology, for-profit and distance-learning competitors and an increasingly complex legal environment. Students, faculty, alumni, donors, federal government and state legislatures, and other external constituencies exert pressure on the university president to advance the institution. Bornstein (2005) commented that “most presidents demonstrate an amazing capacity to push and
pull their institutions toward ever-greater levels of quality and financial stability. Their success is remarkable given the pressures, challenges, and vulnerabilities of the position” (n.p.).

Presidential roles have been described by many (American Council on Education, 2000, 2012; Bornstein, 2005; Cotton, 2005; Dodds, 1962; Fisher, 1984; Fisher & Koch, 1996; Shaw, 1999), but empirical research is limited (Birnbaum, 1992; Cohen & March, 1986; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Neumann and Bensimon, 1990; Tierney, 1988). Dodds (1962) offered three basic categories of presidential roles: education, management and public relations. Offering more detail, Cohen and March (1986) argued that “there does not seem to be a clear core of objectives that presidents should pursue and, consequently, no clear set of attributes that will assure success. Neither is there a well-defined model of the presidential job” (p. 57). Yet they outlined four roles in which the president oversees (1) the operating budget, (2) educational policy decisions, (3) academic tenure decisions, and (4) planning. Cote (1985), incorporating the internal and external aspects of presidential responsibilities, identified twenty roles (see Table 1.1) intended to describe the major work areas of most college and university presidents. He found that the presidents and board chairs in his investigation closely agreed on the relative importance of the roles delineated in his study.

The American Council on Education (ACE)’s American President, 2012, surveyed presidents on their involvement in a variety of roles similar to those suggested by Cote. ACE found that the presidents surveyed indicated that they spent most of their time on budgeting and financial management and fundraising. Community relations, strategic planning, personnel issues, governing board relations, and enrollment management were also cited as involving significant portions of their time. Sixteen percent of long-serving presidents, that is those who have served for more than 10 years, indicated that they spent the majority of their time with
Table 1.1: Presidential Roles, Cote (1985)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
<th>EXTERNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>academic planner/innovator</td>
<td>alumni liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrator/executive</td>
<td>community leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consensus builder/mediator</td>
<td>educational advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faculty advocate</td>
<td>fundraiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial manager</td>
<td>government liaison/resource stimulator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>labor relations specialist</td>
<td>inter-institutional diplomat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>physical plant/property overseer</td>
<td>P.R. specialist/marketer/salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scholar/teacher</td>
<td>symbol/ceremonial official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student liaison/mentor</td>
<td>trustee rapport builder/advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustee rapport-builder</td>
<td>visionary/long range planner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with internal constituents when they first became presidents. This is down dramatically from 2006, when 59 percent of presidents said internal constituents received the majority of their focus (ACE, 2007).

The literature on the presidency suggests that the roles of the academic president have evolved and are now more complex and demanding, time-consuming, and involve the need to increase funding for the institution. The perspectives of long-serving presidents reported by ACE (2012) illustrate this point. These presidents were asked to select the three issues that have increased in importance while they were in office. They cited accountability/assessment of student learning (56 percent), budget/financial management (43 percent), and fundraising (36 percent). As a group the presidents surveyed cited relations with faculty, legislators, and governing boards as their greatest challenges.

Within these descriptions is an indication that board relations is a key role for academic presidents, because he or she is ultimately accountable to both the trustees and the concerned public (Fisher, 1984). As such, boards have particular expectations of the president when it comes to their roles and performance. Yet we can see that many roles may overlap. As such, role
conflict and role ambiguity can contribute to tension between the president and the board. What is not clearly explained is how role ambiguity, role conflict, and the negotiation of roles affect the working relationship between the board and the president.

**Presidential Effectiveness**

Many writers suggest that effectiveness of college or university presidents stems from the fulfillment of the roles identified above as well as personal characteristics. McGoey (2007) defined presidential effectiveness as:

1. taking the time to understand the culture of the institution;
2. developing a shared vision and mission for the institution;
3. influencing issues and people in a manner that meets the institutional vision and mission by administering short and long-term goals;
4. continuously communicating with internal and external stakeholders to increase awareness of what the institution stands for and is attempting to accomplish; and
5. actively seeking resources to enhance and support the academic programs and infrastructure necessary to meet the vision. (p. 87)

In his survey of this definition among college administrators, McGoey (2007) found that the most important roles of the president were: the relationship with the board of trustees, level of influence within the institution, relationship with the board chairperson, knowledge of politics in the institution, concern for long-range planning, and knowledge of higher education. Assessing indicators of presidential effectiveness among members of boards of trustees, Michael, Schwartz, and Balraj (2001), found that knowledge of higher education, the use of influence to attract
resources, a strong relationship with key constituents, and effective management skills are indicators of successful presidents important to the trustees who participated in the study.

Though not empirically studied, Fisher (1984) focused on leadership style. He suggested that an effective president is one who combines charismatic power with expert and legitimate power, a touch of reward power, with only a modicum of coercive power when dealing with staff, faculty, students, the board, and all external constituents. He goes on to offer myriad suggested activities to participate in, like joining in on victory celebrations, as well as those to avoid, such as engaging in gossip. Such a prescriptive formula for effectiveness is unlikely to fit all presidents and ensure that they will have a successful presidency. Enarson (1986) argued that charisma will not ensure that the president will remain in office in the face of internal and external pressures, crises, and potent critics and that “any presidency becomes a test of character as well as intellect” (p. 109).

Drawing on his experience as the president of Syracuse University, Shaw (1999) argued that colleges and universities are challenging to lead because of their horizontal structures with many teams and many leaders. He suggested that presidential leadership is “a process of persuasion and example by which one person induces others to take action in accordance with the leader’s purposes and the institution’s mission, vision, and values” (p. 9). He goes on to identify specific interpersonal competencies, such as knowing the players (board members, faculty, students, alumni, and government), the ability to deal creatively and effectively with conflict, the effective use of power, and motivating others, working in and with groups, dealing with the public, and crisis leadership.

These surveys or opinion pieces provide some guidance in this area, but little empirical research has been conducted regarding presidential effectiveness.
Presidential Term of Office

Hull (2008) suggested that there are only two good presidential models: (1) presidencies that run five to ten years, which enable the president to initiate ideas and see them come to fruition and offering energy and new ideas along the way, and (2) longer tenures that offer the benefit of continuity – as long as he or she can continually reinvigorate the campus with fresh ideas. But statistics about college and university presidents suggest that even the five- to ten-year presidency, let alone the longer tenures, are becoming a rarity rather than the norm. There is a great deal of evidence that the length of the tenure of presidents at colleges and universities has been on the decline over the past several decades. Kerr (1970) found that both average tenure and median tenure had become shockingly low. The average tenure of a president in 1899 was 10.9 years; in 1939 7.7 years; and in 1969, only 5.9 years. Median tenure had declined from seven years in 1929 to only two years in 1969. In his 2000 article, Turnover at the Top, Padilla reported that the average length of tenure of presidents had dropped from 11.7 years for presidents of private institutions and 7.8 years for those at public institutions hired in the early 1950s to only 8.8 for private institution presidents and 5.7 for public institutions. More recently, Boyles (2011), surveying presidents at public, four-year American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) member institutions, found that that 66 percent reported they had served five years or less in their current position; a mere 20 percent had served 6-10 years and only 14 percent served more than 14 years in their current presidential position. Finally, the American Council on Education’s The American College President: 2012 (2012) reported that presidential job turnover has increased, citing that, on average, presidents had been in the job seven years in 2011, compared with an average of 8.5 years in 2006. In addition to these reports of college and university presidential tenure in the United States, David Turpin, former president
of the University of Victoria noted that between 2006 and 2011, 12 Canadian university presidents left office after serving three years or less, before their full-term of office was complete, compared to only four in the previous five-year span (Berkowitz, 2011).

Wilson (2000) argued, though, that “a successful presidency is less about length of tenure and more about whether the president's vision was sufficiently embraced by the institution” (p. 35). In other words, there must also be a good fit between the president, the board, the faculty, and other constituents. Berkowitz (2011) relayed that failed presidencies reveal problems of governance, and when terminated presidents are unaware of problems with the board or their performance, what is exposed is a lack of performance review and engagement by the board. Such lack of engagement may signal a failed or ineffective working relationship between the board and the president.

While the situations cited earlier are high profile and extreme examples of the ineffective president-board relationships, not all presidential departures are the result of conflict or scandal. Some presidents may feel that the job is not that satisfying anymore, was not what they had hoped it would be, or are simply exhausted from the pressure and scrutiny (Kiley, 2012b, n.p.). The Commission on Strengthening Presidential Leadership (1984) suggested several external pressures that may suggest reasons for the declining tenures of college and university presidents. These include increased government regulations and controls; more involvement by the legal system and greater influence by students and parents; staff bureaucratization of and the involvement of outside “experts,” including search firms and consultants; the commercialization of college athletics; as well as greater intensity yet ambiguity of university goals and the decrease in the public’s acceptance of the authority and autonomy of many American institutions, including universities. Of note is the inclusion of frequent board involvement in day-
to-day operations in that list of external pressures. While increased involvement of the board in the management of the university is cited, the president’s relationship with the board is not explicitly listed as having significant pressure on presidential performance, and ultimately his or her tenure. In fact, there are few studies which this relationship is investigated.

**The Relationship between the President and the Board of Trustees**

Most scholarship on boards and presidents focuses on the roles and responsibilities of each. Much of that is in the context of effectiveness of the two parties. There is a modicum of literature that addresses and acknowledges the importance of relationship between college or university president and their boards, in particular the board chair. But that literature is generally based on anecdotes and personal experiences and often prescriptive, advising presidents and boards to do things like designate regular meeting times, take advantage of resources and training, commit to maintaining availability (DeCoudreaux, 2008; Legon, 2009; Reed & Duelks, 2012). Some literature suggests that presidents need boards that provide support for decisions and a safe haven for discussion of ideas, the presence of “go-to” board members, courage, trust and strategic thinking (Legon, 2009). Boards need presidents who promise not to keep secrets and help board members get a feel for the institution’s culture (DeCoudreaux, 2008; Reed & Duelks, 2012). It is recommended that the board and president spend time getting to know each other; develop a clear understanding of each other’s roles and how they complement each other; and be truly candid, honest and forthright with each other (DeCoudreaux, 2008; Reed & Duelks, 2012). The overarching suggestion inherent in all these pieces is that the relationship will be positive and fruitful if presidents and boards act along these lines.

Because investigation into the relationship between college or university presidents and their boards is limited, it is useful to look to literature on the relationship between corporate
boards and their chief executives. The corporate board and chief executive structure is different from that of higher education: in corporations the two are appointed by the board and share power and authority while in higher education, the board is appointed by the governor, elected by alumni or is self-generating, elects the board chairperson, and hires the president, who then reports to the boards. Corporate chief executives officers (CEO) often are subsequently appointed chairpersons, a move not generally made in higher education. Additionally, in corporations the CEO-Chair relationship, rather than either individual, is at the apex of the organization (Roberts & Stiles, 1999). This is not the case in higher education where the board has final authority and responsibility for the institution and the directions it takes. While there are differences the similarities are such that investigations into corporate board chairperson and chief executive relationships can be useful.

An example of a qualitative study of corporate board chairs and presidents is one by Roberts and Stiles (1999) who sought to better understand the relationship between the two. The authors argued that one cannot understand the nature of the chairman-chief executive relationship by simply delineating formal job specifications or defining roles, and that the informal processes of negotiating roles are equally as important as formal organizational elements. In understanding division of responsibilities, they found that role overlap occurred most often in the areas of strategy and external relations. This overlap caused ambiguity in the division of responsibilities and resulted in tension and conflict between the individuals involved. They found that role delineation was only successful if the individuals could work their way through ambiguity to a complementarity of roles, viewing the relationship not as a zero-sum game where one loses power as the other gains power, but rather where the other is viewed as a positive resource. The relationship succeeds through an explicit recognition of the
interdependence of the roles of the two parties, a willingness to recognize and respond flexibly to the needs of the other, and an acceptance of the value of the other to self. By doing this, a cooperative relationship that displaces the hierarchical structure of the organization is developed. Relationships fail when the two remain professionally and personally distant.

In a similar vein, Stewart (1991) conducted a two-year study of the relationship between 20 district general managers and their chairmen which showed that the two roles are very dependent upon each other, occupy overlapping domains. What each person did was considerably affected by the other’s behavior. Ultimately Stewart (1991) concluded that such a complementary relationship is desirable in strengthening the top leadership of the organization.

Role Theory

As described above, the academic board and president have specific roles and responsibilities, although not always well delineated and expectations not well defined. Such lack of differentiation and clarity can cause conflict and stress among the parties involved, unless, as Roberts and Stiles (1999) pointed out, they could work through the haziness to where the two complement each other and the other is viewed as a helpful resource. Empirical analysis of higher education president-board relationships is needed to offer a solid understanding of the interactional dynamics, in particular the negotiation of the relationship between college and university presidents and boards. It is necessary to draw on organizational and leadership theory literature to adequately assess this critical relationship. Theories that have been used to understand corporate or non-profit governance may be useful in developing a better understanding of president-board relationships in higher education. For this study, role theory can be employed to elucidate the subject.
Role theory suggests that individuals construct expectations about the behaviors and roles that they and others have taken on and encourage others to live up to the role expectations they have for them. Roles may be associated with a function, tied to attitudes, or associated with norms or social positions. Biddle (1979) suggested that Role Theory involves three concepts: (1) patterned and characteristic social behaviors, (2) parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and (3) scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood and followed by all members of the system.

There are several different variations on role theory: functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organizational, and cognitive (Biddle, 1986). Two are most applicable here. First is **Functional role theory**, which focuses on the behaviors characteristic of persons occupying specific positions within a stable social system. These persons may be counted upon to conform to norms established for their own conduct and the expectations of conformity to norms of others in the social system. **Organizational role theory** is focused on well-established, task-oriented, and hierarchical social systems, where roles are associated with specific social positions and are generated by expectations of social norms.

Defining these categories somewhat differently, Neuberger (2002, as cited in Winkler, 2010) suggested three variations in role theory: **structuralistic, functionalist, and symbolic interactionism**. Most applicable to higher education governance is Neuberger’s **structuralistic perspective**, in which the individuals’ roles are the sum of behavioral expectations which an organization and its members have of an individual in a specific position. Individual members may have varying role expectations of positions based on organizational rules that have assigned the position to specific functions and places within the hierarchy. Less applicable for higher education are Neuberger’s **functionalist approach**, which involves the individual’s social network.
and focuses less on specific roles but rather the completion of the tasks of the system or organization and symbolic interactionism which focuses on the behavior of an individual, suggesting that behavior is the outcome of one’s interests and lived experiences and group member roles are subjective and reflect the particular context.

Important to role theory is consensus or the degree of agreement among the expectations of the persons in the social group. When there is consensus, the individuals in the system know what they are to do, and all persons in the system can be counted on to support those norms with sanctions. Role conflict occurs when the players have different ideas about what they should be doing versus the expectations placed upon them (Biddle, 1986). Biddle (1986) suggests that issues of consensus can be empirically investigated by asking two questions: (1) to what extent do persons actually agree on roles and norms and what factors affect their agreement? and (2) if the integration of social systems is facilitated by normative consensus, what factors affect this relationship?

This perspective has been criticized because it rests on the assumption that organizations are rational and stable entities, that all conflicts are role conflicts, and that once the role conflict is resolved the individuals involved will be happy and productive (Hall, 1972). Van de Vliert (1981) suggested that the stress of role conflict could be relieved in three ways: when possible, choosing from among norms (although facing sanctions and judgments regarding legitimacy); compromising between norms; or, when faced with no other viable options, withdrawal from the situation. Hall (1972) suggested that those faced with role conflict could negotiate with the others involved to change their expectations as well as modifying perspective or behaviors related to the problem.
After reviewing the literature on Role Theory, Biddle (1986) argued that the focus of most research has been on role conflict or consensus and there is a dearth of empirical research that examines the origins, dynamics, and effects of roles, social positions, and expectations. Biddle (1986) suggests other issues around roles are important to investigate, including role ambiguity (a condition in which expectations are incomplete or insufficient to guide behavior), role malintegration (when roles do not fit well together), role discontinuity (when the person must perform a sequence of malintegrated roles), and role overload (when the person is faced with too many expectations). Seers (2004) suggested that messages from others in the organization that convey expectations about the leaders’ roles serve as the proximal cause of a great deal of what leaders actually do and what must be studied is how leader roles become differentiated.

Role Theory, in particular role conflict and role ambiguity, provides a fitting tool for understanding critical aspects of the higher education president-board relationship because many of the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the two are unclear, overlap, or conflict. Role ambiguity and role conflict may contribute to discordant relationships. Understanding if, how, and why role ambiguity and role conflict happen may contribute greatly to helping the two establish stronger working relationships. But, in addition to issues around roles and responsibilities, it is useful to understand how what individuals do is shaped by the expectations that others have of their behavior and by the extent to which they perceive and accept these expectations. As such, Social Exchange theories are an appropriate lens through which to look at the relationship between the president and the board of trustees.
Social Exchange Theory

Should the relationship between the president and the board of trustees be seen as a superior-subordinate relationship, with the board as the superior and the president as the subordinate? Because the board appoints the president, and ultimately can dismiss the president, such a description may be appropriate. Yet numerous pieces have suggested that the two work in partnership. As such, to see the relationship as primarily that of a chief and subordinate may be misleading and discount the extent of their mutual dependence and the different ways in which they could share the leadership role (Stewart, 1991). As such, Social Exchange Theory, which seeks to understand social structures that are created in relationships and how these structures both limit and enable the individuals involved in social exchanges to exercise power and influence (Cook & Rice, 2003), may also contribute to this investigation.

Social Exchange Theory is defined in terms of “voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (Blau, 1964, p. 91). Interactions may be reciprocal exchanges or negotiated exchanges that mutually reinforce behavior between the parties. The lack of mutual reinforcement could result in the termination of a relationship (Blau, 1964).

A core concept for many social exchange theorists is the relationship between social structure and power. Power is described as a function of the dependence of one actor upon another or a group for valued resources and behaviors (Cook & Rice, 2003). This dependence is a feature of interconnected partners whose relative power grows out of the social network and the positions the individuals occupy (Cook & Emerson, 1978). Relationships then are causal chains: structural power positively affects the frequency of exchanges between actors, which in turn results in the development of positive everyday emotions (e.g., liking, satisfaction) which in
turn positively affect relational cohesion, which positively affects behavioral outcomes such as commitment to the relationship (Cook & Rice, 2003, p. 62).

Exchange theory within the context of organizations and leadership has been presented in both Leader-Exchange Theory and Team-Member Exchange Theory. Graen (2004) argued that models that seek to understand how the three factors in organizations – actors, behaviors, and contexts – are developed through interactions are the most useful, but unfortunately, most leadership theories focus simply on leaders’ behavioral styles or personalities. As such, Graen (1976, 2004) offered Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) as a way to conceptualize leadership as an interpersonal role-making process. He theorized that, despite the power structures inherent in hierarchies influential and powerful roles are negotiated. Power structures emerge from the dynamics and structures created as dyads negotiate leadership relationships and roles. The result is that organizational power structures adapt and change patterns of authority and legitimacy. Through this “role-making,” individual’s actions are enhanced by anticipated mutually rewarding work relationships (Graen, 1976). LMX theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between the leader and the follower, in an attempt to answer, “What is the proper mix of relational characteristics to promote desired outcomes?” (Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1973). While the focus of LMX is on the differential relationships that the leader has with subordinates and not on shared leadership (Dansereau et al., 1973; Winkler, 2009), Seers (1996) offered Team-Member Exchange Theory (TMX) which describes how reciprocal influence patterns among team members constitute a possible form of shared leadership that may co-exist with hierarchical authority. In other words, socially constructed leadership supersedes the formalized structure of organizational hierarchy. Seers (2004) suggested that exchange theories like LMX or TMX offer a way to understand how individuals negotiate organizational roles that
may establish patterns of deference and influence, how such roles arise, and how they may evolve over time, such that organizational structure is recognized as endogenous rather than a given.

In writing about derailed academic presidencies, Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) reflect aspects of LMX and TMX. They state, “boards and candidates must understand the tension between being a team player as a subordinate in a system and being a president whose primary roles is institutional champion (p. 105).” This tension may be a factor that affects the development and maintenance of the president-board relationship.
Chapter 3. Methods

This case study sought to discover the nature of the relationship between presidents and their boards. Additionally, it investigated possible influence of role ambiguity and role conflict in the dynamics of this relationship. Finally, it looked at the relationship as it relates to the length of the president’s term in office. As such, three research questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of the working relationship between the president and the board?
2. How do role ambiguity and role conflict affect the relationship between the president and the board?
3. How does the nature of the relationship between the president and the board relate to the length of the president’s term in office?

These questions are exploratory and intended to contribute to theory. For that reason, a case study approach is appropriate for this study. In exploratory research, hypotheses are not developed in advance and may involve only a rudimentary theory. The research is carried out following hunches, changing direction as necessary (Swanborn, 2010), and does not follow any set formula. Rather, the researcher remains flexible and pragmatic yet broad and thorough (Davies, 2006). The goal is “exploration-for-discovery” (Davies, 2006) – to discover relevant aspects and insights that can lead to the generation of a theory and lay the groundwork for more in-depth descriptive research (Swanborn, 2010). It does not provide definitive answers for the overall population.

This study involved a holistic investigation into a single case, and studied the president-board relationship as it naturally occurs, with the goal of developing a description of the nature of that relationship. Also involved was an attempt to understand how role ambiguity and role
conflict affect the working relationship between the board and the president (Krathwohl, 2009), if at all. In addition, this study sought to identify aspects of the relationship that may be related to the length of tenure of the president.

Yin (2012) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a “case”), set within its real-world context (p. 18).” In a case study, the researcher focuses on process tracing, describing and explaining the social processes between persons participating in the process (Swanborn, 2010). Yin (2012) suggested that this method of research is most appropriate for research investigating a descriptive question, e.g. “What is happening or has happened?” or an explanatory question, i.e. “How or why did something happen? (p. 18)” Stake (2000) provides clarification, suggesting that the driving question is: “What can be learned from the case?” (p. 436).

By studying the phenomenon in its natural situation, as opposed to in a laboratory or in a standardized interview, the researcher can better understand the context and the conditions in which the case is set, both of which are integral to the understanding of the case (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2012). Through such information, the researcher can obtain an in-depth understanding of the issues, including sense-making and systems of thinking (Swanborn, 2010). A case study presents the opportunity to look at social interactions, the meanings that the participants in the systems attach to each other, and how they interpret each other’s actions.

The following sections describe the setting and participants in the study, and the data gathering and analysis procedures. Supporting documents such as the Institutional Review Board approval letters, interview protocols for the pilot and main study, as well as the thematic list are included in the appendices.
Case Setting and Sample

Yin (2012) advises that a case study may consist of single or multiple cases, both of which could be holistic or have embedded subcases. This study was intended to involve a multiple case study looking at two contrasting institutional situations – i.e. a long-term presidency perceived to be a successful one, and one in which the president was terminated resulting from conflict between the board and the president. Because boards and terminated presidents are often limited in their ability to discuss the details of the president’s termination, that structure was not feasible. Instead, the focus of this study is on one institution at which both the current presidents and immediate past president as well as members of the board, both current and past, agreed to participate.

Examining the relationship between a president and the board of trustees at an institution presents sensitivities – few institutions would welcome an examination of this relationship because of the sensitive nature of the relationship and the lack of willingness to open this relationship to public view. Several institutions were approached to serve as the case in this study; all but one declined. As such, the selection of that institution was purposive and relied on convenience. The connection with the institution’s president was through the faculty of the Higher Education program at Penn State. While the use of convenience to obtain a sample is often viewed to have limited credibility, it is acceptable in cases where populations are difficult to access, such as this.

After several requests to serve as a case, a small, private, Liberal Arts college located in the mid-Atlantic was identified and engaged. The institution was originally incorporated in the late 1800’s. The board of this college at the time of this study consisted of 35 members (10 women and 25 men). This number was within the guidelines of the college’s articles of
incorporation, which states that the board will consist of “of not less than thirty-one (31) nor more than forty (40) members.” In this particular case, both the current president and immediate past president agreed to participate.

Working with the two presidents I was able to identify appropriate board members and members of the college’s administration. As a result, the study involved a total of 19 individuals: the current president and immediate past president; three board members who served while the immediate past president was in office; two board members new to the board and who had served only with the current president; five board members who serve on the board with both the current president as well as with the immediate past president; and seven members of the leadership team. Included in the group of board members were the current chair of the board, the immediate past chair of the board, the current vice chair of the board and the immediate past vice chair of the board, and the current board treasurer. The board members in the study come from diverse professional backgrounds: two lawyers, a leadership consultant, a financial advisor, a marketing/strategic planning consultant, a clinical trials consultant, a retired CFO, a pharmaceutical research fellow, a physician, and a retired vice president of a major corporation.

The participant group included 13 men and six women. One was a person of color. Three had been on the board for more than 20 years, four had been on the board 10-19 years, and three had been board members for less than 10 years. Five of the administrators had been in their roles for two years or less, two had been in their roles for five to nine years, one had been in his role for over 20 years and was scheduled to retire. The current president had been in office for just under two years at the time of the study, and the immediate past president had been in his post for nearly 15 years.
Participants’ distributions by role, years in that role, gender, and race are outlined in Table 3.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Total Years on Board¹</th>
<th>Total Years in Position¹</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Anderson</td>
<td>President (current)</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Moore</td>
<td>President (past)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Lewis</td>
<td>Board-Past President</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey Brown</td>
<td>Board-Past President</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Thompson</td>
<td>Board-Past President</td>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Martin</td>
<td>Board-Current President</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Taylor</td>
<td>Board-Current President</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Jones</td>
<td>Board-Both</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly Jackson</td>
<td>Board-Both</td>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry Johnson</td>
<td>Board-Both</td>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Smith</td>
<td>Board-Both</td>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Wilson</td>
<td>Board-Both</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Davis</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald White</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Miller</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria Baker</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Williams</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Green</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca Harris</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Organized by participant’s (assigned pseudonym) first name
²As of May 2015. Numbers were rounded to protect identities
³Current board chair

Data Gathering Procedures

The primary data sources for case study research include direct and participatory observation, interviews with key players, available documents and archival records, and other artifacts (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2012). Yet case study research has been criticized for limited data and the data obtained permit many interpretations. By triangulating the data, that is establishing converging lines of evidence (Swanborn, 2010) case study research can determine
areas of agreement as well as areas of divergence so that the researcher can uncover deeper meanings in the data. Triangulation then, “increas[es] confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem” (Thurmond, 2001, p. 254). To enable triangulation of data, I planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with the university presidents, the board chair, and other key administrators; observe one or two board and board committee meetings; and review pertinent documents. I was granted permission to conduct the interview and review the documents, but was not permitted to observe board or committee meetings due to concerns over confidentiality and the impact of an outside observer on natural conversation. Triangulation, then, resulted from including participants in various roles.

After securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A), I worked with the two presidents to identify possible participants in the spring of 2015. I followed up their introduction of the study and me as the investigator with invitations sent by electronic mail in March, 2015. In that email I requested a meeting for an interview (see Appendix B). I sent a total of 20 invitations, following up with a second request if I had not received a response. A total of 19 individuals agreed to participate and interviews were arranged for May and June of 2015. Once I secured an appointment, I sent an email confirmation with the Informed Consent documentation. I followed up with an email reminder a day before each meeting.

To protect the identities of the individual participants, I assigned a pseudonym to each interviewee and removed all other identifiers from the interview transcripts.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The main method for data collection was semi-structured interviews with the 19 individuals. These interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes, though
some lasted as little as 42 and others lasting as long as 90 minutes; all were audio recorded. I met with each participant in person or over the phone. After confidentiality measures were explained and informed consent (see Appendix D) acquired. I reviewed procedures for data collection and analysis.

I used an interview guide of 10-12 questions in order to cover the same set of issues for all of the participants, although I allowed the participants to elaborate as much as they wanted. This provided significant opportunity for discussion and expansion and the sharing of personal perspectives from the participants in their own words. After the first few interviews, it was evident that some questions were confusing and some did not gather information that was useful to the study. As a result, I altered the questions slightly to reflect changes necessary for gathering the desired data. See Appendix D for the original and revised interview protocols for the various populations.

Throughout the interviews I took notes to capture comments and ideas. Immediately after each interview I reviewed my notes and captured my initial thoughts, observations, and impressions of the meeting.

I enlisted an outside service to transcribe recorded interviews, but also listened to the interviews on tape while reading the transcript to verify accuracy of the transcription, make necessary adjustments to the transcript, and to listen for important inflections in the conversation that may influence subsequent analysis.

Though planned, a second round of interviews was not completed. The interviews conducted provided ample information for analysis. Because of this saturation, I determined that additional interviews with the participants would not have provided significantly different or expanded information.
Review of pertinent documents. I obtained permission to review official documents related to the roles of the president and the board as well as institutional policies and procedures. Specifically, I reviewed and analyzed: (1) the current president’s employment agreement, (2) the institution’s articles of incorporation, and (3) the recently amended by-laws of the institution as well as the (4) board’s statement on trustee responsibilities, and (5) the trustee self-assessment, completed by each Trustee whose term is expiring.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were fully transcribed and checked, I used a combination of qualitative software, in this case Dedose, and manual evaluation to organize, code, and analyze all the data. Welsh (2002) suggested that while qualitative software can add rigor to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type … and can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found, this searching needs to be married with manual scrutiny techniques so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated (p. 4).

As such, the data was subjected to several rounds of coding: the first pass through of the data focused on identifying, labeling, and classifying the data. As the coding evolved, the labels were examined and grouped into categories, these being (1) communication and transparency, (2) trust, (3) shared vision, and (4) an understanding of roles and responsibilities. A second series of focused coding, guided by the high-level categories, followed to identify the most significant and/or frequent codes. This required removing, renaming or grouping some initial codes. This was followed by axial coding, where I grouped the codes within the category to specify the properties and dimensions of the category. Throughout these rounds of coding, I spent time
comparing and contrasting, refining my concepts, and focusing my analysis. Suter (2012) suggests that this type of back-and-forth comparison within categories and their properties, between categories (to make tentative connections), and between other components of conceptualization is a critical procedure in coding (p. 355). This iterative process resulted in an understanding of the data that allowed for an understanding of the president-board relationship to emerge.

Because one of the research questions focused specifically on role conflict and role ambiguity, several questions asked of the participants attempted to gather information on those concepts. Thus my analysis included a special focus on key words and codes that would serve to indicate the presence of role conflict and role ambiguity.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this particular investigation, I utilized extant theories (Role Theory and Exchange Theory, described above) to frame the study in an attempt to explain the nature of the relationship. With case study structure the research can be organized in terms of the problem (e.g. what is the nature of the president-board relationship, how is a president-board relationship established and maintained over time), the context (e.g. the length of the president’s tenure), the issues (e.g. role delineation, role conflict and/or role ambiguity, and how organizational roles are negotiated and evolve), and the lessons learned (e.g. to what extent do the president and the board hold similar or conflicting perceptions of the relationship as well as their own and the other’s roles and responsibilities) (Schramm, 2006).

**Limitations of the Study**

As noted earlier, this study was exploratory research into the nature of the president-board relationship. While case study research cannot be generalized to a wider population, it can
be helpful in generating new ideas that might be tested by other methods. In addition, because the findings are based on the analysis of qualitative data a great deal depends on the interpretation of the information obtained. My own observational biases and subjective opinions may have influenced my assessment of what the data means. Nevertheless, my role as researcher is not to present the data as fact, but to describe and to interpret in an effort to explain the social phenomena. (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

This study has limitations related to both the sample and the sources of data which were primarily interviews. First, because of the complex and potentially sensitive nature of the president-board relationship, I experienced tremendous difficulty in locating a sample for this investigation. Because of that, there may be a limitation related to the potential hesitancy of participants to volunteer information about problems in the president-board relationship. Because this study will become a public document, the participants may have possessed a fear of identification and the release of sensitive information. As such, I took strict measures to mask identities of the individuals involved and the institution.

Additionally, the study included only the 19 individuals involved in the leadership of one institution, most of whom were men (13 or 68 percent men and six or 32 percent women) and only one person of color, although it is not an inaccurate reflection of the population of college and university boards and administrations (Selingo, 2007; AGB, 2007 and 2016). And while observation of board and committee meetings would have been helpful to confirm some of the data, I offer that the engagement of the individuals involved in such meetings is reflective of their views on the president-board relationship.

Other limitations relate to the data itself. These were the participants’ own stories, some recalled from interactions and meetings that took place a long time ago. The details of those
incidents may be blurred by time, by situations that happened between then and when the interviews took place, or simple nostalgia.

While the study of one institution may suggest a limitation related to generalizability to other higher education institution types and sizes, it can be argued that because this study examined the nature of a relationship – the one between a president and a board – institutional type may not result in significant differences. Rather, this study may serve to illuminate nature of this relationship at any institution.
Chapter 4. Research Findings

This exploratory case study sought to discover and understand the nature of the relationship between presidents and their governing boards. Additionally, it investigated the possible influence of role ambiguity and role conflict in the dynamics of this relationship. Finally, it probed for possible connections of this relationship to the length of the president’s term in office. To reiterate, the guiding research questions were:

1. What is the nature of the working relationship between the president and the board?
2. How do role ambiguity and role conflict affect the relationship between the president and the board?
3. How does the nature of the relationship between the president and the board relate to the length of the president’s term in office?

This dissertation study included 19 participants (see Table 3.1 for details on participants) who were interviewed about their views on the roles and responsibilities of college and university boards and presidents as well as general thoughts on the relationship between the two at their institution. Using qualitative methods, data gathered through those interviews as well as documents provided by the institution were coded and analyzed to identify and derive meaning from the data pieces. These ideas were compared for similarities and differences between the participants through several rounds of data coding until some concepts were linked.

Based on the information derived from these interviews, the relationships between this board and the two presidents involved can be described as involving the following distinct, yet interrelated components: (1) communication and transparency; (2) trust; (3) vision alignment;
and (4) a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. The following sections provide explanation of each of the components involved in the relationships examined in this study.

Communication and Transparency

Consistently and among all of the board members, administrators, and the presidents involved in this study, communication was expressed as the cornerstone of the president-board relationship. The importance of communication can also be seen in Mid-Atlantic College’s by-laws, which indicate that communication is an integral part of the president’s duties – facilitating communication between the faculty and the board and the students and the board in addition to maintaining communication between the president and the board. Stephen, a board member during both presidencies, provided his thoughts on the importance of communication, which echoed the thoughts of many of the participants: “There needs to be transparency about issues, short-term and long-term. There needs to be active communication and a willingness to enable the hard conversations to happen, as well as to build trust.”

To understand more about communication as a critical aspect of the relationship between the board and the president, I probed for more details as to what communication meant to individual participants. The interviews revealed that communication within the president-board relationship has many meanings and implications. First and foremost, communication is two-way, as some participants described, a “dialogue” or “conversation” – in other words, not only must the president relay information about the college and its people, activities, and operations, the board must be receptive to and engaged with that information. Secondly, there is a clear indication that certain things must be communicated to the board by the president – the good, the bad, and the ugly. Finally, the president and the board must be willing to engage in difficult
discussions, being willing to challenge the other while valuing the voices and different perspectives that are brought to the table. Each of these is explored below.

All board members interviewed expected both to be kept informed of issues and problems and transparency by the president. At the same time, several participants indicated that the board must ask good questions and be engaged – there must be a conversation, not the board being ‘talked at’ by the president. It was imperative that the board must only approve actions and decisions with a full understanding of the issues and after voicing concerns. Michael, who is part of the administration, commented that, “The president and the board share managing communications together, from the board to the president and from the president to the board, so that neither of them is ever surprised about communications that are happening” Patrick, a board member with the past president, offered, “I think that the president ought to be prepared to make recommendations to the board, and the board ought to be taking a serious and non-rubber stamping look at those recommendations.”

The board expects communication from the president to involve information on what is happening on campus and in higher education in general, such as problems and issues, budget considerations, and to initiate discussions about those matters. Many study participants cited that in order for the board to be able to fulfill its roles in planning, budgeting, and allocating resources; shaping institutional direction; protecting institutional assets; and supporting and evaluating the president, the board must be knowledgeable and engaged. Matthew, a member of the administrative team, described the communication from the president as serving to “provide the context in which we are trying to get the work done to fulfill the mission, so that the board has the awareness and the confidence that we are achieving what we are supposed to be doing.”
Not only is the president expected to share information, the president must engage the board members in meaningful ways. Kevin, a board member with the current president, spoke highly of the current president’s efforts to inform and engage the board in discussions about issues, citing the importance of the information to the work of the board:

we read business affairs, enrollment, videos – we get all that. So we go to the meeting with “okay, what did you think? Let’s really discuss it. Let’s not just learn about it. Let’s discuss it … it’s a great way to run the meeting. It’s a lot more time consuming for us. But it makes us that much more knowledgeable.

The group acknowledged that the board is equally responsible for that conversation. Joseph, the current president, emphasized that,

It can never get to a place where nobody asks questions, or you’re not talking to one another. Because if you get too complacent with all of that then both sides get probably tripped up in something … I want continuous engagement… me with them, them with me, it’s a checks and balances type of situation...

Jeffrey, a board member with the past president, concurred, stating that, “the president needs to have an active board that does not just merely rubber stamps things, but also gives some direction to the president.”

Ellen, a member of the board during both presidencies, also described how communication is critical to the oversight position of the board. The board must always be “asking questions, being knowledgeable about what’s going on, [so we can] vote on certain things.” Patrick contributed that, “the board has to understand that it has ultimate responsibility for signing off on this stuff. I think it requires some serious critical thinking all along the way. You’ve got to question these ideas.”
At Mid-Atlantic College, Maria, a member of the administrative team, finds the conversation to be very much two-way, stating, “I think that it’s a very open forum … board members absolutely feel comfortable to share their perspectives and they do.”

The participants indicated that the board expects to hear from the president about the (1) status of the college through reports on such things as campus happenings, enrollments, fundraising initiatives and outcomes; (2) problems and issues the college is facing; and (3) the budget and items that impact that budget. Many pointed out that this information ensures that the parties are up-to-speed and on the same page, and that the information informs decision-making – it is through this information that the board is able to oversee the strategic direction of the institution and gauge the institution’s progress toward achieving its established goals.

Regarding the status of the college, many participants cited the importance of solid, up-to-date, analyzed, and transparent information, commenting that it is necessary for discussions and decision-making. Kimberly, a member of the board during both presidencies, described how the current president

asked if we would like him to send out a monthly update, enrollment numbers, development numbers, any hot topics on campus, just so that we would not have any surprises. And we all agreed that would be very helpful. So that’s occurring now …. He works very hard at keeping us informed.

Daniel, on the board during the previous presidency, relayed that the former president, Russell, and his staff

always provided excellent information. Even if it was information or data that [showed that we] did not make the goals that were addressed, like how many students we needed, how many students of color or diversity, what was the goal?
…. I’m a data guy so I just loved how much information they provided and analyzed.

Joseph, the current president, offered:

after my first year I realized that the board didn’t know as much as they should know and so the senior team and I, we now construct – outside of board meetings – four updates a year that are just a really quick, pithy summary of work being done here at the college and each of our different management areas to help keep the board engaged and aware of what’s going on.

Stephen, a member of the board during both presidencies, talked about the importance of understanding the institution and the higher education environment, suggesting that if individuals commit to board membership, they should “want to understand kind of the whole environment a little more deeply.”

Problems and issues that the institution faces are both micro and macro. Several of the participants discussed significant problems the college faced, from a donor reneging on a contribution that caused a substantial budgetary shortfall, to a locally newsworthy personnel issue, and to influences on the national scale, such as arming the police force or hiring a Title IX coordinator. Christine, a member of the board with the current president, was straightforward in her statement that the president’s job is to, “identify issues, find resolutions, and to put in what would be a CAPA, a corrective action plan, and to follow through … and keep communication lines open with the board.” This was echoed by Jeffrey, who commented that,

I want to know about the problems that could become public problems – that could become controversial problems. I’m not necessarily going to interfere but I
want to know about them. So that if I think the board needs to convene to discuss
an issue then we need to do it.
Russell, the past president, explained that, with major problems “the board has to know right
away, and what we’re going to do about it right away…. it’s the responsibility of the president to
make sure that the board understands what’s going on.” Daniel noted that the president and his
team should be “defining the problem, being real about it, and owning the problem – then
figuring out what was best to do about it.” Many participants echoed these sentiments,
suggesting that the president should, in the face of problems that arise, use the board as advisors
and send regular communiqués updating the board on the situation.

Communication about problems must be timely and thorough and include both good
news and bad, or the board may develop doubts and distrust. Regarding an instance where
communication about a campus problem during the previous presidency was lacking. Kevin
remarked that,

They’re good at keeping us informed of the positives, but the negatives… that to
me was [the president’s] job to inform all the board members. Because one of our
jobs is to be out in the community … so when something is in the news and we’re
clueless… He’s on top of everything, so he should have just shot things out to us
as it was developing.

Because of the board’s fiscal responsibilities, providing budget information to the board
is imperative. Ensuring that the board has a thorough understanding of the budget, each of the
pieces, as well as the constraints and impacts of budgetary issues is an important part of the
president’s role. Russell provided an important example, offering, “you want that budget to be
balanced – the board has to understand what balanced really means. Because you can have a balanced budget and be not doing very well financially.”

Stephen spoke highly about board of Mid-Atlantic College’s understanding of budget issues, particularly with the current president’s communication to the board:

the membership on the board really does have a good, clear picture about what the challenges are at [the college], as well as what the strengths are. And we’ve spent a lot of time in conversation … to make sure that we can get as much transparency as we can about what the issues are for the college.

On the other hand, Patrick thought that, “the board typically [does not have] the capacity to know the specifics about where the college should be going, even though it probably has the ultimate responsibility to sign off on that.” To ameliorate that, Jeffrey emphasized the need to “generate some discussion and some ideas prior to trying to make the decision or put it in the budget to do this. So it’s a good way to do things. Don’t stick it in the budget and then have everybody question why we need this.”

Several participants indicated that conversations about budgets, problems or issues the college is facing, or direction the institution should take must include a variety of voices and differing opinions and ideas. In the case of Mid-Atlantic College, these discussions, while not contentious, have sometimes been challenging. The participants in this study agreed that the president and the board must value different perspectives that are brought to the table and not be afraid of difficult discussions. Donald, a member of the administrative team, stated that the president should not be “afraid to have difficult conversations. He’s got a lot of backbone but at the same time respects people who also have backbone.” Patrick contributed that, “you need at
least one or two dissidents on the board who are not afraid to speak up... people that are willing to slow up the meeting, gum up the works, ask difficult questions.”

Rebecca, who is a member of the administrative team, added that, “The board cannot be afraid to challenge the president, the conversation, or a decision.” She described how at Mid-Atlantic College those discussions have presented an opportunity for the group to look at, think through, and discuss issues further or for the president to explain why they feel this is the best decision for the college in greater detail.

But the discussion must be controlled. Daniel, a board member, suggested that whether you’re on the board or you’re the president, you have to say things in a way that does not antagonize other board members or the president ... there’s a way to get things done and there’s a way to not get things done ... without creating animosity and contentious relationships.

This was echoed by Maria, a member of the administrative team, who described a recent budget discussion where the president faced strong push for investment in a new administrative position by some trustees. Joseph provided an overview of where the college stood based on the budget and a rationale for why the institution has not moved forward on that particular issue. She said, “having that frank and open dialogue and having the ability for the president and the trustees to be able to defend their positions without anyone being confrontational or overly-aggressive is helpful in working through tough decisions.”

At the same time, addressing issues related to performance of the college is an important role for the board, and one that should be a part of the relationship. Board members and administrative participants agreed that it is important for the board to ask those tough questions and hold the president and the college administration accountable. Donald spoke about an earlier
iteration of the board who, though concerned about the budget and the direction the college needed to take, did not address their perceived mishandling of a donor by the then president. He stated that “the funny thing about it was no one ever came out directly and talked to [Russell] about it. They let us know that we needed to fix this, but they didn’t talk to [the president].”

It was evident that the volume, frequency, and type of communication are different for the current president (Joseph) than what was happening at the end of the tenure of the former president (Russell), who had been in office for 15 years. Some participants suggested that it could be reflective of a new president trying to build trust and demonstrate leadership, or the current president’s personal style versus that of the former president. Joseph is considered to be very transparent, providing thorough information and analysis of issues and situations. Michael relayed that Joseph works very hard at keeping the board informed, suggesting that he “will have staying power as long as he continues to be transparent.”

It was noted that, particularly as he neared the end of his presidency, the past president probably did not feel he needed to share everything or include the board in decisions. This level of confidence the long-term president had in his abilities may have resulted in limited communication and transparency. Ellen commented that,

I don’t know that we would have ever known that we weren’t being confided in.

Things were going well. Not that there weren’t problems and not that there weren’t problems brought to the board, there were. But, they really had to get to a higher level, critical level I think, before they were brought to the board.

Several board members cited the board’s level of comfort with the long-term president may have negatively affected the frequency of communication, the transparency of issues and decisions, and board engagement. Patrick described the progression well: “when he first started, [the board]
actually was some help to [Russell] – as a sounding board … and I think he grew in the job and became more confident so much so that he didn’t need that anymore.”

Stephen also commented that,

[Russell, the past president] and the board had gotten comfortable with each other, to the point that neither side was trying quite as hard. So it wasn’t bad, it was just different … It’s kind of like the relationship I’ve seen in some couples who have been married for a really long time. They don’t need as many words to communicate with each other because you just kind of know what the other person’s thinking. But, for those of us who hadn’t been around for those first long part of the relationship, not everything made sense.”

This was echoed by Donald who observed that board engagement waned over time:

I don’t know if it’s a combination of [the board] not fully paying attention … or they were so worried about this over here, that they would say, ‘Just do what you have to do.’ These things look worse in retrospect than they do at the time.

The negative impact on college governance was expressed by several. Michael stated,

I wasn’t satisfied with the relationship between [the past president] and the board at the end, I thought it was too cozy … [and as a result] the board meetings were less meaningful. It was about getting done as opposed to doing real work on the college.

An observation made by several participants, particularly many of the administrators and some board members, was that there had grown to be groups of insiders and outsiders with the past president and his boards. This “board within a board” seemed to exert a great deal of influence in particular when it came to sharing of information and decision-making. Arthur, on
the administrative team, described it as Russell having, “a coalition, a group that he was very close with. And that group carried weight with others and I can’t think of a single problem where he didn’t know how it was going to be decided.” This segmentation of the group was seen as problematic, particularly to newer board members and administrators. Comments from study participants indicated that the offline discussions ultimately rendered discussion at board meetings moot and, more often than not missing. Stephen indicated that currently “both the board and the [new] president are bending over backwards to support each other, up to and including a different and brighter degree of transparency on and discussion of issues.”

It is evident that communication and transparency are essential to these president-board relationships. There must be an engaged, active, and on-going dialogue between the president and the board, but the president must ensure that the board has the information needed to understand, assess, and appropriately engage in that dialogue. Additionally, communication must: (1) include problems (and solutions) as well as successes; (2) be concise, yet thorough; and (3) be timely. Consistency in communication over time is also an important piece of the equation. Regardless of the level of comfort the president has in his or her position and abilities, there must be an effort to keep the board engaged, and recognize the need for thorough communication for those new to the board.

**Trust**

All of the board members, administrators, and presidents interviewed cited trust as being an essential part of the president-board relationship. Regardless of the number of years in their roles, gender, or position, all expected a level of confidence and trust in the president. Participants repeatedly used words like “assurance,” “confidence,” “belief in,” “faith,” and other similar words to reflect the centrality of trust. Christine noted the importance of trust, suggesting
that “a lot of the function between the president and the board comes from that sense of trust and integrity.” Russell, the past president, was very passionate about trust between the president and the board:

I think the thing that’s important is to have trust between the board and the president. And that trust comes because the president says, ‘we’re going to do something’ and then actually does it, as opposed to saying something and it never gets done. Or maybe it’s false, like a balanced budget, but it’s not balanced. Well pretty soon that trust begins to evaporate.

Paul, a member of the board during both presidencies, explained what trust in the president means to him as a board member:

[the president will] tell you something and you can rely on it… trusting that the President is not going to try to manage the opinions of the board, for instance, filter the news, manipulate the board, [but will] act in good faith with the board.

This was similar to thoughts expressed by administrators as well. Matthew offered,

the board needs to be assured by the president that we are doing what we say we are doing as an institution, that we are doing things that will move the institution in a positive direction … and that we're not doing things that jeopardize the institution.

At the same time there were numerous comments emphasizing the need for the president to be able to trust his or her board. Russell commented,

It can go the other way, too. The president has to have trust in the board – that they’re going to stay in their roles and not get too far out of those roles and get in the way of the running of the institution.
The importance of the trust that president must have in his or her board was echoed by Joseph, who commented that the president must “trust that the board will intervene when it’s appropriate for them to intervene and them having trust in me – that I will ask for that intervention when it’s needed.” Larry, the current board chair, relayed that presidents “need to know that there’s a level of confidence and trust [from the board], because if there’s an adversarial position there – you can’t get done what you need to get done.”

Trust, then, can be described as a shared responsibility, where the board can trust the president to provide the necessary information for the board to understand, assess, and appropriately respond to issues, while the president needs to trust that he or she has an engaged board who will provide guidance and support of decisions.

As Paul pointed out, trust in this relationship is not a given, nor, once established, is it static. It was also evident that there is more than one indicator of trust in this relationship.

The participants relayed that for both presidents trust was extended by fulfilling promises; carrying out the work that needs to be done and doing so with solid information, analysis, and thoughtfulness; as well as ensuring stability, if not growth. Yet, through these interviews, it was apparent that for the previous president, accomplishment and growth were key to establishing and maintaining trust; for the other, trust is being established by comprehensive communication and transparency.

Several board members cited Russell’s accomplishments as what enabled their trust in him. Arthur described the trust the board had in Russell because of that success. He said that their trust in him was based on “fifteen years of success, progress and transformation. The campus just looks completely different … his presidency was one of few crises and lots of success.” Ellen also spoke of this success:
We were financially stable in a growing college under Russell. He had the advantage of being able to increase enrollment and keep bringing in larger and larger classes. The endowment was also growing – he put a distinct effort into increasing the endowment, to get to this 100 million dollar level … and that fed into the trust that the board had in the president.

Joseph, the current president, came into his role not having the level of experience of the previous president, nor the record of accomplishment. He has utilized communication and transparency to earn the trust of the board. Maria suggested that the board, “appreciates the level of communication in his reports … [He’s] very vocal and visible – I think that there’s definitely a level of trust because of it.”

Stephen cited the board’s unanimous vote to support the new strategic plan as an indicator of this trust, saying, “It’s back to that level of trust that we have in Joseph – that he’s done his homework, he has the evidence to support his position … We’re counting on him to support the numbers.”

Several participants commented on the changes in trust over time, the overriding message being that trust is not static nor is discretion limitless. They noted that, not only does it take time for the president to earn the trust of the board, several factors affect that trust over time, including communication level and type, changes to the membership of the board, and accomplishment of the goals set out for the college. Paul described the potential for change in presidential trustworthiness, stating,

you earn trust. [The president is] given trust initially … and then it’s something that you can lose. I think some [board members] are more skeptical than others at
the beginning but fundamentally I think you get the trust card, and you can only lose it.

Stephen indicated that trust must be nurtured for it to grow and remain in place, commenting, “You know that nebulous trust relationship thing, that no one knows how to weigh it, but everyone knows it when they have it? That needs a lot of care and feeding.”

Several board members made comments regarding their sense of trust in the president decreasing over time due to a lack of communication. These comments indicate that communication and trust are fundamentally linked, and that participants viewed maintaining trust as an on-going effort involving communication, transparency, and engagement. Participants who were on the board with Russell indicated that, as his tenure lengthened, there was a decrease in communication, but they trusted him and gave him the leeway to work toward established goals. To some, the decrease in Russell’s communications to the board was a deterrent to trust. Larry lamented that, rather than collaborating and working toward consensus, Russell “often would come into [board meetings] knowing where he wanted to go and that’s where we’d figure out how to get to it.” Ellen suggested that, “The board had absolute confidence in Russell. I almost wonder if it isn’t because some of the things were never provided to the board … I don’t know if he didn’t trust the board or he just [thought] it was too much information for the board, and that he could handle it without [board input].” Those on the board near the end Russell’s term noticed a diminished board engagement in decision-making and expressed that the lack of thorough discussion in the board meetings had become worrisome. The board members who were new near the end of Russel’s tenure as president were most vocal about this concern, as they did not have the history with Russell, nor the level of trust the other members had developed over time.
As it was with communication, taking actions to maintain trust is also part of the board’s responsibility. Michael relayed that it was not simply Russell’s reduction of communication and board involvement over time that changed the board’s level of trust in him – the board had a hand in that as well. He argued that in the end the board had lost some of its edge in terms of asking questions and probing and digging deeper because the level of trust was such that if Russell said it was going to work out, it was going to work out. I don’t know where that started, I just know in the end in the last years … we could have lots of dialogue but if Russell weighed in, that sort of ended the conversation; ‘Russell’s on board, let’s go’ kind of thing.”

It is evident that in this study that, like communication, maintaining trust is a shared responsibility and must involve on-going effort.

While trust is built on and maintained by communication and engagement, it is not enough. For the current president, while communication and engagement have earned Joseph a tremendous amount of trust from the board, all board members noted that tangible accomplishments and successes are imperative to building and maintaining trust. Many on the board with the past president cited his successes in enhancing the physical aspects of the institution with new or renovations to buildings, fund raising, and improving rankings. Participants noted that for Joseph, the current president, accomplishments such as hiring of high-quality personnel, handling crises, balancing budgets, or raising significant funds are expected. Ultimately, the participants expect the current president to strengthen the institution and its reputation by growing enrollments, increasing the net revenue per student, and retaining or
increasing its status in national rankings. Christine took the hard line on the need for accomplishments:

> I think it should look like any other board in corporate America. [The president has] responsibilities to the board, the board has to make sure that responsibilities are being held, the contract’s being held, and if they’re not, identify those problems and determine if they can be corrected or not and, just like any other board, if they’re not doing their job they get fired.

The current president has had what the board considers to be successes in the early years of his presidency, particularly hiring two well-respected senior level administrators. Kevin described this accomplishment as having “strengthened his relationship with the board … that has gone a long way in building that trust between him and the board. Probably more so than anything.” To the board members, it is that combination of communication and action that will keep the president at the helm. Donald shared that sentiment, stating that,

> he laid out a pretty clear plan and the metrics to go with it … he’s begun to lay his winning pattern down here, but it’s going to be maintaining clarity with success that’s going to define [success for him].

Cultivating and preserving trust is also of utmost importance to the president-board relationship. It is evident in this situation that trust and communication are intrinsically tied together. Communication over time will serve to maintain some level of trust, but as was shown here, accomplishments that serve to strengthen the institution are required. Without such accomplishment, the board will lose trust in the president and may jeopardize his job.
Vision Alignment

The idea of vision was raised by all participants, who framed vision in terms of the strategic plan and the long-range activities that will enable the college to thrive. Vision was described as the direction in which the institution wants to go, taking into consideration the college’s history, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. Many described vision as the means of making a good thing better. Statements about vision included elements that need to be considered, such as growth, endowment, enrollment, physical plant, and resources necessary to execute and attain that vision. Christine described the vision for the college as something to make sure “the past is preserved, the present is preserved and the future is preserved, and making sure all of the pegs and wheels are present to be able to do [that].”

There was unanimity among the participants that a unified understanding of and agreement on that vision is essential to the relationship. Jeffrey aptly stated, “[What makes it work is] … you have a common set of goals … you’re working for the same sort of things to move the institution forward.” Ellen concurred stating that, “We’ve both got to have the institution's best interest at heart – we should not be working at cross purposes.” Daniel pointed out that, “You can’t have constant … not going in the same direction – it gets too contentious,” and important work can’t get done. Larry utilized an analogy of a crew team:

[each crew member] has a different job. Each job requires a person who has extraordinary ego, self-confidence, technical mastery – [but] when they get in that boat they have to be one. They have to be able to set all that aside and operate as a team that trusts each other implicitly to achieve their common goal.
While common vision was cited as critical to the president-board relationship, who should be developing and driving that vision was not consistent among the participants. There were many who indicated that the board is responsible for articulating and guiding the vision. For example, Christine stated,

Ultimately, the board’s responsibility is guiding the vision – considering information and then guiding that vision to where the next strategic plan should be ... That vision then is guided by our role as the board … really implementing that vision [is the responsibility of] the president.

Several others suggested that the president should outline the vision. Board member Patrick stated,

the vision thing is the President’s responsibility to initiate. I don’t think the board typically has the capacity to know the specifics about where the college should be going, even though it probably has the ultimate responsibility to sign off on that.

Others indicated that it is a collaborative effort or shared responsibility, such as Paul who stated that the board and the president have “a shared responsibility in setting the strategic direction for the college.” Daniel clearly stated that “the board, along with the president, sets the goals and the long range plan and ultimately where we want the college to go to.” Jean, who is a member of the administration of the college, described this collaboration, suggesting that it is up to the board to set the broad strategic direction

it’s up to the board to articulate the mission, and the vision and the broad strategic direction and then it’s up to them to ensure that we have the resources necessary to execute and attain that mission…[but the president]… partners with the board; it’s up to the president … to inform the board and help shape their perspective.”
This position was even evident in the advertisement about the presidential opening at Mid-Atlantic College stated simply, “The president plays an active role, together with trustee leadership, in setting goals and direction for the College and the board.” Matthew commented on the success of this approach:

I think because the board has an awareness of the realities, because they've been given the opportunity to engage in and understand the ramifications of (implementing the vision) through the information that Joseph has provided, I think it is a successful collaboration.

There was definitely clear agreement that vision, particularly a shared vision is a vital piece of the president-board relationship. Yet the lack of clear agreement on the visioning process and responsibilities indicated important differences that place strain on the president-board relationship. Matthew pointed this out when he stated that a lot of the stresses are related to the [creation of the] vision that we all have for the college…where we think [the college] should be versus the realities of "how we are going to pay for it?" and "how are we going to set the priorities?" "what's most important?"

While there was no clear agreement on who creates the vision, all agreed that the president and board must be able to interpret and understand the institution in the context of where it exists currently and scope out how that vision will be reached. They must be aware of the implications of external expectations and challenges and align vision with important elements, such as budget, enrollment, retention, and completion.
Michael indicated that presidential searches must be focused on looking for candidates that meet the current and planned needs of the college. He described the searches for the past two presidents, indicating that Mid-Atlantic College sought candidates that would bring the things that we think are going to be the most critical for this window of time to the table … [for both presidencies] I think the board was smart about making sure they understood where the institution was in its life and what it needed in terms of leadership… they were very intentional about saying this is the skill set that’s going to be important for the next generation of Mid-Atlantic College, so let’s go find that.

Stephen concurred, suggesting that,

Both [presidents] were able to see the really positive, special, unique elements of the college and then developed and created the vision for others about how we’re going to take the good thing that we have already and we’re going to make it bigger, we’re going to make it better.

The previous president was hired in an era of prosperity. The vision for the college included growth and redesign for competitiveness. As such, the president selected matched that vision. Arthur described Russell as a master with vision … he literally transformed this campus in a very relatively short period of time [through] renovations of buildings and construction of new buildings and on, and on, and on. He just has this incredible vision… [understanding that] people’s willingness to commit and pay and so on is based largely on your experience … He pushed [the board] – he made them realize that the campus was tired and it needed some things.
Like many colleges, Mid-Atlantic College now is operating in a market that is in decline and facing competition for students. The search for the current president, then, focused on things such as fundraising, enrollment management, and engagement with students and donors. Paul commented,

we’re now going into a new vision of the college – we’re going to go through some difficult times because we’re going to have to decide if we want to do XYZ new, we’re going to have to stop doing ABC. So Joseph’s going to have some tough decisions to make.

The board also deliberately planned for the current president. Because there was a significant amount of time between when the previous president indicated he was leaving and when he actually stepped down, the board was able to create a strategy to facilitate the presidential transition. That strategy included having one of the trustees who could serve as a mentor or coach for the president during the transition period. That person was then elected as board chair for that purpose. Larry, the current chair, elaborated:

thinking ahead, the next guy who’s probably going to follow me is a guy that’s going to really be about sort of the big decisions all on the next capital campaign, where we go from here. … We built a succession in our process that would provide for the right person at the right time kind of thing … and we’ve already also identified the person that will succeed him, and partly because of where [that person] comes from and what we anticipate the challenges are going to be for institutions like ours 10 years from now.

Because the board recently went through the search for a president, there was a general feeling among the participants that it was critical for the board to secure a president who shared
its current vision of the role and mission of the institution. Simultaneously, it was imperative that the president develop and implement a plan to make that vision a reality. For these participants, shared vision was a gauge of “fit” between the president and the board. Common vision, as well as the board’s support of the vision and plan and the president’s ability to execute against that vision, was attributed to the staying power of the president. It was apparent that at Mid-Atlantic College, the vision is a shared one and there was little indication that the board’s vision and the president’s vision diverged over time.

**An Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities**

A clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities was also widely identified as being important to the president-board relationship. This speaks directly to the research question regarding how role ambiguity and role conflict affect the working relationship between the board and the president. None of the participants indicated that the president and the board were doing the same job. All described the board’s responsibilities as being at the oversight level – discussing, deciding upon, and enacting policies for the growth of the college. They indicated that president is responsible for management and operations as well as providing information on the world of higher education, data on the status of the college, and perspective on the needs of the college to assist the board in their deliberations and decision making.

The participants were very much in agreement that the roles of the board and the president were clearly delineated and that they make every effort to ensure that they are understood and the lines remain distinct. Larry was firm in stating that “the board really doesn’t have any responsibilities that are like [the president’s]… it’s pretty clear and there’s really not a lot of room for fuzziness.” The board members, administrators, and presidents of Mid-Atlantic College described the role of the board as one of oversight, suggesting that the board “looks out
for the greater good of the institution,” “ensures the decisions [made] are heading us in the right direction,” and “is responsible for maintaining the soundness of the institution.” Details of those responsibilities provided by the participants include the following:

- **Leadership**: hiring and/or firing of the president, evaluating the president’s performance, providing guidance and direction, and holding the president accountable;

- **Fiduciary**: ensuring that the budget is balanced, overseeing the investment of the endowment, and ensuring that the resources are being spent appropriately

- **Strategic**: approving the strategic plan for the college; approving the budget for the college,

- **General Oversight**: setting the mission and vision statements for the college, as well as the articles and incorporations;

- **Administrative**: maintaining compliance regarding issues that must be attended to as an institution

Mid-Atlantic College’s recently revised by-laws state simply that, “The board is vested by law with all the powers and authority to govern effectively and set policy for the College in accordance with the laws of [this state].” Very few other roles are specifically delineated, with the exception of (1) nominating representatives to the board, (2) granting faculty or students representation on the board, (3) participating in meetings, (4) voting on actions, (5) electing officers for the board, and (6) serving as members of board committees that make recommendations to the full board. The Executive Committee, comprised of the officers of the board (Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer), the chair of each standing committee of the board, and two additional voting trustees
elected by the board, is responsible for reviewing and recommending the College's strategic plan as well as the performance and compensation of the president of the college to the board.

The by-laws are supported by the statement of “Trustees Collective Responsibilities” prepared by the Committee on Trustees of Mid-Atlantic College’s board. This document outlines the board’s responsibilities as:

- Set and clarify mission and purpose
- Appoint the chief executive
- Support the president
- Monitor the president’s performance
- Assess board performance
- Insist on strategic planning
- Review educational and public-service programs
- Participate in fund raising
- Ensure good management
- Preserve institutional independence
- Relate campus to community and community to campus

The board members learn about their roles through an orientation program for new trustees during which members of the administration make presentations to new trustees on the operation of various areas of the college, the committee structure of the board, and roles and expectations of board members. The on-going board training includes a self-evaluation and an interview by two members of the Committee on Trustees, both of which are required before they are considered for reelection. Additionally, there is a tri-annual board retreat focused on a particularly pressing topic. Finally, one question in the board’s self-assessment questionnaire
completed by each trustee whose term is expiring, specifically asks if he or she: “demonstrate an understanding of the roles of the Board and the President and honor the differences, providing appropriate support to the President.” These are all indicators of the level of understanding of roles and responsibilities for each party.

The participants described the president’s roles as “chief executive,” “chief spokesman for the college,” “chief advocate,” “head cheerleader,” and “fundraiser,” who is charged to “ensure that we fulfill our educational mission” and with “day-to-day management,” and who should handle “personnel actions.” They also emphasized that the president should “educate the board [on things like endowment, budget, and shared governance]” and be a problem solver, that is, communicate problems to the board and relay solutions for approval.

In Mid-Atlantic College’s by-laws, the president is described as the “chief executive officer of the College” responsible for the management of the college, which includes “interpreting and implementing the policies of the College and of the Board.” The by-laws specify “managing, developing and promoting the College,” as well as serving as the college’s spokesperson and preparing the budget for approval by the board. The by-laws clearly state that the president serves at the pleasure of the board and is charged with carrying out all orders and directives of the board, although the president also establishes and administers operational and educational policies – all subject to board revision and approval.

Once again, this does not deviate from what was included in the president’s contract: The President shall perform all duties … including, but not limited to the following:

- Institutional, faculty, and academic/educational leadership
- Fund raising, development, public, government, and alumni relations;
• Long-range strategic planning; budget formulation; supervision of College buildings, grounds, and equipment controlled by the College; administration of the affairs of the College as best serves the College consistent with Board policy;
• Student recruitment and services; faculty recruitment;
• Appointing, supervising, promoting, and dismissing employees in accordance with law and Board policies;
• Recommending regulations, rules, and procedures useful for the welfare of the College.

The execution of each party’s roles and responsibilities, level of involvement, and subsequent measurement of success are what seem to involve some degree of negotiation. Joseph described how he learned about the board’s expectations related to his roles and responsibilities through discussions with the board, starting with his interview and continuing through his first two years in office. He heard from them that he was expected to, “deliver on the strategic plan, bring in a balanced budget, achieve the necessary class size, launch a campaign, those types of things.” Michael relayed how when Joseph began his presidency, expectations with regard to roles were indistinct, because the current president needed to learn the organization and get the leadership team in place. But, as the strategic plan was developed, the expectations of roles and responsibilities – as well as specific outcomes – evolved and specific metrics developed. Russell commented that the president’s contract and the statement on trustee responsibilities are “the framework. But then things agreed to over time between the president and the board [such as] their level of involvement in strategic planning, budget decisions, or a capital fund campaign.” Larry concurred, suggesting that
regardless of the structure in which they operate or the documents that spell that out, there still has to be an understanding between the two about how they carry out the role of leadership together and jointly in order for it to work, no matter what the documents say.”

Participants indicated that conversations between the president and the board regarding roles and responsibilities as well as expectations related to the execution of those roles and responsibilities are helpful in enhancing role clarity and reducing role conflict.

Several acknowledged that there has been and can be role overlap, but that did not mean the two parties were doing the same things at the same level, particularly decision-making and implementation of decisions. A few administrative participants described times when boundaries were crossed and board members wanted to influence academics and curriculum decisions, admissions, or marketing campaigns, but those situations were addressed by the board chair and/or president, and the board members stepped back. Patrick, a member of the board stated, “Somebody on the board always wants to micromanage a little bit. That happens, but I don’t think it created serious conflict.” Stephen concurred, stating that when his committee was getting into details,

which was absolutely, positively not our job – we caught ourselves and everyone sort of sheepishly looked at their shoes and apologized and pulled back a little bit. And it was not because we didn’t have faith in the people doing it, but frankly our good intentions just got the better of us.

Larry, the current board chair, firmly stated that involvement by the board in operational activities is inappropriate:
[The board is] about governance. The college and its leadership is about operations … we draw very careful boundaries around being involved in what’s going on but not being intrusive…[but]… whether you have written processes and understanding about roles and responsibilities, they can become muddy very quickly if one of those two parties takes control in ways they shouldn’t.

The participants relayed that the board asking questions is not considered micromanaging, but an important part of their oversight role. Also, when the president encourages discussion and seeks advice, he is not perceived as abdicating roles or responsibilities, but rather encouraging the members of the board to share their expertise.

Participants’ comments indicated that the possibility of the board micromanaging and blurring roles and responsibilities decreases with communication and transparency by the president. To this end Ellen indicated:

that came up with [the previous president when he said], ‘I don’t think the board needs to be involved at this level’, we were always ‘Okay, alright. That’s fine. We probably shouldn’t be micromanaging.’ Now, it’s the board saying we probably shouldn’t be micromanaging this. You know, Joseph is very willing to tell us everything we would ever want or need to know – so now it feels like the board is self-regulating rather than the president.”

While it was not apparent that the level of role clarity and lack of role conflict changed over the course of the past president’s tenure, several participants mentioned that the diminished level communication raised questions about the president operating without the oversight of the board and him taking on roles and responsibilities that were really the board’s. As such there was an
expectation of greater transparency, accountability, collaboration, and clarity of processes from the current president.

Overall, there was a great deal of consensus within the group of participants that the roles and responsibilities of the board and the president were fairly well laid out and clearly defined. The president’s contract clearly delineated his roles and responsibilities, and subsequent discussions provided clarity on execution of those roles and measures of success. The board’s roles are spelled out in the statement of “Trustees Collective Responsibilities” and are reviewed with each new board member in the initial orientation sessions and on-going retreats and self-evaluations. These documents and activities enable role clarity and thwart role conflict. Expectations related to roles, particularly those of the president, were negotiated and on-going communication and transparency contributed to each party’s understanding of and trust in the other’s adherence to designated roles and responsibilities.

SUMMARY

This chapter reported on the nature of a relationship between two presidents at one institution and their governing boards, some members of whom were on the boards during both presidencies. Through this case study, the president-board relationship can be described as involving: (1) communication and transparency; (2) trust; (3) vision alignment; and (4) a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The next chapter will review the results of this study and the contribution of this inquiry to our understanding of the development of the working relationship between the board and the president, the part that role ambiguity and role conflict play in this relationship, as well as how the dynamics of the relationship change over time.
Chapter 5. Discussion, Implications, and Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter I present a summary of the study’s findings in relation to the guiding research questions. I present some concluding thoughts and offer some suggestions for future research, and for applications of this study’s findings for practice.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature and evolution of the president-board relationship, as well as what influence role ambiguity and role conflict have on that relationship. To examine these issues, this study was guided by three broad research questions:

1. What is the nature of the working relationship between the president and the board?
2. How do role ambiguity and role conflict affect the relationship between the president and the board?
3. How does the nature of the relationship between the president and the board relate to the length of the president’s term in office?

To answer these questions, I engaged a small private institution and conducted semi-structured interviews with the two presidents, current and immediate past; the board chair; board members; and other key administrators. Pertinent documents were also reviewed for background and a check of consistency.

Discussion of the Findings

Communication and transparency, trust, vision alignment, and a mutual understanding of roles and expectations are essential to the president-board relationship. One of the major findings is that for the participants in this study, communication and transparency are at the core of the president-board relationship. The data presented here indicates that an engaged, active
dialogue between the president and the board is essential to the president-board relationship. In particular, it is incumbent upon the president to ensure that the board has the information needed to understand, assess, and appropriately respond to the issues at hand, even those that are difficult.

Additionally, communication must be calibrated in several ways, including:

(1) problems and solutions must be shared along with successes;

(2) the information relayed must be concise, but not overly superficial; and

(3) some issues require very timely and more detailed communication.

This is in line King and Breuder (1977) who found that presidents and trustees agreed on the importance of the president keeping board members well informed and providing quality information, which is essential for decision-making. They went on to suggest it would be most effective for the president to provide written materials in advance, particularly when policy decisions were to be made. Sandoval (2016) concurred when relaying the advice of a vice president of a public relations agency focused on higher education. He suggested that college presidents must learn to “communicate regularly, to communicate well, and to continue to foster a feeling of investment in an institution” – essentially that communication must be “often and honest.”

Cultivating and preserving trust is also of utmost importance in building and maintaining the relationship between the president and the board. For this institution trust meant working together toward the same goals, fulfilling promises, honesty, and integrity. The board and the president must have trust in each other and trust in the process. Trust from the board allows the president freedom to manage the operations of the institution while, concurrently, the president’s
trust of the board enables him/her to seek their advice and counsel for direction. Trust such as this provides the stability necessary for the success of the institution.

It was also apparent that trust and communication are integrally tied together. For this group active, frank, and open dialogue is important to building trust, and trust enables the hard conversations to happen, which in turn further builds trust. This is in line with Ingram (1996), who advised presidents and board members must communicate with, trust, and support one another and work through any differences in order for both to be effective.

Perkins (2012) suggested that “the most important function of a board of trustees is to secure a president who shares its vision.... One of the most important functions of the president is to develop and implement a plan to make the trustees’ vision a reality.” At Mid-Atlantic College, vision alignment is an important piece of the president-board relationship. Here, though, the development of vision appears collaborative and is based on communication and trust. Then, after the vision is articulated, the president and his team develop a strategic plan for realizing that vision. The board collaborates with the president to ensure that implementation process is well vetted and meets the goals of the vision. Based on the information gathered here, a collaborative approach to vision alignment and implementation planning serves the president-board relationship quite well.

Elsewhere in the literature, vision appears more guided or even driven by the president while the board supports that vision through consultation and allocation of financial resources. For example, AGB (2010) describes how the president provides vision, institutional leadership, and strategic planning for the achievement of that vision and the board partners with the president to achieve the mission and attain the strategic priorities of the institution. AGB (2010) identifies mission centrality as a core responsibility of the board, though the board determines
the mission of the institution and sets strategic direction through consultation with the president. They go on to suggest that the board has significant responsibility in ensuring the resources necessary to maintain that mission and accomplish strategic goals. Shaw (1999) argued that as leader of the institution, the college president must envision and affirm, articulate, implement, and serve as the keeper of the goals and values of the institution. As Ikenberry (2010) suggested, college and university presidents must have a strategic vision and are critical in shaping priorities as well as communicating and building confidence and consensus for the vision among institution’s constituents. These recommendations, though slightly different than what happens at Mid-Atlantic College, they are not at odds with what seems to work there.

Finally, a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities along with on-going communication around expectations associated with those roles were found to be important factors in the president-board relationship. Trachtenberg, Kauvar and Bogue (2013) commented that derailed presidencies are often the result of unresolved issues or unexplored expectations and that the role of the president is one of the most common problem areas. They advise, “The board must make certain that it clearly communicates, and that the candidate fully accepts, the core functions of the president and this particular institution (p. 105).” Trachtenberg, et al. (2012) go on to recommend that boards and presidents develop a common understanding of the boundaries of each party’s responsibilities and suggest that these boundaries must be reexamined and may need to be refined when a new president is hired. As Roberts and Stiles (1999) found – that the nature of the president-board relationship cannot be understood by simply defining and agreeing upon roles – it was apparent in this study that the two parties saw a complementarity of roles and viewed the relationship as interdependent.
While role ambiguity and role conflict did not play a part in the study of this case, they may still be an issue at other institutions. Two concepts were investigated to determine impact on the president-board relationship: (1) role conflict, when parties in a working relationship have different ideas about what they should be doing and the expectations placed upon them (Biddle, 1986), and (2) role ambiguity, when expectations regarding roles and behaviors are incomplete or ill-defined (Biddle, 1986). The literature presented earlier in this document suggests that specific roles and responsibilities of governing boards and presidents are not always well-delineated, and the execution of and expectations related to those roles and responsibilities are not always clear. At Mid-Atlantic College, there is a great deal of consensus among the participants that the roles and responsibilities of the board and the president are clearly defined. It was evident that the past president educated the board on its role and that the current president and board chair work together to maintain that understanding. Because the roles and responsibilities of the president and the board are clear, and expectations discussed and agreed upon, role conflict and role ambiguity were not apparent. Role conflict and role ambiguity were not recognized as factors negatively affecting the working relationship between the board and the president at Mid-Atlantic College. Yet, the potential for role ambiguity and role conflict exists if communication and transparency and the willingness to work through difficult conversations are not maintained.

The relationship between the board and the president changes over time and the implications of those changes are both positive and negative. This can be seen with the four key areas identified: communication and transparency, trust, vision alignment, and an understanding of roles and responsibilities. Birnbaum (1992) found that a new president communicated with constituencies in order to facilitate making sense of the institution and establish relationships.
This was the case with Joseph, the current president in this study. However, Birnbaum (1992) added that as the president’s tenure lengthened and he/she became comfortable in the role, the level of communication declined. He advised that longer serving presidents and boards must be mindful of how the college and the external environment evolve, and how the character, focus, and needs of boards change over time. They must be particularly aware of the need for on-going engagement and dialogue, ensuring that new members are integrated in a positive way and that all voices are valuable. These observations reflect what both Birnbaum (1992) and Michael et al. (2001) suggested, that a president who maintained communication with all constituencies, particularly the board, throughout his/her tenure was proven to be a valued leader. If communication by presidents lessened, he/she was considered only marginally effective (Birnbaum, 1992). In this case, while still considered as highly effective, many of the participants perceived that the former president decreased his level and quality of communication and transparency over time. This decline in communication negatively impacted levels of trust, though not to the extent where it caused problems.

The basis for and indicators of “trust” change over time as well. Other than the trust conferred upon him or her by the board when hired, it is apparent that the new president was expected work diligently to support and solidify the trust bestowed upon him or her. As a president’s tenure lengthens, he or she must include accomplishments that are in alignment with the mission and goals of the institution. In addition, as the tenure lengthens, communication and engagement must also continue, or trust may erode, as could be seen to some extent with the former president, Russell.

The participants in this study agreed that (1) a shared vision is critical the president-board relationship and (2) the lack of shared vision is a cause of stress on the relationship. Additionally,
the vision decided upon by the president and board must attend to both the history of the institution and the pressures of the current environment, such as budget, enrollment, retention, and completion. The participants were aware that aligning vision with elements such as these required on-going assessment, discussion and agreement.

Finally, in this case roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. The expectations around those roles and responsibilities are what were negotiated and decided upon. For most of the participants of this study, the president-board relationship is considered to be a partnership, and one in which there is interdependence. The focus for these participants is less on the specific roles and more on the discussions and exchanges that serve achieve the shared vision. On-going conversations and accomplishments are necessary to create satisfaction, which in turn positively affects relational cohesion and commitment to the relationship – a reflection of Social Exchange Theory that served as a context for this study (Cook & Rice, 2003).

**Implications for Practice**

Earlier in this document, I provided examples of conflict-ridden president-board relationships. These conflicts reflect the outcomes of this study. Given that the findings of this study suggest that communication and transparency, trust, vision alignment, and a mutual understanding of roles and expectations are at the core of the president-board relationship, it appears imperative that boards and presidents clearly define and agree upon the definition of each and how each may be operationalized at their institution. It is also clear that such work requires on-going effort.

As was seen in this case, the “integral” leadership linking the president and board (AGB, 1984) relies first and foremost on communication and transparency. This starts with establishing a clear understanding of roles and expectations. In this case, this was done early in the search
process for the new president, in his contract, and in on-going discussions as Joseph’s presidency progressed. In this case, an intentional, well-thought out search process for the institution’s new president was critical. Additionally, Joseph was open to and even sought out discussions about expectations and performance metrics, suggesting that together, he and the board develop a dashboard to assist with discussions on these issues. These practices appear to have established the foundation of the president-board relationship and would likely be useful for other institutions.

Aligning vision requires not only identifying a president who matches the vision the college has for itself. It also requires that the board understands the effect of external factors on decisions that need to be made. Discussions around vision should include frank assessments of the institution’s strengths and weaknesses as well as available resources that may provide opportunities for movement in the direction of the vision. Challenges that may also prevent the achievement of goals are also a necessary element for these discussions. It was evident here that the current president attempts to thoroughly inform and educate the board on issues. The board here is receptive of the data and information provided and uses it in their decision-making.

Finally, seen in this case is the importance of a board that reflects upon its roles and responsibilities and is mindful of when they overreach or are too passive. AGB (2006) emphasized the need for governing boards to provide support, establish a clear understanding of expectations, and develop a strategic plan. AGB (2006) also insisted that boards should provide guidance and stand behind a president on controversial matters. At the same time, boards are advised to avoid micromanaging and imposing personal agendas so as to not undermine the president (AGB 2006). Boards that are passive and disengaged, too intrusive or do not understand or work within their roles can fail too at pivotal moments, the result being conflict.
and if left unchecked, the collapse of trust. Board orientations, training, and regular retreats as were in place at this institution may contribute to board engagement at appropriate levels and times.

Regular, thorough, and on-going communication by the president on issues and problems of the institution and those affecting higher education, the support and engagement offered to the president by the board, and a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities all contribute to the president-board relationship and should be considered by institutions as critical aspects of the president-board relationship.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

With any case study research, the findings are reflective of that particular case at that point in time. It may be interesting to investigate whether the nature of the relationship as defined in this study differs with institutional type, and if so what would explain any differences. Yet, because this study examined the nature of a relationship itself, institutional type may not result in significant differences. What may be most informative is an investigation of how the factors found here are defined, agreed upon, and operationalized at various institutions to identify and suggest best practices.

The president-board relationship studied here appeared productive and successful. Analysis of other apparently successful president-board relationships may reveal if the dynamics are similar or if they differ in terms of reasons for success. Additionally, research could explore situations in which the president was terminated, to confirm or eliminate factors identified and described here and in the literature (Trachtenberg, et al., 2012; Berkowitz, 2011). An analysis of board dysfunction in terms of the president-board relationships may also serve as an important contribution to higher education leaders. Such findings could serve to enable further
understanding of academic governance, the academic presidency, and relationship building. Potential themes for additional study could include perceptions of relationship building, the ways in which groups and individuals learn from and strategize with each other, and the impact of the relationship on the ability of the institution to achieve its goals. This may help institutional leaders view the president-board relationship as synergistic, and apply that synergy to problem solving.

While this study found that communication and transparency, trust, vision alignment, and a mutual understanding of roles and expectations contribute to the president-board relationship, broader research on meanings and operationalization of each may provide information on best practices that would be useful in the practice of academic governance and leadership.

Finally, Green and Griesinger (1996) found that several board roles and activities were strongly correlated with organizational effectiveness, but the president-board relationship was not among their factors studied nor findings. As such, study of what connection there may be between the president-board relationship and board operations, effectiveness, or performance; institutional performance; or presidential performance and time in office would be useful. Such study would involve both an assessment of relational characteristics and a determination of institutional effectiveness, providing myriad information for boards and presidents to use in vision-making and goal attainment.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This study revealed the nature of a president-board relationship to include communication and transparency, trust, vision alignment, and a mutual understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This study also captured the importance of continuing effort in each of these areas over the course of a presidency, particularly as economic and demographic
situations change, student interest in the institution waxes and wanes, and board membership turns over. As Joseph, the current president at Mid-Atlantic College described,

the relationship between Board and me is still evolving and I can’t imagine it will ever stop evolving – because the Board turns over, we’ve got new challenges, we’ve got different students and faculty. If it ever does become stagnant I would probably venture to guess that’s when the president needs to leave, or the Board needs to make a change in leadership.

Turnover in board membership, in particular, changes the dynamics of the board and means that new relationships must be developed within the board and between the president and the board. The president-board relationship is far from static. As such, thorough and on-going communication and transparency, trust in the other, work toward a shared vision, and a solid and actionable understanding of role and responsibilities are the things that may keep the relationship dynamic and strong.
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

**PENNSTATE**

**Vice President for Research**
**Office for Research Protections**
The Pennsylvania State University  
The S35 Building, Suite 305  
University Park, PA 16802  
**Phone:** (814) 865-1775  
**Fax:** (814) 865-8849  
**Email:** approvals@psu.edu  
**Web:** www.research.psu.edu/irb

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**APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION**

**Date:** March 3, 2015  
**From:** Tracie Kahler, IRB Analyst  
**To:** Catherine Dufour

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<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title of Study:</strong></td>
<td>Characteristics of the Working Relationship between the University President and the Board of Trustees: A Case Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Catherine Dufour</td>
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<tr>
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**Documents Approved:**
- Dufour—Consent for Meeting Observation HRP-588 ORP Consent Form (2), Category: Consent Form
- Study Introduction and Request from current President (1), Category: Recruitment Materials
- Dufour—Consent form HRP-588 ORP Consent Form (2), Category: Consent Form
- Meeting Observation Protocol (1), Category: Data Collection Instrument
- Human Subjects Research Template (3), Category: IRB Protocol
- Study Introduction and Request from past president (1), Category: Recruitment Materials
- Dufour_C-Interview Protocols (1), Category: Data Collection Instrument
- Follow-up and meeting scheduling - past president (1), Category: Recruitment Materials
- Follow-up and meeting scheduling - current president (1), Category: Recruitment Materials

**Review Level:** Expedited

On 3/3/2015, the IRB approved the above-referenced Initial Study. This approval is effective through 3/2/2016 inclusive. You must submit a continuing review form with all required explanations for this study at least 45 days before the study’s approval end date. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking 'Create Modification / CR'.
If continuing review approval is not granted before 3/2/2016, approval of this study expires on that date.

To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu). These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Documenting consent
- Requesting modification(s)
- Requesting continuing review
- Closing a study
- Reporting new information about a study
- Registering an applicable clinical trial
- Maintaining research records

This correspondence should be maintained with your records.
### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

**Date:** January 20, 2016  
**From:** Tracie Kahler, IRB Analyst  
**To:** Catherine Dufour

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On 1/20/2016, the IRB approved the above-referenced Continuing Review. This approval is effective through 1/19/2017 inclusive. You must submit a continuing review form with all required explanations for this study at least 45 days before the study's approval end date. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking 'Create Modification / CR'.

If continuing review approval is not granted before 1/19/2017, approval of this study expires on that date.  
To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu). These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Documenting consent
- Requesting modification(s)
- Requesting continuing review
- Closing a study
- Reporting new information about a study
- Registering an applicable clinical trial
- Maintaining research records
Appendix B

Request for Interview (Electronic Mail)

For those on the board with the previous president only
Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

Dear ________,

As you know, Joseph Anderson and Russell Moore have agreed to participate in a study from which I will produce my doctoral dissertation. Your perspectives as a member of the board of trustees at Mid-Atlantic College during Russell’s administration will be important in understanding how the relationships between these two presidents and their boards were established, negotiated, and navigated, and how they evolved. This exploratory research will generate hypotheses about what constitutes an effective working relationship between the board and the president that can then be tested through future research.

As Joseph mentioned in his note to you, I would like to schedule interviews over the next several weeks, depending on schedules, completing them by April. The interviews will last no more than one hour and your participation will be confidential. I am happy to meet you by phone or travel to your office or home, at a time of your choosing. What would be the best time for you to meet?
If you prefer that I go through your assistant to schedule a meeting time, please let me know.

If you have any questions about this study please reply to me at csdufour@psu.edu or (814) 883-8114 and I will provide you with additional details.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards,

Catherine S. Dufour

Catherine S. Dufour
D.Ed. Candidate
Cell: 814-883-8114
csdufour@psu.edu
Dear __________,

As you know, Joseph Anderson and Russell Moore have agreed to participate in a study from which I will produce my doctoral dissertation. Your perspectives as part of the administrative team at the college during both Joseph’s and Russell’s administrations will be important in understanding how the relationships between these two presidents and their boards were established, negotiated, and navigated, and how they evolved. This exploratory research will generate hypotheses about what constitutes an effective working relationship between the board and the president that can then be tested through future research.

As Joseph mentioned in his note to you, I would like to schedule interviews over the next several weeks, depending on schedules, completing them by April. The interviews will last no more than one hour and your participation will be confidential. I am happy to meet you in your office on campus or in any private spot that is convenient for you, at a time of your choosing. What would be the best time for you to meet? If you prefer that I go through your assistant to schedule a meeting time, please let me know.

If you have any questions about this study please reply to me at csdufour@psu.edu or (814) 883-8114 and I will provide you with additional details.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards,

Catherine S. Dufour

Catherine S. Dufour
D.Ed. Candidate
Cell: 814-883-8114
csdufour@psu.edu
For those on the board with the current president only
Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

Dear ________,

As you know, Joseph Anderson and Russell Moore have agreed to participate in a study from which I will produce my doctoral dissertation. Your perspectives as a member of the board of trustees at Mid-Atlantic College during Joseph’s administration will be important in understanding how the relationships between these two presidents and their boards were established, negotiated, and navigated, and how they evolved. This exploratory research will generate hypotheses about what constitutes an effective working relationship between the board and the president that can then be tested through future research.

As Joseph mentioned in his note to you, I would like to schedule interviews over the next several weeks, depending on schedules, completing them by April. The interviews will last no more than one hour and your participation will be confidential. I am happy to meet you by phone or travel to your office or home, at a time of your choosing. What would be the best time for you to meet? If you prefer that I go through your assistant to schedule a meeting time, please let me know.

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I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards,

Catherine S. Dufour

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D.Ed. Candidate
Cell: 814-883-8114
csdufour@psu.edu
Dear ________,

As you know, Joseph Anderson and Russell Moore have agreed to participate in a study from which I will produce my doctoral dissertation. Your perspectives as a member of the board of trustees at Mid-Atlantic College during both Joseph’s and Russell’s administration will be important in understanding how the relationships between these two presidents and their boards were established, negotiated, and navigated, and how they evolved. This exploratory research will generate hypotheses about what constitutes an effective working relationship between the board and the president that can then be tested through future research.

As Joseph mentioned in his note to you, I would like to schedule interviews over the next several weeks, depending on schedules, completing them by April. The interviews will last no more than one hour and your participation will be confidential. I am happy to meet you by phone or travel to your office or home, at a time of your choosing. What would be the best time for you to meet? If you prefer that I go through your assistant to schedule a meeting time, please let me know.

If you have any questions about this study please reply to me at csdufour@psu.edu or (814) 883-8114 and I will provide you with additional details.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Regards,

Catherine S. Dufour

Catherine S. Dufour
D.Ed. Candidate
Cell: 814-883-8114
csdufour@psu.edu
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Informed consent form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of the Project: 

Principal Investigator: Catherine S. Dufour
17 Old Main
University Park, PA 16802
csdufour@psu.edu
814-867-0552

Advisor: Neal H. Hutchens

1. Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between college and university presidents and their boards of trustees. The relationship is explored to understand how role ambiguity and role conflict affect the working relationship between the board and the president and to identify the appropriate mix of relational characteristics that lead to the desired outcome – a presidency that not only lasts, but also ends on good terms.

2. Procedures to be followed:

You will be asked to answer 10 questions in a one-on-one interview between you and Catherine Dufour, the researcher. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed; a summary will be sent back to you to confirm the accuracy of the information. The recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and will be destroyed after the transcription process is complete. No one other than the researcher (Catherine Dufour) will have access to the audio recordings.

3. Duration/Time:

The first-round interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. If a second round is necessary, it is anticipated that it will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

4. Statement of Confidentiality

Your participation in this research is strictly confidential and all measures of retaining confidentiality of the school, individuals, conversations, etc. will be taken. The data and analysis will be stored on a password protected computer. When writing the research results, or in the event of publication or presentation resulting from the research, no institutional or
personally identifiable information will be used or shared. In addition, the researcher will share the results chapter of the study with the participants for comment.

5. Right to Ask Questions:

Please contact Catherine Dufour at 814-883-8114 with questions or concerns about the study.

6. Voluntary Participation

Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You will not be forced, coerced, or otherwise required to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
Appendix D

Interview Protocol – President (Original)

Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees, and the questions that I will ask will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop or skip a question.

Will you please state your name, title, how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)
1. Let’s talk about your roles and responsibilities as president. What do you consider to be your primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are your perceptions of the primary roles and responsibilities of your university’s board of trustees?

3. To what extent are your roles as president distinct from those of the board?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to your roles and responsibilities?

5. Tell me about a time when you felt conflicted about your roles – where you were both reporting to the board but also responsible for the board?

6. Give me an example of a significant problem the university has had to deal with during your tenure as president. What was your perception of your role in addressing that problem? What was your perception of the board’s role in addressing that problem?

Relationship
7. Think back to when you first started your presidency. To what extent did the board assist you in assuming your roles and responsibilities when you started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

8. Regarding Board Members who started after you had been in office over a year: To what extent did you train/orient new board members to their roles and responsibilities?

9. Let’s talk about your relationship with the board. Describe the relationship between you and the board when you first started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?
10. How would you characterize the relationship between you and the board now? What are the most notable differences?

11. When there is conflict between you and the board, how are these problems worked through?

12. What aspects of your relationship with the board have contributed the most to your staying power as president?
Interview Protocol – President (Revised)

Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees. The questions that I will ask you will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop or skip a question.

Will you please state your name, title, how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)
1. Let’s talk about your roles and responsibilities as president. What do you consider to be your primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are your perceptions of the primary roles and responsibilities of your College’s board of trustees?

3. To what extent are the roles and responsibilities of the board and of the president overlapping or muddled? Conflicting?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to your roles and responsibilities? To what extent have those roles been relayed to you?

5. Think back to when you first started your presidency. To what extent did the board assist you in assuming your roles and responsibilities when you started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

6. To what extent did you train/orient new board members to their roles and responsibilities?

7. Give me an example of a significant problem the College has had to deal with during your tenure as president. What was your role in addressing that problem? What was the board’s role in addressing that problem?

Relationship
8. What should a relationship between a president and his/her the board look like?

9. Let’s talk about your relationship with the board. How would you characterize the relationship between you and the board? How would outsiders describe the relationship?

10. In every relationship there are disagreements. Describe the nature of conflicts. What happens when you disagree on something? What are your feelings about the conflicts? How are problems worked through?
11. How is the fit between expectations and hopes you have for this working with the board and reality?

12. What stresses are there in this relationship?

13. How satisfied are you with the relationship?

14. What aspects of your relationship with the board have contributed/will contribute the most to your staying power as president?
Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees, and the questions that I will ask you will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop or skip a question.

Will you please state your name, title, and how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)
1. Let’s talk about the board’s roles and responsibilities. What do you consider to be the board’s primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of your university’s president?

3. To what extent are the roles of the board distinct from those of the president?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to the president’s roles and responsibilities?

5. To what extent is the president conflicted about his roles – where he was both reporting to the board but also responsible for the board?

6. Give me an example of a significant problem the university has had to deal with in the current president’s tenure. What was your perception of the president’s role in addressing that problem? What was your perception of the board’s role in addressing that problem?

Relationship
7. Think back to when each of the presidents first started his presidency. To what extent did the board assist him in assuming his roles and responsibilities when he started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

8. For Board Members who started after the president had already been in office over a year: To what extent did the president train/orient you to your roles and responsibilities as a member of the board?

9. Let’s talk about the board’s relationship with the president. Describe the relationship between the board and the president when he first started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

10. How would you characterize the relationship between the board and the president now? What are the most notable differences?
11. When there is conflict between the president and the board, how are these problems worked through?

12. What aspects of the relationship between the board and the president have contributed/will contribute the most to Russell’s / Joseph’s staying power as president?
Interview Protocol – Board Members (Revised)

Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees. The questions that I will ask you will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop or skip a question.

Will you please state your name, title, and how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)
1. Let’s talk about the board’s roles and responsibilities. What do you consider to be the board’s primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of your college’s president?

3. To what extent are the roles and responsibilities of the board and of the president overlapping or muddled? Conflicting?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to the president’s roles and responsibilities? To what extent have those roles been relayed to the president?

5. Think back to when Russell / Joseph first started his presidency. To what extent did the board assist him in assuming his roles and responsibilities when he started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

6. To what extent did/does the president train/orient you to your roles and responsibilities as a member of the board?

7. Give me an example of a significant problem the College has had to deal with in the current/previous president’s tenure. What was your perception of the president’s role in addressing that problem? What was your perception of the board’s role in addressing that problem?

8. Relationship
9. What should a relationship between a president and his/her board look like?

10. Let’s talk about the board’s relationship with the president. Describe the relationship between the board and the president – how would you characterize the relationship between the board and the president?
    a. For Russell: When he first started as president of Mid-Atlantic College? Now?
    b. What are the most notable differences?
11. In every relationship there are disagreements. Describe the nature of conflicts. What happens when you disagree on something? What are your feelings about the conflicts? How are problems worked through?

12. How is the fit between expectations and hopes you have for this working with the president and reality?

13. What stresses are there in this relationship?

14. How satisfied are you with the relationship?

15. What aspects of the relationship between the board and the president have contributed/will contribute the most to Russell’s / Joseph’s staying power as president?
Interview Protocol – Administrators (Original)

Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees, and the questions that I will ask you will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop of skip a question.

Will you state your name, title, to whom you report, and how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)

1. Let’s talk about presidential and board roles and responsibilities. What do you consider to be the board’s primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of your university’s president?

3. To what extent are the roles of the board distinct from those of the president?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to the president’s roles and responsibilities?

5. How prepared to assume your roles and responsibilities did you feel when you started as a board member at Mid-Atlantic College?

6. Give me an example of a significant problem the university has had to deal with in the current president’s tenure. What was your perception of the president’s role in addressing that problem? What was your perception of the board’s role in addressing that problem?

Relationship

7. Think back to when Russell / Joseph first started his presidency. To what extent did the board assist him in assuming his roles and responsibilities when he started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

8. Let’s talk about the board’s relationship with the president. Describe the relationship between the board and the president when he first started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

9. How would you characterize the relationship between the board and the president now? What are the most notable differences?

10. When there is conflict between the president and the board, how are these problems worked through?
11. What aspects of the relationship between the board and the president have contributed the most to Russell’s / Joseph’s staying power as president?
Interview Protocol – Administrators (Revised)

Note: This document has been edited to protect participants’ identities.

SCRIPT: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As I mentioned before, I am interested in what constitutes an effective working relationship between a president and his/her board of trustees, and the questions that I will ask you will help me better understand this relationship. If at any point you prefer to not answer a question or to stop, please let me know and we can stop of skip a question.

Will you state your name, title, to whom you report, and how long have you been in your current role (overall and at this institution)?

Roles and Responsibilities (Distinct v. Ambiguous; Handling conflicting roles)
1. Let’s talk about the board’s roles and responsibilities. What do you consider to be the board’s primary roles and responsibilities?

2. What are the primary roles and responsibilities of your college’s president?

3. To what extent are the roles and responsibilities of the board and of the president overlapping or muddled? Conflicting?

4. How well defined are the board’s expectations related to the president’s roles and responsibilities? To what extent have those roles been relayed to the president?

5. Think back to when Russell / Joseph first started his presidency. To what extent did the board assist him in assuming his roles and responsibilities when he started as president of Mid-Atlantic College?

6. To what extent did/does the president train/orient board members to their roles and responsibilities?

7. Give me an example of a significant problem the College has had to deal with in the current/previous president’s tenure. What was the president’s role in addressing that problem? What was the board’s role in addressing that problem?

Relationship
8. What should a relationship between a president and his/her the board look like?

9. Let’s talk about the board’s relationship with the president. Describe the relationship between the board and the president – how would you characterize the relationship between the board and the president?
   a. For Russell: When he first started as president of Mid-Atlantic College? Now?
   b. What are the most notable differences?
10. In every relationship there are disagreements. Describe the nature of conflicts. What happens when the president and board disagree on something? How are problems worked through?

11. What stresses are there in this relationship?

12. How satisfied are you with the relationship?

13. What aspects of the relationship between the board and the president have contributed/will contribute the most to Russell’s / Joseph’s staying power as president?
References


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Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University
Certificate in Institutional Research
Dissertation: The Nature of the Working Relationship between a College President and Board of Trustees: A case study

Master of Arts – 1986
College Student Personnel
Bowling Green State University

Bachelor of Arts – 1984
University Scholars Program/Schreyer Honors College
Speech Communication
The Pennsylvania State University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:
Testing Lead, Project Worklion April 2016 – present
Project Management Leadership Office, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Director of Corporate Relations, Corporate & Foundation Relations July 2008 – March 2016
Office of University Development, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Associate Director, Recruiting and Employer Relations Dec 1997 – July 2007
Career Services, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Assistant Director, Programming & Education Career Services July, 1989 – Dec 1997
Career Services, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

Director of Career Services July, 1988 – June, 1989
The College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY

Siena College, Loudonville, NY

SERVICE:
To the University
Commission for Women, Co-Chair, 2012-2013
Wage Equity Task Force co-chair, 2007 – 2010
Leadership Development Certificate, Planning Team Member, 2010
Faculty and Staff Achievement Awards, Staff Excellence Award Committee, 2005–2008
Student Affairs SSN Conversion Planning Team, 2003–2004

RECOGNITION:
Penn State Career Services, Above and Beyond Award, 2004
Vice President’s Award for Quality Improvement, Penn State Division of Student Affairs, 1996